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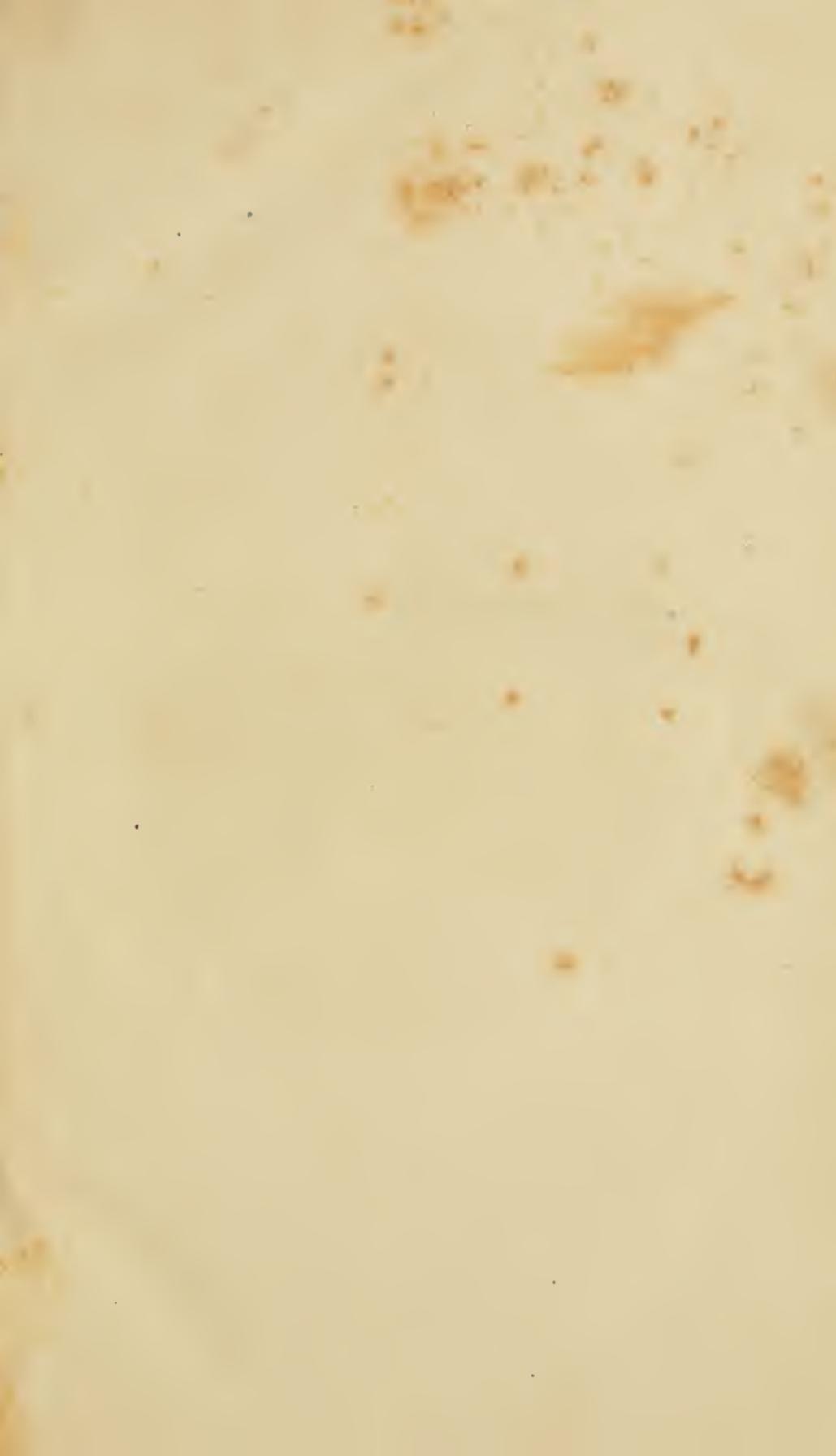
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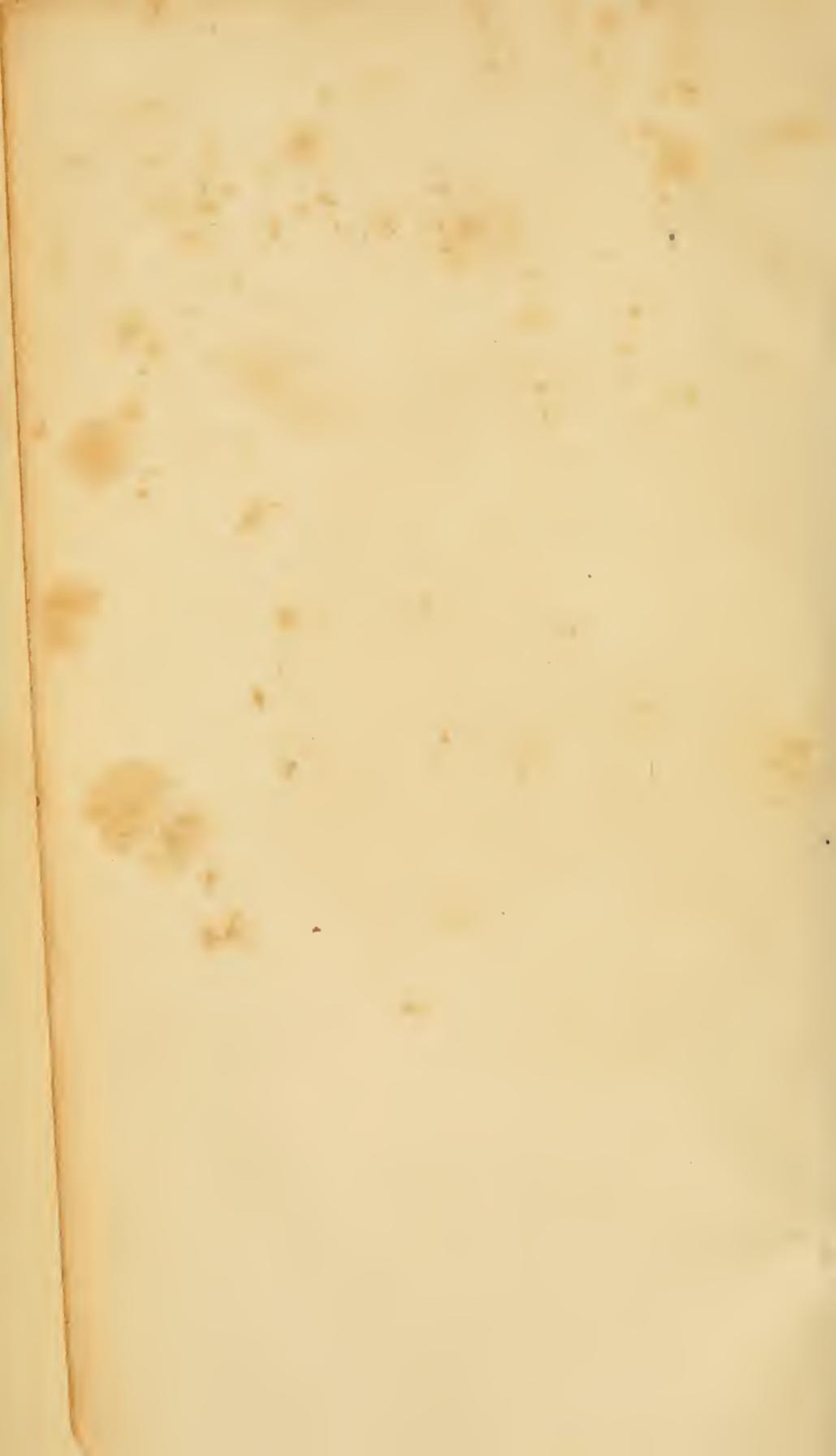
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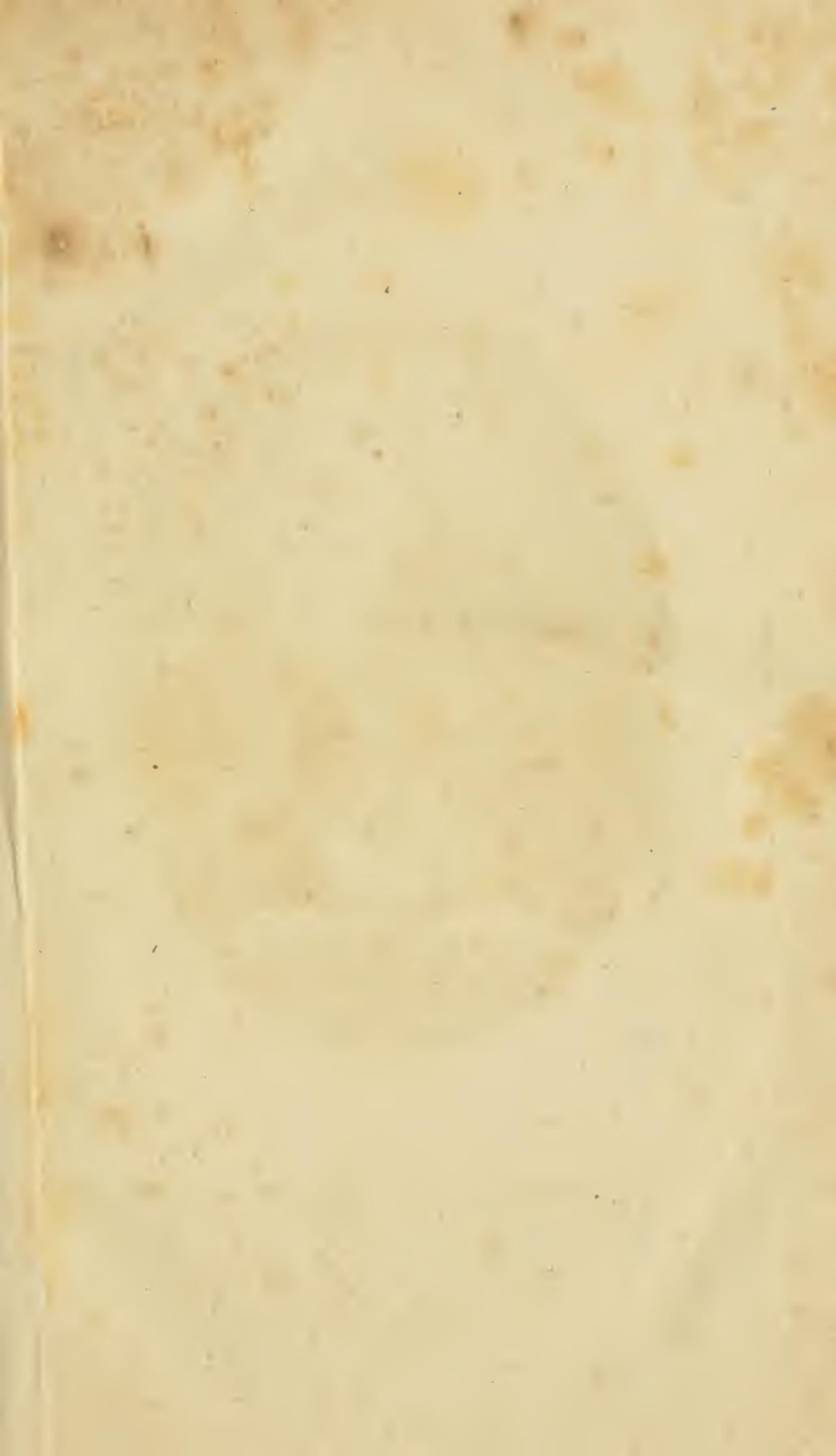
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REV^D ROBERT MACCULLOCH.

LECTURES

ON THE

PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH,

BY

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MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT DAIRSIE.

VOL. II.

ALL THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH ARE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, THERE IS NOTHING FROWARD OR PERVERSE IN THEM. THEY ARE ALL PLAIN TO HIM THAT UNDERSTANDETH, AND RIGHT TO THEM THAT FIND KNOWLEDGE. PROV. VIII. 8, 9.

FOR WHATSOEVER THINGS WERE WRITTEN AFOREFETIME, WERE WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING; THAT WE, THROUGH PATIENCE AND COMFORT OF THE SCRIPTURES, MIGHT HAVE HOPE. ROM. XV. 4.

L O N D O N :

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M.DCC.XCIV.

LECTURES

ON THE

PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

WE now enter upon the Second Part of these Prophecies, in which surprising, variegated, and instructive scenes are presented to view. The future fortunes of the neighbouring nations to Canaan, which were closely connected with the affairs of the people of God, are here faithfully delineated. The subject chiefly treated in the discourse before us, is truly affecting. It exhibits a moving representation of the awful judgments which the Almighty, in the course of divine providence, would certainly execute upon the implacable adversaries of his church. These predicted calamities, the result of his wise counsels, were to display before the world his consummate righteousness, and to promote the good of his people, by delivering them from the oppression of their wicked and malevolent enemies. Whilst the contemplation of these terrible judgments which are here described, calls forth pity and commiseration toward those against whom they were denounced, it lays a sure foundation for the confidence, consolation, and joy of those who have the Lord for their God,

and who demean themselves as the dutiful subjects of his Son's kingdom.

The long discourse, which is comprehended in this and the following chapters, on to the twenty-third inclusive, may be divided into eight different sections. The first relates to the destruction of Babylon, chap. xiii.—ver. 28. of chap. xiv.—The second predicts the overthrow of the Philistines, chap. xiv. ver. 28.—32.—The third treats of the desolate condition to which Moab was to be reduced, chap. xv. and xvi.—The fourth represents the calamitous state of the Syrians, the Ephraimites, the Assyrians, and the Egyptians, chap. xvii. and xviii.—The fifth describes the desolation of Egypt, and its return to the Lord, with the calamities which were to be inflicted upon Ethiopia and the Arabians, chap. xix. and xx.—The sixth foretels the complete overthrow of the Babylonian empire, with which are connected the miseries which were to befall the Idumeans and Arabians, chap. xxi.—The seventh exhibits the distresses which were to be sent upon Judah and Jerusalem, by means of Sennacherib, chap. xxii.—The eighth delineates the destruction of Tyre, chap. xxiii.

These predictions seem to be principally intended to convey the following important instructions, which we ought to learn from them: 1. That the most powerful enemies of the people of God, who oppose their interests, and oppress their persons, shall not escape the righteous judgments of Heaven, but shall certainly perish in their hostile attempts against the church of God, and sooner or later shall feel the weight of divine vengeance.—2. That the God of all comfort will never fail to administer consolation to his oppressed, dejected servants, when they are in dangerous circumstances, and most apt to be overwhelmed with dread of their formidable enemies, and the imminent dangers to which they are exposed.—And, 3. That in the destruction of Babylon, and the other

other powers that were adverse to Israel of old, men might behold a striking representation of the unavoidable overthrow of all the nations on the earth, who persist in virulent opposition to the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ.

The prophecy which comes first under consideration, comprehended in this and the next chapter, on to ver. 28. foretels the destruction of Babylon by the Medes and Persians. This great event was to be the mean of delivering the Jews from the captivity in which they had been long detained; and having been predicted probably about two hundred years before its accomplishment, the prospect it afforded would revive the dejected minds of the men of Judah with the hope of release.—The prophecy opens with the command of God, to gather together the forces which he had appointed to this service, ver. 2. and 3.—Upon which the prophet immediately hears the tumultuous noise of the different nations crowding together to his standard; he sees them advancing, prepared to execute the divine vengeance, ver. 4. and 5.—He then proceeds to describe the dreadful consequences with which this visitation was to be accompanied, ver. 6.—11.—Under a variety of the most striking images, the dreadful destruction of Babylon is next set forth, ver: 12.—16.—The chapter concludes with a description of the everlasting desolation to which that great city is doomed, ver. 17. to the end.

CHAP. XIII.

THE burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see.

The city of Babylon, famous for its antiquity and grandeur, stood in a large plain, remarkable for its rich and fertile soil, which lay along the banks of the
river.

river Euphrates. It was surrounded with walls, which were eighty-seven feet in thickness, three hundred and fifty feet in height, and sixty miles in length. These immense walls were built of large bricks, cemented by a sort of glutinous pitch found in that country. On the outside of the walls a great ditch was formed, which was lined with bricks, and filled with water. The walls were built in the form of a square, each side of which was fifteen miles in length, and had twenty-five gates, that were made of solid brass. At each of the four corners was a tower, and between every two gates were three towers, raised about ten feet higher than the walls. Opposite to the twenty-five gates were twenty-five streets, about one hundred and fifty feet wide, which went in straight lines to the gates on the other side; so that there were fifty streets in the city, fifteen miles long, crossing each other at right angles. Besides, there were four streets next to the walls, about two hundred feet broad. In this manner the city was divided into six hundred and seventy-six squares, each of which was two miles and one quarter in circumference; on the sides of which stood the houses, of three and four stories high, richly ornamented. In the midst of the small squares were gardens and pleasure-grounds.

A branch of the great river Euphrates ran through the city, from north to south. On each side of the river a wall was built, of the same thickness with those which encompassed the city; in which, over against every street that led to the river, were gates of brass; from which a descent, formed by steps, went down to the water, for the convenience of the inhabitants. Over the river was built a bridge, a furlong in length, and thirty feet wide, executed with wonderful art; the arches of which were made of large stones, fastened together with chains of iron and melted lead. To prevent the injuries to which the city and country adjacent were exposed, from the inundations

undations of the Euphrates, two artificial canals were cut at some distance above the city, by which the course of the waters was directed into the Tigris; and prodigious banks were formed on each side the river, to keep the waters in their channel. To facilitate the execution of these great works, it is said that a very large artificial lake was dug, of forty miles square, and thirty-five feet deep, into which the waters of the river were turned, by means of a canal, until the whole enterprise was finished.

At each end of the bridge was a magnificent palace, the one of which had a communication with the other, by means of a vault that was made under the channel of the river. The palace, on the east, is said to have been three miles and three quarters in compass; and that on the west, seven miles and a half: and both were surrounded with three walls, at considerable distances.—There were also in this city hanging gardens, containing a square, measuring four hundred feet on each side. They were made in form of terraces, carried up as high as the walls of the city, by means of arches built on the top of arches, and encompassed by a wall of twenty-two feet in thickness. On the top of the arches were laid large stones: these were covered with reeds, mixed with bitumen, upon which were laid bricks cemented with plaster; and above all these, thick sheets of lead, on which was laid the mould of the gardens, so deep that the largest trees might grow there. In the upper terrace was a pump, by which water was drawn up from the river, to moisten the soil of the gardens. In the arches were magnificent apartments, from which were seen the most beautiful prospects.

The magnificent temple, which was built in the form of a pyramid, stood near the palace; and, at the foundation, measured half a mile in compass. The tower, on the top of it, was said to be a furlong in height; on which was raised an observatory, the ascent to which was by stairs on the outside, turned in

in the manner of a spiral line. In this temple was performed the worship of the god Belus or Baal, and other deities. The riches it contained in statues, tables, &c. were immense, reckoned by some to have amounted to twenty-one millions Sterling. Such were the wonderful structures for which this great city was renowned, and by which it was richly ornamented.

Babylon was no less remarkable for antiquity than grandeur. The foundations of the city were laid by Nimrod, the great grandson of Noah, about a hundred years after the deluge. In after times, Semiramis, that she might surpass all who had preceded her in enterprise and magnificence, and immortalize her name, employed two millions of men in building and decorating this royal emporium of the Babylonish empire; which increased through various periods, until it attained the summit of its power and splendor in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. This is great Babylon, of which Isaiah treats in the prophecy before us.

The burden. The root from which the word here translated *burden* is derived, signifies *to lift up* or *to bear*; and, by an easy transition, it is used to denote the awful doom pronounced upon a person or people. The prophecies containing denunciations of divine judgments, which were to be inflicted upon various nations as the just punishment of their wickedness, are called *burdens* in this and the following chapters. Such was to be the intolerable weight of the predicted calamities, that they were greatly to distress and crush those on whom they were laid. So heavy and unsupportable are the effects of the divine displeasure, that they are a burden by far too much for men to bear. This truth was acknowledged by David, the servant of the Lord, in these words: ‘ Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me *.’ So great was the load of guilt

* Psal. xxxviii. 4.

which

which he had contracted, and so dreadful the wrath of God he deserved, that he apprehended it altogether intolerable. If the hand of God is thus heavy on his people, when he chastens them for their profit, how dreadful must be those terrible calamities whereby he punishes and consumes the wicked! None knoweth the power of God's anger, the awful effects of which crush into ruin the strongest nations of the earth, and prove a burden too heavy for them to sustain. So frequently was this expression used by the prophets of the Lord, that there were some scoffers who, on that account, derided them with contempt, with whom God was highly displeased, and whom he threatened, by the prophet Jeremiah, severely to punish, in these words: 'And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the Lord? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the Lord *.'—*This burden Isaiah, the son of Amoz, did see.* The calamities which he foretold were to be inflicted on Babylon were very clearly revealed to him, probably by means of a vision, wherein he had a distinct representation of the approaching divine judgments that should spread desolation over that great city. This vision which he beheld, either with his bodily sight, or with the eyes of his mind, was attended with such satisfying evidence, and convincing power, that he could not entertain a doubt concerning the truth of what he relates.

2 Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.

The prophecy begins with the command of God, to collect together the forces which he had appointed

* Jer. xxiii. 33. *et seq.*

to execute righteous judgments upon Babylon. To the Lord of hosts it belongeth to muster the armies of battle, and to give out his orders to his servants, that they may fulfil the purposes which he hath formed. The armies whom the Almighty was to employ, as the instruments of his vengeance against Babylon, were to be composed of Medes and Persians; and to them the orders, here delivered, may be considered as particularly addressed, though it is unnecessary anxiously to inquire, who were the persons by whom the command was given? In explaining prophetic visions, it is of much more importance to attend to the leading truths which were thereby illustrated, and the principal designs for which they are recorded, than to minute circumstances, which may be mentioned only to connect their several parts together.— The orders are thus expressed, *Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain.* Three different signs have been used to collect troops together with expedition, for hostile purposes, all of which are required to be made on this occasion. Well known conspicuous signals, such as lifting up a banner or standard on a high hill, are first mentioned. Loud calls were to be given to the soldiers, by such voices, and great sounds, as might be heard at a considerable distance. Besides, some significant gestures were to be likewise employed, such as shaking the hand, in order to convene military people from all quarters, and to hasten their march to the arduous service of attacking Babylon.— The design of all these signals was, *That they may go into the gates of the nobles.* That they might enter into those strongly fortified gates, which seemed for ever to exclude the approach of an enemy: that they might enter those splendid doors, by which the princes and nobles of Babylon went into their stately palaces. The words plainly intimate, that all the creatures are under the direction of divine Providence, who disposes of them as he pleases, and assigns them the various services which they are to perform.

They

They strongly express the success with which the martial achievements of the forces, collected by the above signals, should be attended, through the remarkable interposition of divine Providence, removing every impediment that might retard their progress.

3 I have commanded my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger, *even* them that rejoice in my highness.

These words describe the character of the people whom the Almighty was to employ, in executing his purposes with respect to Babylon.—*I have commanded my sanctified ones.* The persons here intended, were not really and internally sanctified, and made holy; but they were chosen and set apart by the Lord of hosts, to perform the arduous service to which they were called. In the style of scripture, people are sometimes said to be sanctified, who are separated, by the providence of God, to any important work, by which the divine glory is illustriously displayed. Thus, in the Prophecies of Zephaniah, chap. i. 7. it is said, ‘The Lord hath sanctified, or prepared his guests.’ In this sense the expression must be understood in the words before us. The people are farther described in the following clause of this verse: *I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger.* The troops of Media and Persia, who are here intended, were renowned for their valour and strength; and, on these accounts, are celebrated by those who have delineated their character. God calls them his mighty ones, in as much as from him they derived all their military skill and prowess, and to him they were indebted for the wonderful success which accompanied their enterprises, particularly against Babylon. If they vanquished all opposition, if they proved invincible in war, if their attempts were crowned with victory, all this proceeded from

the Lord mighty in battle, who appointed them to be the ministers of his wrath and vengeance.—To complete the description, it is added, *Even them that rejoice in my highness.* Jehovah is the Most High over all the earth, whose sovereign dominion extendeth to all persons, to all times, and to all places. He commands and forbids, he rewards and punishes, he exalts and depresses, according to his pleasure. All power and highness is in God, and derived from him, and therefore ought men to rejoice. Though the people spoken of knew not the true God, who girded them for war, who went before them, and brake in pieces the gates of brass, and the bars of iron, to give them the treasures of darkness; yet they exulted in the undaunted fortitude with which he endowed them, and in the hazardous enterprises to which he appointed them, in the execution of which he enabled them to surmount all opposition.

Such are the outlines of the character of that people, whom God commanded and called to execute his fierce anger, and to inflict his righteous judgments upon Babylon. By this command and call, we must not suppose that he excited, in the minds of the Medes and Persians, the corrupt dispositions of pride, revenge, and lust of power, from whence wars commonly originate, and by which contending nations are generally actuated. In perfect consistency with the infinite purity of his divine nature, God assigned them this service, in the course of his providence: he so over-ruled the counsels and designs of these powerful kingdoms, as to accomplish the wise purposes which he had in view.—The greatest empires in the world are only the instruments which the Almighty is pleased to employ, in executing the plans which he hath formed. With perfect ease, and certain success, he could fulfil all his designs without their aid. He needeth not their help, nor doth his work depend on their assistance; but he calls them to his service, to shew that he hath use for them,

them, that he hath command over them, and can render them successful in the most hazardous enterprises.

4 The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as of a great people: a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms of nations gathered together: the LORD of hosts mustereth the host of the battle.

This verse represents the prompt obedience which should be given to the divine command, by the nations to whom the call of God was directed.—The prophet immediately hears the tumultuous noise of the several kingdoms to whom the Most High had issued his orders, assembling in vast numbers, with the utmost expedition, to the standard which was to be erected for this purpose. No sooner is the signal given, and the command delivered, than a great confused noise is suddenly heard, of multitudes running together, from different nations, to fight against Babylon. They were chiefly composed of Medes and Persians, with many from among other nations, who united with them in this bold attempt. Their appearance was like that of a great people, convened from all quarters, forming a very numerous and formidable army, prepared to surmount every difficulty that might lie in their way. To this short account of the assembling of the people, the prophet subjoins this noble sentiment:

The Lord of hosts mustereth the armies of battle. These words beautifully express the majesty and dominion of Jehovah, who presides over the armies of heaven and earth, and employs them to execute his pleasure. The hosts which he mustereth for battle, are innumerable and invincible. The armies of earthly princes are intended to protect their persons, to defend their kingdoms from their enemies, and to assist their friends and allies. From them they derive
their

their importance, to them they are indebted for their safety, and by them the plans which they have formed are carried into execution. The Lord of hosts is the strength and defence of all the vast armies which he employs in his service. There is no numbering of his hosts. Thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand of angels, who excel in strength, hearken continually to the voice of his word, and obey his commands. The sun, the moon, and the stars of heaven, and all the creatures upon earth, from man down to the lowest insect and meanest worm, are the hosts of Jehovah. All these armies he mustereth; they are thoroughly trained and disciplined by him, who knoweth their number and their names, who hath appointed to each the particular station which he holds, who hath exactly marked out the order which they must observe, who hath assigned to them the work that they ought to perform, and given them commission in virtue of which they are to act. He hath absolute power to command, and they are under indispensable obligations to obey, with the utmost alacrity, whatsoever he requires. This consideration, which ought to strike terror into the enemies of this mighty Lord, should revive and comfort the hearts of his people; who are taught to adopt this triumphant challenge, ‘If God be for us, who can be against us*.’

5 They come from a far country, from the end of heaven, *even* the LORD, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land.

The people, who were called to be the executioners of divine wrath upon Babylon, were to come from a very distant land, which is described as situated toward the extremity of heaven. They should take their march from the mountains of Media, Persia,

* Rom. viii. 31.

and Armenia, which, in scripture-style, lay far from Babylon, against which their expedition was intended; and from Judea, where our prophet was favoured with this vision, and delivered this prophecy.—Nor were the people spoken of, to come by themselves alone: the LORD, who used them as weapons of his indignation, was to go with them, that, by the operations and dispositions of his providence, he might render their way prosperous. In executing his righteous judgments upon this strong city, he would employ them to destroy the whole country that surrounded it, and to overturn the great empire of which it was the metropolis.—Cities however great, princes however powerful, shall not escape the indignation of God incurred by their sins. Babylon was a very great and strong city; and, to human view, it seemed impregnable: but it was a bloody city, full of cruelty, pride, and oppression; and, by its multiplied transgressions, brought unavoidable destruction upon itself, and the whole land. The overthrow of this city ought to convince us of the extreme danger of persisting in sin, which exposes to the greatest calamities, and the absolute necessity of returning to God, that iniquity prove not our ruin.

6 ¶ Howl ye, for the day of the LORD *is* at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.

These words, which seem to have been addressed to the inhabitants of Babylon, warned them of approaching calamities. Clearly foreseeing the imminent danger to which they stood exposed, the prophet called upon them to howl, in the prospect of the terrible destruction with which they were to be visited, as the just punishment of their crimes. To howl, is to mourn and cry; to make a doleful noise, like the beasts of the field, when they are pinched with hunger, or suffer extreme misery. In allusion to this well-known custom

custom of animals in distress, the people of this great city, whose overthrow was fast drawing on, are invited to weep and howl, as a proper expression of grief and sorrow, in the view of that dreadful desolation which was at no great distance.—The reason is subjoined :

For the day of the Lord is at hand. This expression frequently occurs in the prophetic writings; and denotes, that the particular season was approaching, wherein God had determined to avenge the iniquities of a nation or people, and to punish them for their transgressions. Such a period is significantly called a day in scripture-language, though it comprehend hundreds of natural days, because it is the time allotted for some important work which is then to be performed. It is emphatically styled the day of the Lord, in as much as he would then manifest his righteous vengeance upon his incorrigible enemies. The gloom of wilful ignorance shall be dispelled, the hidden mysteries of iniquity discovered, and the perfections of God displayed. It is therefore described as a day of darkness, a day of visitation, a day of evil, a day of calamity, of fierce anger, of ruin and sorrow. Hence the day of final judgment, in which threatened evils shall be assigned to the wicked as their portion, is, by way of eminence, called the day of the Lord*.—The day of the Lord, wherein he would inflict awful judgment upon the inhabitants of Babylon, is affirmed to have been at hand. Though this prophecy was probably delivered in the reign of Ahaz, about two hundred years before its accomplishment, yet, in the prophetic style, the day spoken of was very near. Notwithstanding that period may appear very considerable to human view, yet it runs on with unobserved rapidity; and, in God's sight, with whom a thousand years are as one day, this distance is so small, that it is said to be at hand.—

* 2 Theff. ii. 2.

Let us remember, that the day of the Lord, in which we are intimately concerned, is also at hand: the Judge standeth before the door; and, ere long, he will render tribulation and wrath to every soul of man that doth evil, and eternal life to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality.

It shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. The title which is here given to the great God, imports, that the divine power is employed, not only in creating, preserving, and saving men, but in punishing transgressors. It intimates, that as God graciously manifests himself able to quicken the dead, and to save them that are lost, both in the common and spiritual sense of the words, he also gloriously reveals himself as the righteous Governor of the world, who can easily destroy the obstinately and impenitently wicked. In this character, God is pleased to exhibit himself to mankind in two different points of view; as propitious to the penitent, whom he can deliver from sin, misery, and death; and as the powerful avenger of sin, who can punish it in the incorrigible workers of iniquity. In these opposite, though perfectly consistent views, he spake of himself to Moses, when he said, ‘I kill, and I make alive*.’ In the New Testament, the apostle James declares, that he is ‘the One Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy †.’ The LORD, to whom belongeth the issues from death, is not only the God of salvation to the righteous, whom he delivers from all evil, but he is the God who sends destruction upon the wicked and ungodly, who, like Antichrist, are sons of perdition, in as much as they destroy both themselves and others.——Destruction, in the words under consideration, denotes those desolating calamities whereby Jehovah gives convincing demonstration of his dread displeasure against sin, and proves a consuming fire to

* Deut. xxxii. 39.

† James iv. 12.

the workers of iniquity. This destruction, which cometh from the Almighty, announces, in an awful manner, his omniscience, holiness, justice, and power: it proclaims his wrath, his jealousy, and righteous vengeance; and punishes the folly, ingratitude, and wickedness of those on whom it is inflicted. It calls aloud to the inhabitants of the world to learn righteousness: it inculcates the important lessons of fearing God, whom we, as well as others, have forgotten in prosperity; of being humble and charitable, and of making restitution to those whom we have injured. The day of the Lord was foretold to come upon Babylon, as a destruction from the Almighty, which comes with irresistible violence, and oft-times when little expected.—This prediction was fulfilled, when Cyrus, king of Persia, marched with his powerful army against Babylon, and, contrary to the expectation of the inhabitants, in a short time, entered it in triumph.—Were we properly influenced by steady views of the approaching day of the Lord, did we rightly attend to the useful instructions which arise from this subject, we would not so frequently transgress, as we do, the rules of piety toward God, and equity toward man.

7 Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt.

The effects produced upon the Babylonians, by the above-predicted expedition, are described in this and the following verse.—*All hands shall be faint*, or shall fall down, as the Hebrew word is translated in the margin. The expression is metaphorical; and seems to allude to the effects arising from a paralytical disorder, through a relaxation of the nerves, or a stoppage of the blood. In such circumstances, persons become unfit for action, their hands hang down, and they are unable to use them. In like manner, at the season here referred to, such should be the consternation

sternation and distress which was to seize upon the inhabitants of Babylon, that it should be accompanied with a total cessation from labour and business, in which the citizens were commonly occupied. With this description the words of the prophet Jeremiah perfectly agree: ‘The king of Babylon hath heard the report of them, and his hands waxed feeble: anguish took hold of him, and pangs as of a woman in travail*.’—*And every man’s heart shall melt.* This is another effect of the fear and dread with which the men of Babylon were to be seized, in the immediate prospect of the terrible calamities foretold by our prophet. The heart of every one, even of the stoutest and most courageous, was to be deprived of its wonted firmness and fortitude; and, through dismaying fears, should melt within them, as wax before the fire, or as snow before the beams of the sun. Divine judgments awaken men from fatal security: they often fill them with amazement, and put them into fright. The hearts of the people in Jericho did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of the children of Israel, when they heard what they did unto the two kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og, whom they utterly destroyed. Similar effects were to be experienced by the men of Babylon, on the appearance of the judgments above threatened, as here plainly declared.

8 And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them, they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another, their faces *shall be as flames.*

They were to be filled with amazement and consternation, by viewing their perilous condition; and their terror was to increase as their ruin drew near.

* Jer. l. 43.

Fear, my brethren, is a strong passion: so dreadful did it appear to the Grecians, that, to appease its terrors, they worshipped it as a god. In times of great danger, all men have felt its powerful influence. When the hand of God was stretched out to deliver the Israelites from the land of Egypt, ‘the dukes of Edom were amazed, and the mighty men of Moab trembled*.’ ‘When Saul beheld the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled †.’ When Nebuchadnezzar marched into Judea, ‘the heart of the king, and of the princes, did perish: the priests were astonished, and the prophets wondered ‡.’ And when the day of the Lord was at hand, the inhabitants of Babylon were afraid.—*Pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them, they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth.* Their fears were to be accompanied with inexpressible anguish and sorrow, which are compared to those of a woman in travail, on account of the suddenness and extreme violence of the pain and agony with which they were to be afflicted.—*They shall be amazed one at another.* This expression intimates, that their powers and faculties were to be so disturbed and debilitated, that they would have neither understanding, nor ability, to take proper measures to secure their safety or retreat. They should look upon one another like persons who are surprisèd and confounded, who are unable to speak or act in a manner suited to their circumstances.—*Their faces shall be as flames;* thus giving proof of their shame and confusion, and of the wrath, indignation, and anguish, which they felt. These passions are often attended with violent agitation, by which the blood is expelled from the heart to the exterior parts, and particularly to the face, which, being inflamed, appears, in colour, like flames of fire. These two verses, taken together, contain a natural and beautiful description of the timid,

* Exod. xv. 15.

† 1 Sam. xxviii. 5.

‡ Jer. iv. 9.

perplexed,

perplexed, and distressed condition of the inhabitants of Babylon, at the time the calamities above threatened were to be inflicted upon them by the Medes and Persians. Had we an accurate history of what then happened at that great city, there is every reason to believe we should be informed of the exact accomplishment of every one of our prophet's predictions delivered on this subject.—If the day of the Lord produced such dismay and consternation at Babylon, what effects ought the approach of a far more awful day of the Lord to have upon us? You know perfectly, that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night; and that he will surprize, with a dreadful alarm, those who are asleep in security. When they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction shall seize upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation*.

9 Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath, and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.

Our prophet proceeds more fully to delineate the terrible destruction which should be brought upon Babylon by her enemies.—The day of the Lord here denotes, as in the sixth verse, the particular period wherein God had determined to exhibit himself present to the inhabitants of that city, by the awful judgments he would inflict upon them, by means of those whom he employed to punish their wickedness.—In the following words, the season alluded to is described by some of its peculiar characteristics. *It is cruel.* Cruelty consists in with-holding mercy

* 1 Theff. v. 1. *et seq.*

from those who are in our power, and in acting toward them with severity and rigour. The day of the Lord is said to be cruel, because the exercise of pity and compassion was then to be restrained, and the most dreadful calamities were to be inflicted with the greatest severity. The Babylonians were ‘a cruel people, who had no mercy *;’ therefore the Lord, as he threatened by his servant Jeremiah, ‘was to send against them a great nation, and many kings, who were cruel, and would not shew mercy †.’—*With wrath, and fierce anger.* ‘Wrath (saith the wise man) is cruel, and anger is outrageous ‡.’ When lesser judgments effect not the purposes intended by them, and when they are not accompanied with a speedy reformation, the wrath and fierce anger of the Lord is kindled. This remark was verified to the Babylonians, concerning whom Jeremiah thus speaks: ‘We would have healed them, but they are not healed—for their judgment reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up even to the skies ||.’—*Te lay the land desolate; i. e.* to deprive it of its inhabitants, to spoil it of its beauty, to divest it of its riches, to ravage its cities, and to spread general devastation through the whole country. As the scorching heat of the sun dries up the pools and brooks of water in the drought of summer, so the wrath of the Almighty was to consume the inhabitants, the riches, and all the glory of Babylon.

And he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. Though all men are sinners, having transgressed the law, and come short of the glory of God, yet there are various degrees of sin, and different kinds of sinners. Even the holiest and best of men come under this description, in as much as they often offend God, and do not uniformly act for the advancement of the

* Jer. vi. 23.
|| Jer. li. 9.

† Jer. l. 41, 42.

‡ Prov. xxvii. 4.

divine glory. There is another very numerous class of sinners, who deliberately transgress the commandments of the Lord, who presumptuously go on in their trespasses, and take pleasure in committing iniquity. There are also sinners of a still greater magnitude, who are continually projecting and executing all manner of wickedness, and daily employed in perpetrating the most enormous crimes. Persons of this last description, no doubt, greatly abounded in Babylon; and were especially intended in this prediction, which declares, that they should be destroyed out of it, by the awful judgments to be inflicted upon them in the day of the Lord's anger.—What hath been said of time is also true of sin, it consumeth all things. Sin hath even destroyed those creatures which time could never have wasted. It divested angels of their original dignity, and cast them down from heaven, which time alone could never have done. Sin is the cause of all the destruction and misery which the desolating judgments of war, famine, and pestilence, hath spread over the face of the earth. Nay more, sinners bring upon themselves greater destruction than can proceed from any of these calamities. They ruin their reputation, they wound their conscience, they destroy their own souls, and deprive themselves of those comforts which the sword, famine, and pestilence, cannot withhold. Let us then take heed lest by our trespasses, we expose ourselves to similar judgments with those here threatened against the sinners of Babylon.

10 For the stars of heaven, and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

By the terrible calamities threatened to be inflicted upon this great city, the inhabitants were to be deprived of their prosperity and joy: instead of which,
they

they were to experience darkness, sorrow, and anguish.—The prosperity and felicity of states and kingdoms is often represented, in the prophecies, by images taken from the luminaries of heaven, which are represented, for this purpose, as shining with increasing splendor, and uninterrupted continuance. The overthrow and destruction of empires and nations is also represented by opposite images: the stars are obscured, the moon withdraws her light, and the sun ceases to shine. This remark may assist us in understanding the import of the figurative expressions contained in this verse, which I now proceed to explain, and apply to the subject before us.—The stars of heaven may here denote the princes and nobles of Babylon, who made a very splendid and brilliant appearance in the eyes of the people, the priests, and those who with them presided in the worship of their gods, whom they would consider as luminaries in their horizon.—The constellations of heaven are literally numbers of fixed stars, which appear in the form of some creature, by whose name they are called; and seem here intended to signify the counsellors and statesmen, whose abilities were united in directing the affairs of that great city.—By the heavens in which they were wont to give light, may be meant the whole superior part, civil and religious, of the nation.—By the sun, the king of Babylon might be particularly intended, under whose influence the kingdom enjoyed great prosperity, light, and happiness.—The moon significantly represents the less principal and subordinate power of the state, which derived authority and influence from the chief ruler in the empire.

Concerning these stars and constellations the prophet declares, that *they shall not give their light*. Being themselves involved in obscurity, they shall not be able to communicate the least ray of light and prosperity to those on whom they formerly shined with a cheering, refreshing light.—*The sun shall be darkened*

ened in his going forth. As light is a symbol of wisdom, joy, and comfort, so darkness, when opposed to it, signifies perplexity, misery, and sorrow. The darkness here ascribed to the sun, may denote the insufficiency of the supreme power in Babylon for the exercise of government, and his inability to convey the advantages which he formerly imparted to those who were under his influence.—*And the moon shall not cause her light to shine.* The agreeable and useful direction afforded by the seasonable exercise of subordinate authority, was to be withheld from those by whom it was enjoyed. The bright splendor of the sun, the fainter light of the moon, and even the glimmering light of the stars, were to be extinguished in the Babylonish hemisphere. By these various images, in which the beautiful order of nature appears inverted, our prophet figuratively describes the great public calamities wherewith Babylon was to be visited. Deprived of her former privileges and prosperity, by which she became conspicuous among the nations, she was to sink into obscurity, meanness, and misery, and become as contemptible as ever she had been admired.—The flourishing and prosperous condition of states and cities is altogether uncertain. By their sins they often provoke God, as did the men of Babylon, to send upon them desolating judgments, which terminate in their destruction, or at least, in many respects, reverse their former circumstances. Firmly convinced that sin is the reproach and the ruin of a people, let us beware of incurring the divine displeasure, and exposing ourselves to the righteous vengeance of heaven.

11 And I will punish the world for *their* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

These

These words farther describe the great effects which were to be produced in the day of the Lord, and explain the figurative language which our prophet had used in delineating this subject.—The world, which God declares that he would punish, must be understood in a limited sense, as in many other prophecies, to signify the large portion of the inhabited earth which was subject to the Babylonian empire, whose territories were very extensive. In the same manner, the Roman empire is called the whole world in the New Testament*. The wicked, who are here intended, are the same with the sinners threatened with destruction in the ninth verse. The most atrocious wickedness, of almost every sort, abounded among the men of Babylon, who indulged themselves in perpetrating the most enormous crimes, as we learn from many passages of the prophetic writings. Like other great cities, who enjoy opulence and prosperity, they were remarkable for pride, luxury, and wantonness. Hence these words of the prophet Jeremiah, ‘Behold, I am against thee, O most proud! saith the Lord God of hosts: for thy day is come, the time that I will visit thee †.’ Cruelty and oppression in treating the people of God, when reduced to their subjection, was another evil that prevailed among them; and therefore the prophet, just mentioned, thus exclaimed, when speaking of their destruction: ‘How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken ‡!’ In idolatry and superstition they exceeded most other nations; and therefore the same inspired writer calls their country, ‘a land of graven images, where they were mad upon their idols ||.’ To this list of crimes may be added, unbounded ambition and avarice, gross profanity with respect to the worship and sanctuary of the true God, and the most insulting blasphemy as to his power and providence. These were some of the evils and iniquities for which

* Luke ii. 1. † Jer. l. 31. ‡ Jer. l. 23. || Jer. l. 38.

God threatened to punish the people of Babylon: these were the sources of their calamities, on account of which the wrath of God was revealed from heaven against them.

And I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. God is the declared enemy of the proud and arrogant, but the friend of the humble, the modest, and self-denied. He resisteth the proud, but he giveth grace to the humble. He beholdeth mischief, spite, and arrogancy, to requite them with his hand, and to check their progress, by the interposition of his providence. Arrogancy and haughtiness are discovered, by a proud disdain of those who occupy the lower stations in society, and enjoy few external advantages. They are frequently the source of contentions, emulations, and strifes, among those who are in similar circumstances. They excite malevolence, discontent, and envy, toward those who ought to be acknowledged our superiors, and impatience of admonition and reproof. This arrogancy of the proud, God declares that he would make to cease; this haughtiness of those who made themselves to appear terrible to others, he would lay low, by the awful judgments which were to be executed upon Babylon.— Though wicked men may be little sensible that they are the authors of their own ruin, yet nothing is more certain than that they contribute, not only meritoriously, but likewise instrumentally, to their own destruction. Their prosperity is not a steady progressive light, like that of the sun; but uncertain and perishing, like that of a candle, which, by burning, consumeth itself. To repress that pride and arrogance, to which we are all too prone, let us remember, that we have nothing but what we have received; and that the Lord of hosts hath purposed to stain the pride of all human glory.

12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.

What is here said plainly intimates, that the slaughter should be very great that was to be made among the people of Babylon, at the remarkable period to which this prediction referred.—By the awful judgments above mentioned, such vast numbers were to be slain, that few men were left remaining. Such was the savage cruelty of the Medes and Persians, employed in this business, that they would not be induced to spare the Babylonians by the promise of gold, even a considerable quantity of the best sort. So great was the slaughter in the day of the Lord, that very few people should be left alive: a man would be as scarce, and difficult to be found, as a golden wedge of Ophir. To this place sailed the fleet of Solomon and Hiram, from whence they imported large quantities of the best gold. I stay not to inquire, whether this celebrated port, from which was brought abundance of the finest gold in ancient times, was an African island, or Peru in America? It is sufficient for our purpose at present to know, that there was in that country plenty of the most excellent gold, from whence it was brought in bars or wedges, of considerable weight and value. Such however was the unrelenting fury of the enemies of Babylon, and their contempt of this precious metal, that they would not spare a man's life for a wedge of the best gold, which was easier to be got, and in greater numbers, than men, at the time this prediction was fulfilled. This circumstance gives a most affecting view of the very small number of people which were to remain at Babylon.

13 Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place in the wrath

wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

In this and the following verses, the subject of which our prophet treated, is illustrated and amplified. The words now to be considered expressly foretel, that the whole great empire of Babylon, at the time referred to, should be shaken to its very foundations, and entirely overthrown. They strongly intimate, in very emphatical language, that it should receive a violent concussion, by the storm of divine wrath that was to fall upon its metropolis:—that their gods, their kings, princes, and nobles, who are signified by the heavens, were to be shaken;—and that the nations subject to their government, who are intended by the earth, should suffer a very great change, equivalent to their being removed out of their place. Kingdoms and empires were to be overthrown, and buried in ruins.—*In the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.* The wrath and hot displeasure of the Almighty, were the powerful causes whereby these astonishing effects were to be produced. Like a mighty tempest, they were to spread universal desolation where-ever they came. Such is the irresistible power of God's anger, and the righteous judgments which he executes, that the greatest empires cannot withstand them. In the land of Egypt were strong cities, great rivers, and vast multitudes of inhabitants: but, through the fierce anger of the Lord, her cities were destroyed, her rivers were dried up, and her people were cut off. The kingdom of Israel and Judah, which subsisted, through various fortunes, about five hundred years, from the days of Saul to the time of Zedekiah, was abolished in the wrath of the Lord. The Babylonian empire was laid waste by the same wrath, and fierce anger of Jehovah.

14 And it shall be as the chased roe, and as a sheep that no man taketh up: they shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land.

The affecting consequences of the terrible tempest of divine wrath, which came down upon Babylon, are elegantly described in this verse.—The inhabitants were struck with a panic, and betook themselves to flight, which is illustrated by two beautiful similitudes. The roe is a very timid creature; and, when chased by the hunter, runs exceeding swiftly: and, in these respects, it affords a lively image of the timorous men of Babylon, who had recourse to a precipitate flight, when they beheld the approach of a powerful enemy. Sheep are weak, defenceless creatures, intimidated by every appearance of danger: they are exceedingly apt to wander, and to become a prey to rapacious animals. In these respects the Babylonians were to resemble them. Unable to defend themselves, they would have recourse to flight, and wander into divers places, where they were to be dispersed as sheep deprived of the care of their keeper, reduced to a forlorn and dangerous condition.—*They shall every man turn to his own people, and flee every one into his own land.* In Babylon, as in all great cities, and especially in the flourishing metropolis of an extensive empire, there was a large conflux of people which belonged to different nations. These were called, ‘the mingled people (by the prophet Jeremiah) that were in the midst of her*.’ People of this description, who either had their fixed residence in the city, or were there only occasionally, dreading the approach of a hostile army, immediately deserted Babylon, with intention to return to their native country, and their own people. Hence the prophet above mentioned, in the particular descrip-

* Jer. l. 37.

tion which he gives of the judgment of Babylon, speaks of the voice of them that flee, and escape out of the land *.—In seasons of calamity and danger, people are often scattered like sheep, and obliged to flee like the roe, leaving behind them their most valuable effects, that they may escape from the hands of the enemy. Blessed be God that we have not been reduced to these disagreeable circumstances; and that, through divine mercy, we are allowed comfortably to enjoy the inestimable blessings of tranquillity and plenty, with which for a long time this happy country hath been favoured!

15 Every one *that is* found shall be thrust through: and every one *that is* joined unto them, shall fall by the sword.

16 Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes, their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished.

These verses contain a farther description of the dreadful calamities which the inhabitants of Babylon were to suffer from their powerful, barbarous enemies, inflamed by the rage of war, and desire of conquest.—Every one whom they found, endeavouring to escape by flight, or trying to hide themselves, or unable, through disease or weakness, to make resistance, without exception, and without mercy, was to be slain with the sword.—*And every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword.* So general was to be the slaughter, that those who, from other countries or nations, endeavoured to afford the Babylonians assistance, and to repel the force of the enemy, should likewise perish by the sword.—*Their children also shall be dashed in pieces before their eyes.* According to the law of retaliation, and the predictions of ancient prophecy, the men of Babylon were

* Jer. l. 28.

to receive the just retribution of those acts of unnatural cruelty, which they had perpetrated among those nations who had been obliged to yield to their oppressive power. They were to be recompensed according to the works of their hands, and to be rewarded as they served Israel in the time of their conquests. The young men of Israel they had slain with the sword, in the house of their sanctuary; and had no compassion on young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age*. ‘They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah †.’ The prophet David therefore had foretold, ‘He was to go on and prosper, who took and dashed their little ones against the stones ‡.’ To aggravate this calamity, this was not to be done secretly, or in a corner; but publicly, in the sight of those who, if not lost to the feelings of humanity, must have shuddered at such terrible barbarity.—Their houses, which were richly and elegantly furnished, were to be pillaged of their treasures, by a fierce and unrelenting enemy, who would not be restrained from the most shocking crimes. In few words, the destruction of this great city was to be universal: neither age nor sex should be exempted from the common calamity.—The atrocious sins of Babylon brought upon them these complicated miseries, and provoked the Almighty to visit it with utter desolation, thereby giving warning to all succeeding ages to beware of her sins, that they partake not with her in her judgments.

17 Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver, and *as for* gold, they shall not delight in it.

In this and the following verse, the prophet delineates the character of the people whom God was to

* 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17. † Lam. v. 11. ‡ Psal. cxxxvii. 9.

employ, as the instruments of inflicting the above-mentioned calamities upon Babylon. The Almighty himself was to take the supreme direction of this great enterprize; and to this important circumstance our attention is repeatedly called in this prophecy. The divine agency, in this arduous work, ought not to be overlooked, but seriously considered, and humbly acknowledged. The providence of God so orders the counsels and actions of men, that whilst they accomplish their designs, the Most High fulfils the good pleasure of his goodness, and executes his righteous judgments. He over-rules all their projects and contrivances, for accomplishing his wise purposes: none can defeat, nor even retard his work: individuals and nations are all subservient to promote his designs, and to advance his glory. Though this is a subject by far too profound for our investigation, yet the truth is certain, and demonstrated by innumerable instances. Rehoboam, king of Israel, voluntarily rejected the advice of the old men, and preferred the counsel of the young men: yet this matter was from the Lord. The Assyrians marched against Judah, to take the spoil, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets, whilst, at the same time, they executed the purpose and work of God. The Medes acted in hostility against Babylon, to gratify their ambition, or to avenge some of their own quarrels: but the Lord stirred them up to perform his will.

The Medes were the people whom the Lord of hosts declares, that he would send against Babylon. After the ancient Assyrian empire had flourished for several ages, it began to decline, by the revolt of various nations from their former subjection to its dominion: the Medes were the first who threw off the yoke; and maintained, by their valour, the liberty which they had acquired. They were divided into tribes, and dwelt in villages, destitute for some time of any regular form of government. Dejoices, a man who had great reputation among his countrymen, for
prudence,

prudence, equity, and good conduct, was exalted, by common consent, to the royal dignity, which he enjoyed, with considerable renown, for the long period of fifty-three years; and was succeeded by Ahasuerus, and other kings, mentioned in scripture. His successor, not contented with the kingdom of Media, which devolved to him at the death of his father, attacked the Persians, and obtaining a decisive victory over them in battle, united them to his empire. Strengthened by this accession of power, he fell upon the neighbouring nations one after another, until he acquired the sovereign dominion of almost the whole of Upper Asia. To this united, great empire, the renowned Cyrus, of whom I may hereafter have occasion to speak, did afterward succeed.—A very remarkable feature, in the character of the Medes, is here mentioned :

Which shall not regard silver, and as for gold, they shall not delight in it. Silver and gold are generally much esteemed by mankind, especially by commercial nations, who set a high value upon them, as the means of acquiring the necessaries and comforts of life. As the riches of the Medes, who were unacquainted with trade, consisted in corn and cattle, they had little or no occasion for money; and therefore they were indifferent about it, in comparison of other people. That they had some regard for silver and gold, is evident from their seizing the treasures of Babylon: at the same time, so moderate was their delight in these things, that they would not be thereby prevailed upon to spare the lives of their possessors. This character of the Medes is acknowledged in the speech that Cyrus addressed to his army, in which were these memorable words: ‘O ye Medes! and all present, I truly know that not for want of money are ye come out with me*,’ &c.—Were the Heathen people of Media thus indifferent to silver

* Cyropædia, lib. v. sect. 3.

and gold, let us, who profess to be Christians, take heed that we do not over-value them, and too eagerly endeavour to attain them, as if they were essential to our happiness. Permit me to seize this opportunity, of ‘ charging them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy *.’

18 *Their* bows also shall dash the young men to pieces, and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children.

The savage cruelty of the Medes was to be strongly marked by their very inhuman treatment of the younger inhabitants of Babylon. Persons of this sort were to be killed, not only by arrows shot from their bows; but such was to be the wild ferocity and barbarity of the enemy, that they would strike dead with their large bows, the young people who came in their way. Tender infants, little children, and young men, who are often objects of compassion, and allowed to escape, when others suffer the most direful calamities, the Medes were neither to pity nor spare. They would not shew mercy to the most feeble and helpless, nor to those for whom the dictates of humanity most powerfully plead. Instigated by fierce and violent passions, through the whole of this arduous enterprise, they would not, on any account, discover the least favour toward persons of any description.— In the course of providence, God often recompenses men according to their doings: as they have done to others, so others have done to them. They are made to feel the burden of their iniquities, and to inherit the fruit of their own doings, according to what is written, Obad. ver. 15. ‘ As thou hast done, it shall

* 1 Tim. vi. 17.

‘ be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon
 ‘ thine own head.’ Babylon had greatly afflicted and
 spoiled the people of God; and therefore she, in like
 manner, should be afflicted and spoiled. ‘ As thou
 ‘ didst rejoice at the inheritance of the house of Israel,
 ‘ because it was desolated; so will I do unto thee,
 ‘ thou shalt be desolate.’

19 ¶ And Babylon the glory of kingdoms,
 the beauty of the Chaldees excellency, shall be as
 when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

In this and the following verses, to the end of the chapter, the prophet describes the success which was to attend the expedition of the powerful and cruel enemies whom God would stir up against Babylon.—That great city was to be laid entirely in ruins, and to become a perpetual desolation, which should never be restored to its ancient splendor and glory. To embellish his representation, he extols its former magnificence and grandeur in the time of its prosperity, that, by contrasting its flourishing condition with the deplorable state to which it was to be reduced, he might draw the more moving picture of its overthrow. Babylon was once the richest and the most elegant city in Asia; and, at the time in which it was overwhelmed with destruction, it was the greatest and most powerful. It was the metropolis and royal seat of a mighty empire: ‘ it was the Lady of kingdoms,’ to whom many states and nations yielded homage and obedience.—It was *the beauty of the Chaldees excellency*. The Chaldees were a people highly celebrated for learning, for their acquaintance with philosophy, astronomy, and the sacred rites performed in honour of the gods. They were greatly addicted to divination, soothsaying, and astrology. Hence those who professed these magical arts, are called Chaldees, or Chaldeans, in the book of Daniel.

Daniel *. They were a strong and valiant, a fierce and courageous people, a great and ancient nation. Their martial character is thus described by the prophet Habakkuk: ‘ For lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, ‘ that bitter and hasty nation—they are terrible and ‘ dreadful—their horses also are swifter than the ‘ leopards, and are more fierce than the evening- ‘ wolves—they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to ‘ eat †.’ The country inhabited by this people, was called ‘ the land of Shinar ‡,’ ‘ the land of Nimrod ||,’ the ‘ land of Mesopotamia.’ From thence the Lord brought out Abram, the Father of the faithful, that he might give him, and his posterity, the land of Canaan to inherit. The excellency of the Chaldees consisted in their riches, wisdom, strength, valour, extent of dominion, with other things of a similar nature. Of all these things which are esteemed excellent among men, the city of Babylon, comprehending its palaces, temples, fortifications, and public buildings, was the chief ornament. It was one of the most beautiful and most elegant cities that was ever formed by human wisdom and power. How astonishing, that a city of such exquisite beauty, strength, and excellence, should have been utterly destroyed!—This overthrow is illustrated by a very striking similitude, in the following words:

It shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. Truly memorable was the destruction of these cities, which proceeded immediately from God, who rained down fire and brimstone from heaven upon them, whereby not only they, but all their inhabitants, all the neighbouring plains, and all that grew upon the ground, were laid waste §. Their overthrow was sudden and unexpected to the inhabitants, who were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Their destruction was universal and irre-

* Daniel ii. 3.

† Hab. i. 6, 7, 8.

‡ Gen. x. 10.

|| Micah v. 6

§ See Gen. xix. 24, 25.

coverable, according to the prediction of the prophet Jeremiah: 'As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and the neighbouring cities thereof, saith the Lord: so shall no man abide there; neither shall any son of man dwell therein *.' In like manner, the destruction of Babylon was to proceed from God: it was to come suddenly and unexpectedly, when its inhabitants were employed in festivity and mirth; and its perdition was to be complete and irreversible.

20 It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there, neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.

The subject introduced in the preceding verse, is here amplified and illustrated. According to this prediction, Babylon was to be entirely desolated, and deprived of its inhabitants, so as to become an unfrequented desert. Lest it should still be imagined, that, though reduced to a wilderness for some time, it might again rise into its former splendor, our prophet declares, that it shall not be inhabited for ever. The desolation shall be perpetual, without any hope of its restoration. To give greater solemnity and certainty to what is foretold, the prediction is repeated with little variation, and the strongest assurance is given of the perpetuity of its desolate condition.—And lest it might be supposed, that, notwithstanding the city was to be divested of its inhabitants, it might nevertheless afford a place of retreat to Arabians wandering through the deserts, and to shepherds employed in feeding their flocks, it is expressly affirmed, that it should serve none of these purposes, but be wholly abandoned by every human creature.

21 But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures,

* Jer. l. 40.

and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.

22 And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in *their* pleasant palaces: and her time *is* near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.

The wild beasts of the desert, and of the islands, here intended, might be lions, bears, tigers, and other rapacious animals, which frequent the wilderness. The doleful creatures with which their houses should be filled, might be those nocturnal birds, the lesser heron, the night-raven, and bittern, which frequent old ruins, and howl and shriek with very dismal cries.—*And owls shall dwell there.* Owls commonly choose for their residence, places which are deserted by men, where they may escape the notice of other birds, which are said to attack them, and strip them of their feathers. The owls are seldom heard to cry, except in the night-time, when, at intervals, they raise their melancholy, frightful voice.—*And satyrs shall dance there.* Satyrs were anciently described as a kind of monstrous creatures: in their upper part, resembling the human form, with the addition of horns; and in the lower part, in shape like a goat. These hideous animals were to frisk and dance, in the dreary solitude of that place where Babylon once stood.—*And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces.* Dragons, which are wild, mischievous creatures, make a horrible, mournful noise, and resort to solitary places, were likewise to take up their residence in the sumptuous palaces of Babylon, which had been the seats of luxury, debauchery, and wickedness.—*And her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.* The period fixed, in the divine decree, for the total overthrow of this great city, speedily approached, at the time in which this prophecy was delivered; and the
season

season of her prosperity and grandeur was not long to continue.

History records the exact accomplishment of the foregoing predictions, which may be summed up in the few following particulars: That Babylon should be entirely desolated, without hope of restoration:—that the Medes, with their auxiliaries, were to be the instruments by whom God was to execute this judgment:—and that the work was to be done with great ferocity and cruelty toward the Babylonians. Accordingly, Cyrus, with his army, consisting of Medes and Persians, suddenly entered the city, and took possession of its palaces and fortresses with little opposition. This great and unexpected event put an end to the Babylonian empire. The kings of Media not choosing to reside in Babylon, it ceased to be a royal city. The few remaining inhabitants, which survived the capture of the city, were soon induced to leave their old habitation in solitude and ruins, nothing almost of this great city being left but the walls, which the Persian princes used for the purpose of an enclosure, wherein wild beasts were kept for being hunted. At length the walls fell down, which were never repaired: the animals, which were kept within them, abandoned the place; and were succeeded by those mentioned in the two last verses of this chapter. At the taking of this very populous city, Cyrus, with his army, made a terrible slaughter among the inhabitants and soldiers: they put all to the sword that were found in the streets, besides the king, and all his attendants, which would make a dreadful carnage. So entirely destroyed is great Babylon, that even the place where this wonder of the world once stood, cannot with certainty be determined. Thus were the prophecies, which we have been considering, literally accomplished.—Let us diligently attend to the instructive lessons inculcated repeatedly in this and the following chapters; namely, the omniscience and providence of God, the wickedness

wickedness and instability of kingdoms and empires. We are here taught, in the most convincing manner, that the true God knoweth all things; that he can reveal secret things, and shew the things that are to come hereafter, however improbable and distant they may appear to human view:—That divine Providence is intimately concerned in bringing about all the changes which happen among the nations; that he setteth the boundaries of kingdoms and states, fixes the period of their duration, and determines the instruments by which they are overturned:—That the wickedness of empires and cities is the fuel which kindles the fire of God's wrath among their pleasant things, which consumes their finest buildings, and their strongest fortresses:—That the sins of idolatry, injustice, cruelty, pride, oppression, covetousness, lewdness, and luxury, when they abound in a city, nation, or family, if persisted in, never fail to bring down upon them divine judgments, which often terminate in their total overthrow:—That the most powerful kingdoms upon earth are subject to revolution and change, and cease to exist, after they have flourished for a while. The whole world is mutable, and liable to decay; and all things in it are continually changing, and tending toward dissolution: even the greatest empires and cities perish as do their princes and governors. The world is only a figure, fashion, or form, that passeth away. Wherefore, my brethren, let us give diligence that we may obtain a kingdom that cannot be moved; and, in this hope, let us hold fast that grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THIS chapter contains the latter part of the prophecy concerning Babylon, which represents the important consequences that were to arise from the divine judgments to be inflicted upon that great city. The happy deliverance of the people of God from their captivity, is set forth as the immediate consequence of this great revolution, ver. 1, 2, 3. This subject introduces a description of the fall of Babylon, that for a long time had disturbed surrounding nations, which is composed in the form of a triumphant song, ver. 4.—28. In treating this subject, the great God is introduced, declaring the fate of Babylon, the utter extirpation of the royal family, and the total desolation of the city—the deliverance of Judah, and the destruction of their enemies—and confirming these irreversible decrees by the sanction of his oath. Dr. Lowth says, that the former part of this prophecy is one of the most beautiful examples that can be given, of elegance, of composition, variety of imagery, and sublimity of sentiment and diction, in the prophetic style; and the latter part consists of an ode, of supreme and singular excellence.

 CHAP. XIV.

FOR the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.

The joyful consequence of the fall of Babylon, was to be the deliverance of the people of Judah from the captivity in which they were detained.—The word

for,

for, with which this prediction is introduced, seems intended to shew, that the judgment executed upon Babylon, was not only to be a display of the righteousness of God, but a proof of his favour, and tender compassion, toward his peculiar people. Viewing the matter in this light, the concluding words of the foregoing verse may be considered as at once giving assurance of the speedy accomplishment of the preceding prophecy, and the desirable approach of the deliverance of Israel from the hands of their enemies, which is here predicted. The overthrow of Babylon was to be hastened, to make way for the deliverance of the church.—*For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob.* In these words, the prophet directs to the source from whence the blessings he proceeds to mention were to take their rise, viz. the mercy of Jehovah. Indeed this is the uniform doctrine laid down in the scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, by the prophets and apostles of the Lord. The following passages are specimens of what is often repeated on this subject: Jer. xxxiii. 26. Hosea i. 7. Rom. ix. 18. The expression, the Lord will have mercy, intimates, that, according to his sovereign will and good pleasure, he would extend his tender compassion, accompanied with seasonable relief, to those who were in a miserable condition, though utterly unworthy of his favour. The divine benignity respects all the creatures of God, on whom it bestows innumerable benefits. Grace respects men as unworthy of his kindnesses, and unable to make adequate returns for the blessings they receive; whereas mercy is conferred upon those who are in danger and misery, from which it rescues them, that they may enjoy happy deliverance. It consists in a strong propensity to afford assistance to those who are in need: and, in this sense, mercy is always to be found with God, who communicates it in abundance, according to the circumstances of those to whom it is extended.—Sensible of our infinite need of this important

bleffing, let us often earnestly implore that God may grant us his mercy; and, having obtained our request, let us beware of injuring or abufing the divine mercy, by perfifting in our fins, and tranfgreffing his commandments.

And will yet choofe Israel. This is the diftinguifhing, gracious privilegè whereby God, according to the counfel of his will, fets apart for himfelf a peculiar people from among the nations of the earth, who are fuffered to walk in their own ways. Exprefions fimilar to this are often ufed by the infpired writers, when fpeaking of the precious benefits which God beftows upon his people. Thus faith the Lord of hofts, by the prophet Zechariah, ‘The Lord fhall yet comfort Zion, and fhall yet choofe Jerufalem*.’ That which is here affirmed of the people of Ifrael, muft hold equally true of the individuals whereof that people confift. You who juftly claim the privilege of choofing your friends, and of conferring your favours on whomfoever you please, whilft you injure not thofe whom you overlook, cannot confiftently refuse to acknowledge, that this prerogative eminently belongs to Jehovah, who repeatedly claims it in his holy oracles. To me, therefore, it hath been matter of furprife, that any who have read their Bibles with attention, fhould be averfe to own this fimple truth, which is frequently repeated in fcripture, though we are unable fufficiently to refolve all the difficulties that may be started refpecting this article of divine revelation.—The moft high God was graciously pleafed to choofe the pofterity of the patriarch Jacob from among all other nations under heaven, as Mofes reminded them †. In after-ages, however, he feemed, at certain periods, to have rejected them, when they provoked him to deliver them into the power of the Babylonians, and other nations. At the time therefore in which he would have mercy upon them, and

* Zech. i. 17.

† Deut. vii. 6.

rescue them from the power of their enemies, he is said to choose Israel, that in this manner he might demonstrate his adherence to his choice, and grant his people happy experience of its comfortable effects in their deliverance.—Let us, brethren, give all diligence to make sure our calling and election, to be the peculiar people of God, by being holy in all manner of conversation, and zealous of good works, convinced that this is the only way whereby we can enjoy comfortable evidence, that God hath chosen us to salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*.

And set them in their own land. This privilege was likewise expressly promised to Israel by the prophets Jeremiah † and Ezekiel ‡. The multiplied and aggravated iniquities of Israel provoked the Almighty to scatter them among the nations, and to disperse them among the countries, particularly of Assyria and Babylon. From this dispersion God promises to collect them, that he might set them in their own land, the land of Canaan, which was the glory and ornament of all lands, an exceeding pleasant and very fruitful country. It was remarkable for the excellence of its climate, and the fertility of its soil; and, on these and other accounts, it was called in scripture, an exceeding good land, a glorious land, and a land of desire. It was supposed to be situated in the midst of the earth; and though it is said to have been only about two hundred miles in length, and fifty in breadth, in the days of David the king, there were in it thirteen hundred thousand men, beside aged men, women, and children.—This land is called their own land, in as much as God promised it to their fathers, and gave it to their children, for a possession, and an inheritance. A very noble and rich donation it was, according to the description given of it by Moses, the servant of the Lord: ‘It is a land (saith he) of hills and valleys, that drinketh water of the

* 1 Theff. v. 9. † Jer. xxiii. 8. ‡ Ezek. xxxiv. 13.

‘rain

‘ rain of heaven : a land which the Lord thy God
 ‘ careth for : the eyes of the Lord thy God are always
 ‘ upon it, from the beginning of the year until the
 ‘ end thereof *.’ These and other advantages which
 it possessed, rendered it a faint type of the rest which
 remaineth for the true Israel of God in heaven.—
 In this land God promises to set them, and to establish
 them in the possession of it, that they may dwell safely,
 and none make them afraid ; that he may feed
 them as his flock, and dwell among them. Their re-
 turn from captivity, and restoration to their own land,
 is one of the most remarkable events mentioned in
 the Old Testament, and is often spoken of as a rich
 display of the divine mercy and favour. In this light
 let us contemplate it, as the necessary means of pre-
 serving the Jewish church in existence, until the ful-
 ness of time arrived wherein that œconomy was
 abolished.

*And the strangers shall be joined with them, and they
 shall cleave to the house of Jacob.* The persons who
 are here intended, were the people from among the
 Gentiles, which were not of the posterity of Israel,
 and had no right to the important privileges enjoyed
 by the house of Jacob. They were those whom the
 apostle Paul thus emphatically describes, as being
 aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, both with
 respect to civil and sacred advantages ; and strangers
 from the covenants of promise, which God entered
 into with the Father of the faithful, and delivered to
 his posterity at mount Sinai. Numbers of such stran-
 gers, at the period to which this prophecy looked for-
 ward, should join themselves to Israel, that they might
 participate with them in the inestimable prerogatives
 which they enjoyed. From religious motives, and a
 sincere regard to the instituted worship of the true
 God, they were voluntarily to become profelytes to
 the Jewish religion, and to be initiated into their

* Deut. xi. 10, 11, 12.

church by the rites appointed for that purpose. Having obliged themselves, in the most solemn manner, to pay a sacred regard to the laws and ordinances of Israel, they were inviolably to adhere to them, as the girdle cleaves to the loins of him that weareth it. They would also cleave to the house of Jacob; discovering, on every proper occasion, a strong attachment to them, and their interests, by a careful observance of the divine institutions established among them, and by a steady regard to divine truths and precepts delivered for their instruction and government.—

After the laudable example of those who are the subjects of this prediction, let us cleave unto the Lord, and his people, with purpose of heart. Look diligently to yourselves, brethren, lest there be in any of you a froward, a false, a deceitful, and evil heart of unbelief, which may prompt you to depart from the living God, and to abandon connection with his people.

2 And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD, for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were, and they shall rule over their oppressors.

The benefits to be derived by the people of Israel, from the accomplishment of the foregoing predictions, are here mentioned.—*They shall take them*; namely, the strangers who were joined to them, and who steadily adhered to the profession of friendship which they had made:—*And bring them to their place*, which God gave them for inheritance, that they might share in the important advantages which they themselves possessed. They were to be admitted members of the commonwealth of Israel, to whom pertained the adoption, the glory, and the covenants, the giving of the law, and the service of
God,

God, and the promises.—*And the house of Israel shall possess them.* The house of Israel may denote, as in other passages of the prophetic writings, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with those of the other ten tribes, who were mingled with them. There were many belonging to the ten tribes, who, perceiving that Jeroboam intended to establish idolatry among them, separated from their brethren, and joined the house of Judah. Hence we read, that ‘those who set their hearts to seek the Lord, came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice; and strengthened the kingdom of Judah*.’ And afterward, in the days of Aha, ‘many fell to him out of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon †.’ Under the reign of Hezekiah, ‘divers of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulon, humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem ‡.’ From these and other places of the Old Testament history, we learn, that the house of Israel comprehended, not only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, but likewise all those who joined them from among their brethren. This house was to possess the strangers who cleaved to them in the land of the Lord.—They were to enjoy considerable benefit from the kind services, and various offices, of humanity, benevolence, and affection, which they would perform toward Israel, whom they should consider, not only as their friends, but as their instructors. This advantage they were to enjoy in the land of the Lord; in the land of Canaan, which justly merited this description, on account of its superior excellence to all other lands, and because it was the object of his peculiar care and kind regard.

And they shall take them captives, whose captives they were, and they shall rule over their oppressors. The import of this prediction is easy to be understood: it plainly intimates, that some of those various nations, who had made captives of the people of Israel, were, in their turn, to be made captives by them;—that

* 2 Chron. xi. 16, 17. † 2 Chron. xv. 9. ‡ 2 Chron. xxx. 11.

when God would turn again their captivity, they should exercise authority over those who had crushed them by violence;—that their condition was to be entirely reversed from what it once was, in so much that they were not only to be delivered from a state of captivity to their enemies, and subjection to their tyranny, but to be invested with power to retaliate the injuries which they had sustained from those who afflicted them. The righteous Governor of the world, in the course of his providence, often recompenses men according to their doings. The Tyrians, who exulted at the destruction of Jerusalem, were hissed at by the merchants among the people, in the day of their calamity*. Upon the Edomites, who dealt cruelly with the house of Judah, God laid his vengeance, by the hand of his people Israel †. After the house of Jacob returned from captivity at Babylon, they waxed strong, became terrible, and consumed like fire the Edomites, who had despised and insulted them. A similar change in their circumstances is here foretold by our prophet, in respect to other nations who had oppressed them, which was remarkably verified in the respectable condition to which they were advanced, and the considerable influence that they attained, at the period wherein this prophecy was fulfilled.—Such dispensations inculcate upon us diligent attention to the maxim of Jesus Christ, who hath said, ‘With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again †.’ The law of retaliation was the first which was published after the fall of man: ‘Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed †.’ It was engrossed in the law of Moses, where it is thus written: ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ It is transcribed and illustrated in the whole of the divine procedure toward individuals and societies. They have moved me to jealousy,

* Compare Ezekiel xxvi. 2. with chap. xxvii. 36. † See Prophecies of Obadiah. † Matth. vii. 2. † Gen. vi. 9.

faith the Lord, by that which is not God; and I will move them to jealousy, by those who are not a people. And again, ‘As he cried, and they would not hear; ‘so they cried, and I would not hear, faith the Lord ‘of hosts.’

3 ¶ And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve.

The particular period is here marked wherein the preceding prophecy should receive its accomplishment.—*In the day the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, &c.* Sorrow, fear, and hard bondage, hath, at certain seasons, been the lot of the posterity of Israel, who were, from time to time, subjected to the greatest calamities. Sorrow is that uneasy sensation which is excited by distress, and the natural effect of the affliction from whence it takes its rise. Transgression is the cause of all the calamities which befall mankind; and calamities are the source of grief and sorrow, from which the house of Israel were not exempted.—Fear sometimes expresses in scripture, the uneasy passion which bears that name, and at other times the dreaded object from whence it arises. Between the passion, and the object which occasions it, there is a very intimate connection, in so much that when the latter is removed, the former commonly ceases. The fear from which the Lord was to give Israel rest, was that perplexing and tormenting passion which proceeds from the dreaded approach of those formidable evils that embarrass and enfeeble the mind, and incapacitate for action those on whom it seizes.—The hard service which they were made to serve, may chiefly refer to the very painful and difficult labours wherein they were employed, with great rigour and severity, by the Babylonians. At the time in which God was to deliver them

them from the sorrow, fear, and bondage, that they had experienced, they were to enjoy the benefits foretold in the preceding verses.

This remarkable prophecy was accomplished soon after the destruction of the Babylonish empire. The Ephraimites having been carried away into Assyria and Media, the Jews were led captive to Babylon. At the expiration of seventy years, the period fixed for their continuance in a state of exile, God was pleased to shew them mercy, to restore them to their own land, and to perform what is here foretold. For this purpose, he raised up his servant Cyrus, who issued the memorable decree, recorded 2 Chron. xxxvi. 29. To carry forward this great work, of rescuing his people from their sorrow and bondage, he employed Ezra the scribe, whose name signifies a Helper, and Nehemiah the governor, whose name denotes the Consolation of the Lord, to assist and comfort them. These great men, with Zerubbabel and Joshua, conducted from the captivity and thralldom in which they had been detained at Babylon, above forty-two thousand of them, besides more than seven thousand men and women servants, who were probably strangers that had joined them. About the same time, many profelytes were made to the Jewish religion, who joined the house of Jacob, as we learn from the book of Esther; where we read, that, after Mordecai's promotion, 'the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day: and many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them*.' Thus the Lord gave them, in some measure, rest from sorrow, fear, and bondage. "The circumstances mentioned in this prophecy (says the learned Dr. Lowth, in his Notes) which did not, in any complete sense, accompany the return from the captivity at Babylon, seem to intimate, that this whole prophecy extends its views beyond that

* Esther viii. 17.

“event,” to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, in which it shall receive a full accomplishment, and to which we look forward with hope and joy.

4 That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!

The prophet now returns to describe the fall of the Babylonish empire, by means of which great event, way should be made for the accomplishment of the predictions that we have been considering.—This subject is introduced, with the utmost propriety, in the form of a triumphant song. A chorus of Jews first express their surprise and astonishment at the sudden downfall of Babylon, and the great reverse of the tyrant’s condition, who, like his predecessors, had oppressed his own and neighbouring kingdoms. Against the debased monarch, they are called, *to take up this proverb*. The Hebrew verb of the noun translated *proverb*, signifies, to exercise authority, to compare one thing with another, to utter weighty sayings or parables. The noun is used to express every sort of sententious, figurative, and sublime speech; such as the Proverbs of Solomon, which are delivered in short sentences, frequently figurative, and generally authoritative, both in matter and form. Such also are the wise maxims, and pithy sayings of Jesus Christ, recorded in the gospel: where he saith, ‘No man can serve two masters; Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.’ Some proverbs are obscure, and signify somewhat different from what the words seem to intimate: of this sort was that anciently used in Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the childrens teeth are set on edge *;’ and that mentioned by the apostle Peter, ‘The dog is turned again to his vomit; and the sow that was

* Ezek. xviii. 2.

‘ washed, to her wallowing in the mire *.’ Others are plain, moral sentences; of which you have an instance, 1 Samuel xxiv. 13. in the speech of David to king Saul, ‘ As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked.’ The proverb which was to be used by the men of Judah, was a taunting kind of speech, in which the power and pride of Babylon was to be insulted, and treated with contempt.—In this view also, you may consider the following words of triumph, in which the people of God were to express their joy at the destruction of that great city.

How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The oppressor is a name which emphatically describes the character of the king of Babylon, whose government was stained with injustice, violence, and oppression, and supported by heavy exactions imposed on the neighbouring states, to support his magnificence and grandeur.—The golden city is a graphical description of that city, which was renowned for its immense riches and incomparable splendor. To express their astonishment at the event alluded to, they inquire, *How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!* He who oppressed us and other nations, who made us to serve with hard bondage, how is he come to nothing! Who hath accomplished his ruin, and by whom hath his destruction been effected? Both the prince, and the city, have ceased. The king was slain, and the city overthrown.

5 The LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, *and* the sceptre of the rulers.

These words contain an answer to the preceding inquiry: God is acknowledged the author of this wonderful desolation. The king of Babylon might justly be called the staff of the wicked, in as much as

† 2 Peter ii. 22.

he greatly promoted the practice of all manner of wickedness, and was a chief support of its interests. This instrument of corruption and guilt the Lord hath broken: he hath suddenly crushed him by a violent death, whereby a final period is put to all his mighty power and influence.—*And the sceptre of the rulers.* The royal authority (signified by a sceptre), which was exerted, by means of the rulers and governors of the provinces, over the people, was likewise broken and destroyed. Thus did the Most High take away from the earth this wicked, tyrannical prince, and his proud ambitious rulers, that his people might enjoy the inestimable benefits of liberty and safety.

6 He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke; he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, *and* none hindereth.

The language of exultation and triumph, begun in the foregoing verse, is still continued.—The king of Babylon made war with the people of Israel, and the nations of the earth; and, having conquered them, he smote them, not with temper and moderation, but with wrath and fierce anger; not with an occasional, but with an uninterrupted and continual stroke. He ruled over the kingdoms which he vanquished, not with mildness and equity, but with extreme rigour and severity: he governed them, not with justice and clemency, but with tyranny and oppression.—This haughty, angry monarch *is persecuted, and none hindereth.* He was pursued, overtaken, and seized, by the justice of God, and quickly brought to condign punishment. None of the neighbouring states or princes, who were tributary to him, or in alliance with him, afforded him any assistance, or interposed in his behalf, to ward off the blow given him by the direction and appointment of Heaven. Thus doth the Lord pour contempt upon princes, and
abase

abase those who walk in pride, punishing their pride and insolence, their cruelty and oppression, according to their desert.

7 The whole earth is at rest, *and* is quiet: they break forth into singing.

The happy effects resulting to surrounding nations, from the abolition of the tyrannical power of the king of Babylon, are beautifully delineated in this verse.—All the kingdoms of the earth which were subject to the Babylonian empire, and connected with it, were to experience an agreeable cessation from the disquietude and turbulence which they suffered, from exorbitant claims and rigorous demands which had been made upon them, by a monarch, whose desire for riches, and ambition of power and conquest, knew no bounds. In consequence of his sceptre having been broken, the nations who had formerly served him, and been greatly disturbed by the exercise of his tyrannical authority, were to find themselves happily delivered from that continual oppression which they were unable to resist, and re-established in the possession of desirable tranquillity and peace.—On this pleasing change of circumstances, they should feel strong emotions, arising from the satisfaction and joy which sprang up in their new condition; so that *they break forth into singing*. Transported with the view of the downfall of Babylon, and contemplating the happy effects with which it was to be accompanied, they were to exult in triumphant strains, and thus to express their gratitude and joy, on account of the agreeable change of condition which was the subject of their song.—If the nations rejoice at the overthrow of a haughty, tyrannical prince, and the re-establishment of tranquillity and liberty, how much greater ought to be the triumph of those who are delivered from the dominion of divers impetuous lusts, and enjoy the earnest of spiritual and eternal rest!

Let

Let such break forth into singing, in honour of him who hath delivered, and will preserve to his heavenly kingdom.

8 Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, *and* the cedars of Lebanon, *saying*, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us.

The fir-trees and the cedars are here introduced, rejoicing at the fall of Babylon.—The fir and the cedar are the tallest and most stately trees that grow in the forest; and the cedars of Lebanon were, of all others, the largest and most excellent. These trees are sometimes mentioned in scripture, as representing persons exalted to the most eminent station, and enjoying the most flourishing condition. In this figurative sense I suppose that the words before us must be understood. The fir and the cedar of Lebanon are intended to signify the princes, the rulers, and great men of those kingdoms, which had been harassed by the king of Babylon before the overthrow of that empire. Persons of conspicuous dignity, and great opulence, were to exult over the fallen tyrant, and to boast of the ease and security they expected to enjoy, in consequence of his depression, or being laid down. Since thou hast been brought low, and laid upon the ground, like a tree that is cut down, no feller is come up against us, no power hath attacked us, in whose heart it was to cut off nations not a few. Since he who was the axe, in the hand of the Lord, to cut down kingdoms, hath been broke in pieces, there is no other power to give disturbance to the nations, or to deprive them of their just rights.—The reign of tyrannical monarchs is not commonly of long continuance: God who cutteth off the spirits of princes, and who is terrible to the kings of the earth, lays them low, and divests them of their power, whilst those around them triumph in their destruction, and the consequent safety they hope to enjoy.

9 Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet *thee* at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, *even* all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

The scene is now changed, and a new set of persons are introduced: the regions of the dead are laid open; and *hades* is represented as rousing the shades of departed monarchs from their seats, to meet the king of Babylon, and to insult him, on his being reduced to the same low estate with themselves. The Hebrew word translated *hell*, sometimes signifies the place into which the souls of men are conveyed, after their separation from the bodies to which they were united before death. This residence of departed spirits hath been thought by many to be situated somewhere under the earth; and, agreeable to this idea, it is called hell beneath. As the grave is the house appointed for the bodies of men after their decease, so the place here mentioned, is supposed to be the mansion wherein spirits have their residence after they are separated from the bodies which they inhabited. Accordingly the royal psalmist, personating the great Messiah, and predicting his resurrection from the dead, thus speaks: ‘ My heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope: for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell *.’ After death, the souls of men are not reduced to a state of inactivity and sleep, in which they are divested of their powers, but still possess the faculties of understanding and discernment, and exercise those affections which are suited to their condition. The description given in this verse of what passed in hell, at the approach of the king of Babylon, seems to intimate, that, in the infernal regions, spirits are known to one another, that they are treated according to their rank, and

* Psa. xvi. 9, 10.

that wicked princes there enjoy such precedence as is consistent with their state.—At the coming of the king of Babylon into the receptacles of the dead, there was to be a great commotion among those who were once the chief ones of the earth, and the kings of the nations. On that occasion, these formerly great personages are represented as rising from their seats, which they are supposed to have filled, in order to congratulate that prince upon his arrival among them, and to express their surprise at his being reduced to the same low estate of impotence, wretchedness, and dissolution with themselves.—The sarcastical language which they were to adopt, is recorded in the following verses.

10. All they shall speak and say unto thee,
Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?

Having nothing to fear from him who had descended from the throne of Babylon, instead of lamenting over his miserable fate, departed spirits scoffingly deride and insult over him, on account of his downfall.—Full of astonishment, they inquire, *Art thou also become weak as we?* Notwithstanding all thy boasted power and grandeur, art thou, who wast renowned on earth for thy invincible strength, and who acted without control among the nations, by the stroke of death, become weak and feeble as we, who are stript of those natural abilities, and that civil authority, whereof we were possessed on earth?—*Art thou become like unto us,* who are deprived of all influence and empire over the sons of men, of all the terrestrial pleasures which we once enjoyed, without the least hope of ever regaining any thing of that sort; and are exposed to the dreadful vengeance of the Almighty, which he inflicts upon those who were oppressive, proud, unjust, and tyrannical.

II Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, *and* the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.

Very great must have been the pomp and magnificence of the king of Babylon, when he resided in his sumptuous palace, of which you may form some idea from the following circumstances. The image which Nebuchadnezzar set up in the plain of Dura, is computed to have cost three millions and a half of money. The elegant entertainments, made for thousands of lords; the vast variety of fine musical instruments, which were used at public solemnities; the rich furniture, such as vessels of gold, and beds of ivory, with which the palace-royal was decorated, with a thousand other things, clearly shew the splendor of the Babylonish monarch. All thy worldly glory, which dazzled the eyes of men; all that sweet, melodious music, which delighted thee, and pleased the ears of thy admiring attendants, are now gone, and perished for ever, being as it were buried with thee.—*The worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.* That body, which was the object of respect, attention, and care, which was elegantly dressed in finest linen and richest silks, and highly ornamented at an immense expence, is now covered on all sides with worms, who feed upon it as their prey. How great, how affecting, must be the change to that spirit which once animated it!—Be not proud, my brethren; be not vain of strength, beauty, or elegance of form. Contemplating the structure of the human body as the workmanship of God, it is a most beautiful and noble fabric: but viewing it as polluted by sin, as subject to disease, and liable to corruption, you may perceive ample ground of humility; and you ought to be reminded of the very abject state to which your bodies, like that of the king of Babylon, shall certainly be reduced. This mortifying consideration should give a check to that pride and vanity which

deforms and corrupts the human mind, and preys upon it as worms do on the dead bodies which are laid in the grave.

12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

A new scene is here opened, in which the Jewish church address the king of Babylon, as a star of the first magnitude, fallen from the conspicuous splendor and dignity which he held in the political hemisphere.—The word *lucifer*, signifies one that bringeth light; and its import is well expressed in the very next words, *son of the morning*. It is a name given to the morning-star, which shines bright immediately before day-break, ushers in the chearing light of the morning, and appears with peculiar lustre among the other stars in the firmament. By this description, which must be here understood in a figurative sense, the Babylonian monarch, who excelled other princes in dignity, magnificence, and brilliancy, and who shone with a splendor far superior to surrounding potentates, is certainly intended. Concerning this remarkable person, the church thus exclaims, How art thou fallen from the summit of glory, empire, and influence, into obscurity, contempt, and forgetfulness! The expression alludes to meteors, somewhat like a star, which are sometimes observed to fall from heaven, and immediately to disappear. Such was the sudden fall of this mighty prince, which is here mentioned with admiration and astonishment.

How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! To give new force and beauty to the description, he who, in the former expression, is said to have fallen as a star, is now represented as cut down like a tree. This prince, who, by the tyrannical exercise of his power, impaired the strength
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of many nations, did not gradually pine away by sickness or disease; he did not wither away through age; he was not broken by accident: but he was suddenly cut down by a violent blow, and fell at once as the tree that is cut down by the feller, never more to rise again.—The Lord is known by the judgment that he executeth. What more suitable punishment could have been inflicted upon this haughty, vain-glorious monarch than that which he received? What more just and proper than that he, who was ambitious to be admired for power and grandeur transcending all other princes. should have fallen into obscurity and derision?—that he, who aimed, through pride, to stand alone in the earth, should have been cut down as a tree?

13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north.

In these words the proud king of Babylon is insulted, on account of the extravagant boastings which he uttered, and the ambitious projects he had formed, when in his former glory.—This insolent and arrogant prince impiously said, *I will ascend into heaven*. No man, in the sober use of reason and of his senses, can be supposed to have formed the absurd design of literally performing the resolution contained in the words before us. The expression, therefore, must be interpreted in a manner consistent with the wicked, avowed attempt, and sacrilegious purpose, of this aspiring prince, and so as to correspond with the words in the latter part of the verse. The heavens then must not be literally understood, to signify the visible, airy, or starry heavens, into which no man can ascend, whilst he continues in this world; but that which was analogous to them, in the view of the king of Babylon. As the highest heavens are, in a peculiar

liar manner, the dwelling-place of the Most High; so he is said to have dwelt in the temple at Jerusalem, which, in several respects, was an image of heaven. There God appeared from between the cherubims: there he was worshipped by his saints, and afforded them desirable manifestations of his presence and glory, when they were employed in the duties of his service. Thither this haughty monarch had secretly said, that he would ascend.—*I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.* It surely could not enter into the head of the Babylonian prince, that it was possible for him literally to fulfil this extravagant resolution; and, therefore, it is necessary to explain his words in their metaphorical sense. In this view, his throne may denote his empire and royal authority. The stars of God may signify the priests and teachers of the Israelites, who illuminated them by their instructions, and to whom this description is sometimes given in prophetic language*. These stars shined with considerable splendor in the mystical Jewish heavens, and in some measure enlightened that church. Above these stars this proud ambitious king resolved to set up his throne, to usurp authority over the servants of Jehovah, and to lay claim to that homage which was performed to the true God.—*I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north.* Mount Zion, to which this description very well agrees, seems to be intended. In that mountain the children of Israel were commanded to assemble, that they might attend upon God in the institutions of his worship, and enjoy the peculiar privileges of which he had given them comfortable assurance. This was the mount of the congregation, or solemn convention, where God was pleased to meet with his people, and to commune with them.—*In the sides of the north,* on which stood Jerusalem, the city of the great King. The words, thus explained, express the pre-

* See Dan. viii. 10.

sumptuous determination of the impious king of Babylon, to go up to Jerufalem, that he might affume authority over the ministers of the Lord, and establish his dominion over the highly favoured mountain of Zion.

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.

Pride and ambition know no bounds. Being seated upon mount Zion, this haughty prince promised, that he would get above the height of the clouds. This expression, like those contained in the former verse, must, I suppose, be figuratively understood, as the literal interpretation involves in it too absurd a project to have been formed by a man in the exercise of reason. The Lord promised of old to his servant Moses, that he would appear in the cloud which rested above the mercy-seat; and, after the house of the Lord was built upon Zion, we read, that the house was filled with a cloud *. Such was the arrogance of this proud man, that he resolved to ascend above the cloud, to take possession of the sanctuary and secret place, which the Almighty had appropriated for his own residence, as a symbol of his eternal throne in the highest heavens.—*I will be like the Most High*, in majesty, glory, and authority. Totally indifferent about resemblance to God in holiness, righteousness, and mercy, he wickedly aspired after likeness to him in the incommunicable glories of his divinity.—The resolutions here expressed, when collectively considered, import, that this impious prince formed the extravagant and blasphemous purpose of rivalling the great God in majesty and grandeur, and of attaining greater dignity, and a more elevated condition, than mortal man can enjoy in this world. He aspired to nothing less, than that his excellency might mount up to the heavens, and his head reach to the clouds †.

* 2 Chron. v. 13.

† Job xx. 6.

15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Disappointment, depression, and misery, were to be the fatal consequences of this haughty insolence, and insatiable ambition.—*Thou shalt be brought down to hell*, the dreadful receptacle prepared for the separated spirits of wicked men, where thou shalt be filled with sorrow and anguish; and where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.—As if this was insufficient to represent the misery and wo in which he should be involved, it is added, *To the sides of the pit*. The expression may denote the low, neglected, and despised condition to which the prince was to be reduced. As elevation to heaven, in the language of scripture, signifies the highest exaltation; so being thrust down to hell, and thrown to the sides of the pit, denotes the lowest and most abject depression, the most wretched and forlorn condition.

16 They that see thee, shall narrowly look upon thee, *and* consider thee, *saying*, *Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms?*

Those especially who had seen the king of Babylon in his glory, and were the spectators of his unexpected, sudden overthrow, contemplating this surprising event, whereby he was dejected from the highest pinnacle of worldly grandeur, into a wretched and contemptible condition, were to be struck with wonder and astonishment. Beholding this remarkable instance of the vanity of human pride, of the uncertainty of temporal greatness, and of the righteousness, power, and providence of God, and observing the various ways whereby the divine displeasure seizes upon haughty transgressors, they were to express their admiration in the following manner. To perceive the union of these with other circumstances, it would
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be requisite, as hinted in the words before us, that they should attentively look upon the downfall of this great and powerful monarch, that they carefully inspect the incidents with which it was accompanied, and seriously consider the hand of Providence in its execution.—In this way they would see abundant reason to exclaim,

Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms? Is this fallen, despised, miserable creature, the great and powerful monarch who once made such a conspicuous figure on the earth, and subjected many nations to his empire? Is this he who did shake kingdoms to their very foundations, who overturned their constitution and government, and, having vanquished them, united them to his dominions? Is this he at whose approach the inhabitants of the earth were filled with consternation and terror, lest he would do to them as he had done to many nations; destroy their cities, pillage their country, rob them of their treasures, and put them to the sword, or carry them away captive.

17 *That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof, that opened not the house of his prisoners?*

That made the world as a wilderness, by laying waste many populous countries and great cities, and plundering the inhabitants, whom he killed, took prisoners, or oppressed with exorbitant taxes, so that a prodigious extent of territory became solitary and unfrequented.—That opened not the house of his prisoners. Such was his rigorous severity, and unrelenting cruelty, toward those whom he had taken captive, that he would not permit them to be set at liberty, even after very long confinement. Is this the man who lately flourished like a green bay-tree, who was so great and high that none could be seen equal to him? Is this the profane blasphemer, the ambitious prince,

prince, the cruel oppressor, the cunning politician, the luxurious epicure, the powerful monarch, with whom the eyes of the people were dazzled, and the nations of the earth were harassed? What an amazing change hath befallen this man! such indeed as demonstrates the vanity and uncertainty of all worldly grandeur, and at once excites wonder and compassion. How doth he now shake and tremble! how low and desolate is his condition! how little and insignificant doth he now appear! This great alteration we ascribe entirely to the divine interposition of that God, who abaseth them that walk in pride.

18 All the kings of the nations, *even* all of them lie in glory, every one in his own house.

To diversify the subject, and to give it additional splendor, a different scene is here opened. Certain persons are introduced, who light upon the corpse of the king of Babylon, cast out and lying upon the ground among the slain, covered with wounds, and so disfigured that they hardly know him. His condition is contrasted with that of other princes. Among all nations great honour and respect hath been given to their sovereigns, not only whilst they were alive, but even after they were dead: their corpses were laid in state in their palaces. Clothed with the richest dresses, and honoured with the ensigns of royalty which formerly belonged to them, they are put into fine coffins; and, after a considerable time, they are interred in the earth, or the tomb, with great pomp and solemnity. Having in this manner been deposited in the sepulchres of their fathers, large and costly monuments are erected, to perpetuate their memory, whilst their friends and their subjects wear the badges of public sorrow, and public loss. This expensive ceremony and parade is commonly proportioned to the worth of the deceased prince, the excellency of his administration,

administration, and the esteem in which he was held by the people.

19 But thou art cast out of thy grave, like an abominable branch: *and as the raiment of those that are slain*, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit, as a carcass trodden under feet.

The corpse of the king of Babylon was not to be treated, after he should be cut off by a violent death, in a respectful manner, as the bodies of other princes. His dead carcass was to be thrown out with ignominy and contempt, along with the bodies of those who were slain, and was not to be buried in the sepulchres of his fathers. It was to be considered as an object of detestation, and cast out as an abominable branch, cut off from a noxious or useless tree, which, being good for nothing, is neglected and despised by every body, and left to lie and rot where it fell.—*And as the raiment of those that are slain, &c.* which, being cut by the sword, or other deadly weapons, and covered with blood, are cast down into the pit, along with the dead bodies which they clothed.—*As a carcass trodden under feet*; that is, despised and trampled upon in the day of battle, having no other burial given it than the corpse of a common soldier that is thrown into a pit, which hath been made to receive the bodies of the slain. Instead of a sepulchral monument being erected to perpetuate his memory, his dead body was to be treated with the greatest neglect and contempt.

20 Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, *and slain thy people*: the seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned.

Intolerable pride and oppression, luxury and debauchery, and the cruel treatment of those whom he governed and conquered in war, procured to this haughty prince the just sentence here pronounced, and brought upon him and his kingdom certain destruction.—*The seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned.* Though to this maxim there may be some exceptions, yet it holds true in general, and was remarkably verified in the king of Babylon, to whom our prophet particularly refers. To display the divine sovereignty and goodness, and to accomplish other valuable purposes, the wisdom of God is pleased, in some instances, to deviate from the general laws by which his administration is conducted. Notwithstanding, the aphorism before us contains a certain and important truth. The Hebrew words may be rendered, the seed of evil-doers shall not be called for ever. Suppose the posterity of the wicked may have a name for a while, and seem to be established in the view of men, their renown shall not always continue; ere long their reputation and glory shall be buried in oblivion. Misery is the portion of the wicked; it is the heritage of the children of disobedience, the wages of the workers of iniquity. Though the offspring of evil-doers may sometimes flourish for a little, their beauty shall soon fade away, their increase shall go into captivity, their pomp shall be brought down, and all their glory shall perish. Their doom is irreversibly decreed; and who can tell when the sentence shall be executed, and how soon the judgment written may take hold of them? A dark cloud hangs over them, which may burst upon their defenceless heads ere ever they are aware. ‘The seed of the wicked (saith the royal poet) shall be cut off*.’ The kings of Babylon, who were the seed of evil-doers, were not to be renowned, or called for ever.

* Psal. xxxvii. 28.

21 Prepare slaughter for his children, for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities.

In these words, the Medes and Persians, who were to be the executioners of divine vengeance upon Babylon, are called upon, to make ready to cut off the whole royal family, which was to be destroyed root and branch. According to the irreversible constitution of the supreme Governor of the universe, he visiteth the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, when they approve and imitate the wickedness of their parents, to the third and fourth generation of them that hate him. In some instances, as in the one before us, he prepares slaughter and death for the children. By such dispensations of providence, the Almighty demonstrates, in the most convincing manner, that sin is exceeding odious in his sight, that he is highly displeas'd with transgressors, and that he neglects no means whereby they may be deterred from it.—The design of publishing this order was, *That they do not rise, nor possess the land, &c.*: that there may be no succession to rise up, and govern the extensive kingdom of Babylon, in the room of their ancestors.—*Nor fill the face of the world with cities*, built by cruelty and oppression, to support a tyrannical government, to keep surrounding nations in awe, and to perpetuate their own glory and renown.

22 For I will rise up against them, saith the LORD of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son and nephew, saith the LORD.

According to this prediction, the whole royal family of Babylon should become extinct, and their kindred so extirpated from the earth, that none were to be left.—Parents may be said to live in their children,

children, who commonly resemble them, and perpetuate their names in the world. The scriptures therefore represent the death and destruction of children as an awful judgment; and in this light it must be considered in the prophecy before us. When persons are deprived of their own offspring, who are their nearest heirs, their inheritances often devolve to nephews, or some distant relation. These connections were likewise to be cut off from the Babylonian monarch, and the whole race of his successors were to perish. To give certainty and stability to this surprising event, these emphatical words are added, *Thus saith the Lord of hosts*, who hath all the armies of heaven and earth at his command, and all human affairs under his direction, and never wants instruments to execute the purposes which he hath formed.—In what elegant variety of language is this prophecy delivered. In scripture, expression is often subjoined to expression, and words of similar import are multiplied, more fully to represent the fierceness of God's anger, the awfulness of his judgments, the greatness of his mercies, the sins of his people, and to amplify the subject, whatever it is. Of this surprising variety we see a remarkable instance in this prophecy, which foretels the destruction of Babylon, as well as in many other passages of the word of God*.—As the prophet foretold, so it came to pass; the race of the kings of Babylon ended with Belshazzar, who was vanquished by the Medes and Persians, under the conduct of the renowned Cyrus, king of Persia.

23 I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts.

* See Zeph. iii. 2. Job iii. 13. *et seq.*

The total overthrow of the great city Babylon is predicted in this verse.—The bittern is a bird nearly as big as the common heron: it lurks among the reeds and rushes, in marshy places: it hath a doleful cry; and, when it soars aloft into the air, it is said to make a hideous noise. This highly celebrated city was to be so desolated, that it should become a proper habitation for this lonely bird.—*And pools of water.* The city stood in a plain, and occupied the low grounds, through which flowed the river Euphrates, which, for the sake of commerce, and watering the adjacent country, was divided into several streams. The course of the river being interrupted by the ruins of this large city, the water would stagnate, and be formed into pools.—*And I will sweep it with the besom of destruction.* This expression is metaphorical; and refers to the practice of cleaning a house with the besom, which takes away whatever is filthy or useless, that it may be thrown out to the dunghil. Destruction is significantly compared to a besom, with which Babylon was to be swept, and deprived of her towers and walls, her houses and streets, her inhabitants, with all the provisions and riches that she possessed.—To give certainty to this great event, and the strongest assurance of its accomplishment, these solemn words are again added, *Saith the Lord of hosts*, who, by the execution of this awful judgment, would display his majesty, power, and righteousness.—This prediction hath been so remarkably verified, that the place where this wonder of the world once stood, cannot be certainly ascertained. How astonishing, that so great and well-fortified a city, in which were such immensely strong and extensive buildings, should have been so entirely demolished, that the remains cannot be known.—Persons and families, cities and empires, are subverted according to the purpose of the Lord of hosts. No crown so secure, no family so established, but he can easily remove them: no kingdom so powerful, but he can shake to its foundation:

no city or empire so fortified, that he cannot overturn them. By his appointment, the kingdom of Israel was laid in ruins, after it had subsisted about five hundred years; the Athenian monarchical government was overthrown, after it had continued about four hundred and ninety years; and the kingdom of Babylon, after it had flourished for several ages. The kingdoms of the earth belong unto the Lord, and he disposes of them as seemeth good in his sight: he enlargeth or straiteneth, he establisheth or overturneth them at his pleasure. ‘Wisdom and power are his: he changeth the times and the seasons: he setteth up kings, and removeth them*.’

24 ¶ The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.

The certainty and stability of the divine purpose concerning Babylon, is here affirmed in the most solemn manner.—At the time this prophecy was delivered, the Babylonian empire flourished in its highest glory, and its renown had spread throughout the earth: no event therefore appeared to human view more improbable, than the accomplishment of what our prophet had foretold. To demonstrate the immutability of the divine counsel, it is declared, that *the Lord of hosts hath sworn*. In scripture, God is said to swear, when he condescends to give men the highest security, and most explicit, solemn assurance, respecting the truth of any thing, which they are capable of receiving prior to its actual completion. In this awful manner, he pledges the veracity, the holiness, and immutability of his own nature, for the fulfilment of what he hath said: he virtually obliges himself to renounce these divine excellencies, if what he hath declared shall not be accomplished in its sea-

* Dan. ii. 20, 21.

son. Though some of the purposes of Jehovah seem to be suspended upon certain conditions, those which he is pleased to confirm by his oath are unalterable, as the covenant of day and night, and more firmly established than the perpetual hills and immovable mountains.

Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand. The whole frame of heaven and earth shall be dissolved, the luminaries of heaven extinguished, and the rocks removed from their places, but the thoughts and purposes of Jehovah cannot be altered. The rise and fall of states and empires, are all directed agreeable to the irrevocable counsel of his will. The whole course of providence, as well as of nature, is entirely regulated according to his pleasure. The time, the manner, and the instruments, by whom the long series of events shall be carried forward, are fixed in his eternal mind; and agreeable to his appointment all human affairs are conducted. He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. If he will work, who shall let it: if he will smite, who shall hinder him. As he hath sworn, so he will perform. None can destroy those whom he preserves: none can retain in safety what he hath determined to overthrow. Edom is introduced by the prophet Malachi, after having contemplated his ruinous condition, and the desolations which God had made in his land, forming this resolution: ‘We will return, and build the desolate places.’ To this declaration the Lord replies, ‘They shall build, but I will throw down.’—Many striking instances of the truth here affirmed occur in scripture, one of which I shall mention. After the city Jericho was destroyed, the Lord thus spake by his servant Joshua: ‘Curst be the man before the Lord, that raiseth up and buildeth the city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born, and in his youngest son he shall set up the gates of it.’

‘ it *.’ About five hundred years after, one Hiel, the Beth-elite, attempted to rebuild the city, on which God had pronounced this curse: ‘ He laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born;’ and still persisting in his wicked design, ‘ he set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua, the son of Nun †.’ In like manner, the thought and purpose of Jehovah, with respect to Babylon, was exactly to be carried into execution, as here declared.

25 That I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders.

The prophet now mentions the particular purpose of Jehovah, the stability of which he had strongly asserted in the foregoing verse.—The word *breaking* is often used in a figurative sense in scripture, to denote the destruction of that power of which individuals, or nations, are possessed. Through God (saith the church) we shall do valiantly, for he it is that shall break or tread down our enemies. The Assyrian, whom God declares he would break, comprehended the strength of that great empire, consisting of its very numerous and well-disciplined troops. When a body or substance of any kind is broken, it is rendered weak, and useless for the purposes that it formerly served. In allusion to what happens on such occasions, this prediction imports, that the strength of Assyria was to be greatly diminished by some extraordinary divine judgment, whereby that empire should be greatly weakened, and divested of its former power and grandeur. This terrible stroke, whereby the Assyrian was to be broken, is foretold to be given in the land of Canaan, which God here

* Joshua vi. 26.

† 1 Kings xvi. 34.

calleth his land, and upon the mountains in that country, where his troops were to be trampled under foot. The words denote the entire conquest of the Assyrian power; and the triumph of God's ancient people over that formidable enemy.—After this great event,

Shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. The yoke, to which the inhabitants of Judea were subjected, and the burden laid upon them by the Assyrians, was to be removed. Having spoken of this yoke and burden, when treating chap. x. ver. 27. where the prophet seems to have had in view, the same event of which he here speaks, I hope it is unnecessary to repeat what was then said. In few words, the people of Judah were to be delivered from the yoke of servitude; and the burden of tribute which the king of Assyria had exacted from them. This prediction was fulfilled by the wonderful slaughter made among the Assyrian army, which had marched against Jerusalem; in consequence of which the Jewish nation were rescued from the oppressive yoke which they had sustained.

26 This *is* the purpose *that is* purposed upon the whole earth: and this *is* the hand *that is* stretched out upon all the nations.

To give still more solemnity to this prophecy respecting Assyria, and to obtain the greatest credit to what he had delivered, Isaiah subjoins the reasons on which faith might rest, in the assured expectation of the accomplishment of these predictions.—The purpose which is here intended, is the counsel or decree of Jehovah that extended to the whole earth; *i. e.* to the whole Assyrian empire, which was then probably, as the Roman empire afterward was, reckoned to comprehend all the world: or the expression may be designed to signify all the states and

kingdoms of the earth, which, like Assyria, were to attack the people of God, and molest them in the enjoyment of their important privileges.—*And this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations.* This almighty arm of the Lord is in continual readiness to execute his determined purpose upon all the nations of the earth, who follow the example of Assyria in wickedness, and particularly in their perverse opposition to the interests of the church of God. The destruction of the Assyrian power, affords an instructive warning to the kingdoms of this world, of the danger to which they expose themselves, by injuring those whom God hath taken into his gracious protection. The same omnipotent arm, which broke in pieces the Assyrian, is still stretched out, to punish all the nations who obstinately persist in disturbing and distressing the peculiar people of God.

27 For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul *it*? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?

As the purpose of God is irrevocable, so his power is irresistible. The purpose of the Lord of hosts is not like the purposes of a man, that may lie, or the son of man, that may repent. It is not like the resolutions formed in the cabinet of an earthly prince, which may be laid aside for reasons of state; nor doth it resemble the fluctuating determinations of the tribunes of the people, which may afterward be overruled. The purpose, of which our prophet speaks, was unalterably settled in the court of heaven, and therefore cannot be frustrated. It is the counsel of him who is wise in heart, and mighty in strength, who will assuredly perform all the promises and threatenings which he hath delivered by his servants.—*His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back;* and avert the stroke which the arm of Omnipotence is lifted up to inflict. No created power is able

able to ward off the blow, or to prevent it from being given. The great Disposer of all events clearly discerns all human connections, consequences, and designs, so that his purpose cannot be defeated, nor his providence counteracted.—We have now finished a cursory view of the awful threatenings denounced against Babylon, and considered the infallible certainty of the predictions relating to that great city, the metropolis of Assyria, which are here solemnly confirmed. However improbable the foretold events might appear to many in the days of Isaiah, time hath fully verified the prophecy. Having contemplated the total overthrow of the literal Babylon, which was a figure of the destruction of mystical Babylon, comprehending the numerous society of wicked and worldly men, who, under the prince of darkness, indulge in all manner of transgression, and act as the avowed enemies of God's people; let us look forward, with faith and hope, to the happy period, when it shall be proclaimed concerning this adverse power, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and shall no more arise.'

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

WE are now arrived at the second prophetic discourse, contained in the second part of these prophecies, which relates to the future fortunes of the Philistines, a people frequently mentioned in sacred history. They were the posterity of Ham, one of the sons of Noah. The country which they inhabited was called Philistia, or Palestina, and was situated to the westward of Judea, toward the sea. They possessed five principal cities, whose names were Ashdod, Gaza, Askelon, Gath, and Ekron *, each of which was governed by a lord or prince †. Dagon was the chief idol whom they served, and to others they professed to do homage: they neither acknowledged, nor worshipped the God of Israel. Being a martial people, they were perhaps the greatest enemies of the posterity of Jacob, against whom they entertained an inveterate enmity, and with whom they were often at war. For a long period of time, many battles were fought between Israel and the Philistines, which terminated with various success, as God, in his providence, interposed, either to chasten his people, by their means, for their sins, or, in righteousness, to punish their enemies for their wickedness. The Philistines, on the one side, often vanquished and distressed the Israelites. In the days of the Judges, when the children of Israel forsook the Lord, and served him not, the anger of the Lord waxed hot against them, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, who vexed and oppressed them eighteen years ‡. Not long after, for the same reason, he delivered them into their hands for forty years. In the time of Samuel the prophet, they smote the Israelites with a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand men, and the ark of God was taken ||. In

* See 1 Sam. vi. 17. † See Josh. xiii. 3. ‡ Judges x. 7, 8.
 || 1 Sam. iv. 10.

another battle, after Saul ascended the throne of Israel, they slew that prince, with his three sons; the Israelites fled, and the Philistines came and dwelt in their cities*. The Israelites, on the other side, frequently conquered and subdued the Philistines. Samson distressed them greatly; and, with his own hand, slew prodigious numbers of them †. While Samuel judged Israel, they sustained some considerable losses. They were, in a special manner, severely handled by David, the king of Israel, who, with his own hand, slew their champion, and repeatedly obtained signal victories over them ‡. Uzziah, long after, demolished the walls of their strong cities, and built towns among the Philistines. These continual wars rankled the minds of both nations, and confirmed the implacable hatred which subsisted between Israel and the Philistines from generation to generation.

In the verses now to be considered, our prophet, in the name of God, denounces against the Philistines the distressing calamities whereby they were afflicted, first by Hezekiah, and afterward by the king of Assyria. Having dissuaded them from foolish joy, and vain glory, which, in a short time, was to be exchanged for sorrow and lamentation, he assures the pious, distressed Jews, that they should enjoy tranquillity and security, under divine protection, in the midst of the extreme danger to which they were to be exposed. In this manner God was pleased, by a new argument, to confirm the faith of his people in his providential government, who disposes of the fate of nations, and takes a friendly care of his people in every condition.

* 1 Sam. xxxi. † Judges xiv. 15, 16. ‡ 2 Sam. v. 8, &c.

CHAP. XIV. VER. 28.

IN the year that king Ahaz died, was this burden.

These words shew us the date of this prophecy. In the year that king Uzziah, the grandfather of Ahaz, died, our prophet was favoured with the vision which he describes in chap. vi. And now, in the year wherein Ahaz departed this life, he received from God the prophecy recorded in the following verses. The Holy Spirit often interposes, in critical, remarkable seasons, to instruct and comfort his servants under great changes in public affairs, whether for the better or the worse. Ahaz was an unhappy, wicked prince, whose reign had been unfriendly to the worship and service of the true God, and who, by his transgressions, brought many evils upon himself and his people. He died in the midst of his days, when he was only thirty-six years of age, leaving his throne and kingdom to his son, who, in every respect, greatly excelled his father.

29 ¶ Rejoice not thou whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.

The Philistines, to whom our prophet directs his discourse, are forbidden to triumph, on account of the prosperity which they had of late enjoyed, and the death of the king of Judah, and that for a most important reason. The Philistines inhabited the land of Palestina, which lay toward the Mediterranean sea, to the west of Judea, between the wilderness on the south, and Tyre on the north. It was divided into certain districts, over which presided the lords of the
Philistines.

Philistines. The prophet addresseth, not merely one division of the country, but the whole inhabitants of the land, and calls upon them, not to rejoice on this occasion. They had probably been greatly overjoyed at the death of some of the former kings of Judah, with whom they had been at variance; and now that their affairs wore an agreeable aspect, they were ready to exult at the death of a hostile prince. This message was sent to correct this levity and vanity, which, for reasons that were both important and interesting, appeared unjustifiable and unbecoming.—*Because the rod of him that smote thee is broken.* Uzziah, king of Judah, seems to have been the person here intended, who smote the Philistines. I already observed, that he destroyed some of their fortifications; and that he went so far, in consequence of his having smitten them, as to build cities within their territories. The Philistines must have been greatly reduced, and severely smitten, before they submitted to these encroachments. If Uzziah, as seems probable, was the person who smote the land of Palestina, Ahaz, his grandson, who sprung from his stem and root, must have been the rod, which was now broken by death. The sceptre of Judah, the rod of royal authority, which he had held for a considerable time, was the instrument whereby he had been enabled to beat the Philistines.—*Rejoice not thou whole Palestina,* as thou exultedst and triumphedst at the death of Uzziah, by whom thou wast greatly afflicted, as if thou hadst nothing to fear from the kings of Judah. Though thou hast enjoyed for some time peace and security, whilst Ahaz sat upon the throne, be admonished to be very temperate in your mirth, as your affairs will soon take a different, and a very unfavourable turn.

For out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent. These words, which suggest the reason upon which the foregoing advice is founded, must be understood, not in their literal, but in their figurative signification.

By

By the serpent's root may be meant king Uzziah, who was always inimical to the Philistines, whom he sometimes greatly distressed. From this root arose another prince, who was still more severely to afflict them; and, inflamed with a strong desire of vengeance, should come upon the inhabitants of Palestina with the utmost expedition, and, advancing toward them with the most rapid motion, should strike them with a mortal wound. He is therefore spoken of as a cockatrice, and a fiery flying serpent. This description does not relate to his temper and practice, which was mild and gentle, but to that irremediable destruction which he was to be the instrument of inflicting on the Philistines. This person can be no other than Hezekiah, king of Judah. Though, at first sight, this interpretation may appear somewhat strained and unnatural, I hope you will be satisfied of its justness and propriety, by attending to the general import and design of the prophecy. In some prophetic emblems, we observe a strict agreement and resemblance between the names and figurative descriptions, and the persons who are signified by them; in others, the likeness and correspondence is not so conspicuous, as in the instance before us. This circumstance however, in some measure, arises from our unacquaintedness with ancient manners and modes of expression. Among the Egyptians, serpents were considered as emblematical of kings, who often dangerously wound those who provoke them, when they come within their reach. The patriarch Jacob uses the same emblem, when blessing his sons, and pronouncing their future fortunes. 'Dan (said he) shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path; that biteth the horse-heels, so that his rider shall fall backward*.' In like manner, Isaiah here speaks of the king of Judah, under a symbolic expression, that he might, in some measure, conceal his meaning, until the

* Gen. xlix. 17.

completion of the prophecy should discover its import. Nor ought we to be surpris'd at this; the genius of the prophetic style being enigmatical, this cast is sometimes purposely given to it, even when the expression is most plain and direct.

30 And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety: and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant.

The happy consequences which were to arise in Judah, from the slaughter to be made among the Philistines, are here represented.—By the poor and needy, seem to be meant the inhabitants of Judea, who were reduced to low and straitened circumstances, by the encroachments of their enemies, under the reign of Ahaz. Whilst that wicked prince sat upon the throne, the Jewish people were much harassed by the incursions of neighbouring nations, and exposed to many hardships, as Hezekiah plainly intimates, in the proclamation which he sent throughout all Israel: ‘ Be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, who trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see *.’ By the first-born of the poor, are meant, not the eldest sons of the poor, who, in the language of Jacob, were their might, and the beginning of their strength, but those who were extremely poor, who, instead of having a double portion of the good things of this world, had a double share of poverty, and were oppressed with penury and want. People of this description, our prophet foretels, *shall lie down in safety*. God was about to elevate them, from that forlorn state wherein many of the lower ranks had been exposed to danger and want, to a comfortable condition, in which they were to en-

* 2 Chron. xxx. 7.

joy tranquillity and affluence. Even those who had been exceedingly poor, and greatly distressed, were to find agreeable relief, and deliverance from the evils and enemies by which they had been greatly afflicted.

And I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant. A root, properly speaking, is the lower part of the tree, by which it is fastened in the earth, by means of which it receives moisture and nourishment, and the tree itself is supported. When used in a figurative sense, and applied, as in the words before us, to a nation, it may denote whatever constitutes its strength and support, and is the means of promoting its establishment and increase. All things having this tendency, God declares, by our prophet, that he would kill by famine, and so deprive the Philistines of what was necessary to strengthen and uphold them as a people. Their root was to perish, their strength was quickly to decay, and they were to lose their stability. The necessary supports of life being removed, they would lose their vigour and influence as a people, and fall from their former flourishing estate.—*And he shall slay thy remnant.* The person of whom the prophet speaks, who was to slay the remnant of the Philistines, which remained after the famine, seems to have been Hezekiah, king of Judah, who, in the preceding verse, was spoken of under the emblem of a cockatrice. The root, or great bulk of the nation, having been destroyed, through want of the necessary means of subsistence, the Jewish prince was to slay the residue, in consequence of which all their power and glory should be abolished.—The fulfilment of this prediction is recorded, 2 Kings xviii. 8. ; where we read, that ‘Hezekiah smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza, and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.’ This slaughter was probably made after some severe famine which they suffered, arising from the ravages made upon their country by some of their enemies.—How variable

is the condition of mankind, and how often is it reversed in the course of divine providence! Those who were oppressed with indigence, and exposed to danger, are frequently advanced to enjoy abundance and safety, whilst those who were ready to exult and triumph in the superior advantages of their state, are reduced to a low and deplorable condition. Their power, riches, and honours, are blasted at the root, and down they fall from their former eminence and grandeur. Day unto day makes report of such revolutions, and night unto night sheweth us this knowledge. The prophecy which we have now been considering, presents this truth to our view in a very striking light; and our own experience confirms the uncertainty and mutability of every worldly enjoyment.

31 Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou whole Palestina *art* dissolved: for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none *shall be* alone in his appointed times.

Our prophet not only dissuaded the Philistines from rejoicing, but he called them to mourning and lamentation, on account of the approaching calamities with which they were to be visited. He addresses the gate and the city. By the gate, may be meant more especially the chief magistrates, the elders, and the judges of the people, who anciently sat in the gates of the cities; and the soldiers, who were placed there, as centinels for their defence, to repel the hostile attacks of their enemies. These two classes of men constituted, in great measure, the strength of the city. By the city, might be intended the inhabitants who dwelt in it, subject to the magistrates, and defended by the military. The people residing in the five principal cities of the Philistines, already mentioned, were probably, in a particular manner, in Isaiah's view, when he invited them to howl and to cry, in the prospect

of the great calamities which, ere long, were to seize upon them.—*Thou whole Palestina art dissolved.* The expression is metaphorical; and borrowed from solid bodies, which, when thrown into the fire, lose their solidity, are melted, and become liquid. In like manner, the inhabitants of Philistia, being cast into the furnace of affliction, were to be divested of their former strength and firmness of mind, which was to be exchanged for timidity and terror, joined with melancholy despair. The condition of the republic in Palestina should be reversed: being deprived of its former consistency and stability, it was to be reduced to a weak, fluctuating condition; unable any longer to resist the assaults of its adversaries.—The reason of this dissolution is subjoined:

For there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times. The smoke which should come out of the north, seems intended to signify the great Assyrian army, which was to march into Palestine in deep columns, and, like smoke, to darken the air, by the dust they would raise in their rapid movements, so that the signs of their approach were to be visible at a great distance.—*None shall be alone in his appointed times;* or, as the bishop of London translates the Hebrew words, “There shall not be a straggler among his levies.” When the appointed season should arrive, for collecting and marching the powerful army, here spoken of, into Palestine, the whole troops were voluntarily, and with alacrity, to engage in the service. None should straggle from the main body; but all were to march forward with unanimity and courage, in the firm expectation of success and victory. You may see this prophecy beautifully illustrated in the forty-seventh chapter of Jeremiah, where the same subject is treated.—Thus have we contemplated another instance of what we may have often observed, that the time wherein the enemies of God’s people are most apt to rejoice and triumph, on account of flattering appearances in their favour,

is the season in which God is pleased to write disappointment on their hopes, and to send desolation upon their land. This remarkable circumstance ought to animate us, who profess to be his people, to hope in his mercy, and to trust in his providence.

32 What shall *one* then answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.

The servants of the Most High are here directed, what answer to give those who might be sent to inquire into the causes which contributed to afford them safety, whilst destruction laid waste the powerful kingdoms of the earth.—The prophet, having foretold the overthrow of the Assyrian empire, and the desolation of the land of Palestine, naturally supposes, that messengers would be sent from some of the surrounding nations, either of Moab or Ammon, Egypt or Tyre, to learn, whence it came to pass that Judah was preserved, even when neighbouring kingdoms conspired their destruction? and why they, in their turn, were not also overthrown. The inquiry is both natural and curious, and deserves a proper reply. Inform us, might they say to the men of Judah, whence it is, that you are safe and secure at home, and renowned abroad, whilst many powerful kingdoms are razed to their foundations? To inquiries of this sort some might be instigated by envy, which is a turbulent, inquisitive passion, accompanied with anxiety and jealousy. This remark was exemplified in the transactions which passed between Sanballat the Hōronite, and Nehemiah the Tirshatha *. The inquiries which are made concerning the welfare of the church, doth not always proceed from affection, and a tender solicitude for their prosperity. In some cases, they arise from envy and vexation at the felicity and exaltation

* See Neh. iv. 1.

tation of those who are contemned and despised by the world around them, who wish nothing more than their subversion and ruin.—Others might be prompted by timidity. Fear, which is ever solicitous and inquisitive, is always anxious to be acquainted with every circumstance relative to its object: though it is often increased by the information it receives, it cannot refrain from diligent search. Timorous dispositions generally incline them who act under their influence, minutely to inquire into the condition of those of whom they are afraid. When God brought forth his people out of the land of bondage, that he might settle them in a comfortable state, the tents of Cushan were in affliction; the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble*. When their mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing, then said they among the Heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them: they saw them, so they marvelled, they were troubled, they hasted away: fear took hold upon them there†. Thus envy and fear induce men to search into the condition of the church of God.

What shall one then answer the messengers sent on this errand? What ought one to reply, in such an emergency? The words stand in the form of an interrogation, which seems intended to give them peculiar force and energy; and to intimate, that a proper answer ought always to be in readiness for those who ask information on this subject. Consider what reply you ought to give to those who may inquire concerning the dispensations of divine providence and grace, in which you are deeply interested. Though to us, many of God's ways of righteousness and mercy are unsearchable, yet ignorance, inattention, and folly, are frequently the causes to which we may ascribe the obscurity of our apprehensions concerning them. Ill-founded prejudices, and disordered affections, unhap-

* See Hab. iii.

† See Psal. xlvi.

pily perplex our minds; and often hinder us from forming just sentiments respecting divine dispensations, and from giving proper answers to those who interrogate us on these subjects. Happy had it been for king Hezekiah, and his posterity, had that prince given the messengers, sent to him from Babylon, to congratulate him on his recovery, a suitable reply, and then dismissed them.—The following words suggest a proper answer to this inquiry:

The Lord hath founded Zion, &c. He established upon its basis the literal mount Zion, wherein the solemn exercises of his worship were anciently performed, so that it can never be removed. He hath also founded the spiritual Zion of his church, comprehending the holy nation, the peculiar people, the royal priesthood, the chosen generation, whom he hath set apart for himself. The church is as firmly founded upon Jesus Christ, the Rock of ages, as Zion is established upon the broad basis on which it stands. The gates of hell, the adverse powers of this earth, shall never prevail against it: the raging of the Heathen, and the moving of the kingdoms, shall not be able to overthrow it. The Lord, who is wonderful in counsel, mighty in strength, and excellent in working, hath laid the foundations thereof; the Highest hath himself established them. God is in the midst of this great, spiritual building; he is the refuge and strength thereof: Jesus Christ is the sure foundation which God hath laid, whereupon it is supported, and therefore it shall never be moved. It derives stability from the promises of him who is faithful and true; and the arm of Omnipotence hath formed around it an impregnable defence. This is the proper answer to give to the messengers who inquire into the causes of the preservation, security, and perpetuity of the church of God. No mention is made of human power and prudence: nothing is ascribed to the wisdom and strength of man, to riches, armies, local situation, or any such circumstances. All their safety

is attributed to Jehovah, whose dispensations of providence are all designed to promote the establishment of his church. Doth a wicked nation prosper? their prosperity fits them for being a rod, to chasten his people for their sins, or for affording them shelter from their enemies. Is a nation weakened or destroyed? by this judgment, they may be recompensed for the controversy which they had with Zion. Indeed the preservation of the people of God, that they may serve and glorify him in the world, is the great aim of providential dispensations.

And the poor of his people shall trust in it. The persons spoken of, are described as poor, on account of their mean external condition in the world, their internal poverty of spirit, and lowliness of mind. For these reasons, this character is often given them in scripture: thus saith the Lord, by the prophet Zephaniah, ‘I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord *.’—Concerning persons of this description, it is foretold, they shall trust in it; or, as the Hebrew word signifies, and is translated in the margin of some Bibles, they shall resort or retreat, they shall betake themselves to it. This is the obvious meaning of the word, in Psal. xxxvi. 7. where the inspired writer affirms, that, on account of the excellency of God’s loving kindness, ‘therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings;’ thither they resort for protection and comfort. From these remarks, we may learn the import of the expression before us. Since the Lord hath founded Zion, and always continues to support and maintain the interests of his church, the poor and needy, among his people, ought for ever to confide in his power and faithfulness, who hath done this great work, to acquiesce in all his dispensations, and to build their faith, hope, and joy, on the sure

* Zeph. iii. 12.

foundation which is laid by the Lord God Omnipotent.—Since then Jehovah hath thus founded Zion, and taketh care of the indigent among his people, let us trust in him for direction and protection, for liberty and peace, with every needful blessing. Amidst all the changes and revolutions which bury in ruins nations and empires, the church of God shall endure throughout all ages. No weapon that is formed against it shall ever prosper. It is a city founded and protected, not by human, but by divine power and providence: its builder and maker is God. It is prepared, by infinite wisdom and love, for the reception of all who love God's salvation, who are poor in spirit, and flee thither for protection from impending calamities, that they may enjoy desirable tranquillity, sacred liberty, and permanent felicity. 'Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord *.'

* Psa. cxviii. 19.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

WE have now before us, in this and the following chapter, the third discourse contained in the second part of these prophecies, which relates to the future fortunes of the Moabites. It consists of two parts; the first of which is comprehended in this chapter, and the other in the next, the sixteenth chapter. It bears the title, or inscription, of ‘The burden of Moab.’ The prophet begins by representing the direful, impending calamities that were every where to distress the Moabites, the causes from whence they originated, and the mournful consequences with which they should be attended. These fruitful topics he discusses with brevity: and treats them in such a manner as to present to the view of God’s people, the righteous vengeance which the Almighty was to execute upon their proud and insolent enemies, who, in the season of public calamity, had treated them with rigour and harshness; and who, in contempt of the God of Israel, attributed their prosperity to an idol. He endeavours, through the whole prophecy, to confirm the faith and hope of the righteous in the stability of the kingdom of the house of David; and teaches them, that the God whom they served, would not suffer the injuries which they sustained to pass unpunished. He also aims to convince the Moabites, who were acquainted with these predictions, of their bad treatment of the men of Judah; and to call them to repentance, by the salutary advices which are subjoined in the following chapter.

 C H A P. XV.

THE burden of Moab. Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, *and* brought to silence; because in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste, *and* brought to silence.

Moab was the name given by Lot's eldest daughter to the son she had to her father. His posterity were called by his name in succeeding generations, after they had multiplied, and become a powerful nation. They soon rose to considerable rank and importance among the neighbouring kingdoms, who proved the inveterate enemies of Israel. The wars in which the Israelites were frequently embroiled with the Moabites, terminated with various success, in subserviency to the purposes of divine providence. After the death of Othniel, the son of Kenaz, the children of Israel served the king of Moab eighteen years; and then Moab was subdued, under the hand of Israel, and the land had rest fourscore years*. When Saul, the son of Kish, had ascended the throne of Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, among whom were the Moabites†. Under the reign of David, the son of Jesse, that renowned prince smote the Moabites, who became his servants, and brought him gifts‡. In the days of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel, who, calling Jehoshaphat to his assistance, fought against the Moabites, and smote them even in their own country. They beat down their cities; they marred the land with stones; they stopped the wells of water, and felled the good trees. From that period, nothing remarkable is related concerning them that I recollect, until the time in which this prophecy was delivered. The predictions of which it is composed, leave no room to doubt, that the Moabites had treated with great inhumanity and cruelty the Jews and Ephraimites, who, in time of national danger and distress, had fled to their places of strength for safety. Relinquishing the worship of the true God, they early fell into idolatry, and served Chemosh, their abomination.

The country possessed by the Moabites was bounded by Arabia on the east, by Jordan and the Dead

* Judges iii. 14.—30. † 1 Sam. xiv. 47. ‡ 2 Sam. viii. 2.

Sea on the west, by the brook Zered on the south, and by the river Jabbok on the north. In process of time, their territories became more limited. The Amorites, coming down from the hill-country which they inhabited, expelled them from their possessions, which were situated between Jordan and Jabbok. The children of Israel, in their journeys toward the land of Canaan, passed through the coast of Moab, having received this express command from God, ‘ Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle*.’ In this country, Moses, the celebrated legislator of Israel, departed this life, as it is written, Deut. xxxiv. 5. ‘ So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord.’—This prophecy is inscribed, The burden of Moab, because it contains heavy tidings, which were no doubt afflicting to our prophet to deliver, distressing to those who heard them, and especially grievous to them who were to feel the crushing weight of the calamities here foretold.

Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence. The Hebrew word rendered *because*, seems to intimate, that the desolation of the chief cities of Moab was to be the reason of the lamentation and weeping described in the next verses; or if translated, as it might be, *indeed*, or *truly*, it denotes the certainty of the predicted event.—Ar is the first mentioned city of Moab. It was probably a very ancient, large, well-fortified, and populous city, the metropolis of the kingdom, and the seat of government. In the night-time, when its inhabitants were secure and asleep, having got no intimation of approaching danger, this flourishing city was to be suddenly and unexpectedly laid waste. It was to be taken, plundered of its riches, and divested, in the night-season, of its inhabitants, who were either to be

* Deut. ii. 9.

put to the sword, or taken prisoners. Thus it should be reduced to silence, and cut off, expressions which intimate its utter destruction.—Kir was another considerable city of Moab: it was probably the same which is called, chap. xvi. 7. Kir-harefeth; and, in ver. 11. of that chapter, Kir-haresh. It is called Kir of Moab, to distinguish it from Kir of Assyria, mentioned by the prophet Amos*, and from Kir in Media, spoken of, chap. xxii. 6. of this prophecy. This city of the Moabites was to share the same fate with Ar, and should likewise be laid waste, and brought to silence, in the night-time. This mournful event would greatly increase the sorrow and lamentation of the people of Moab.

2 He is gone up to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep: Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads *shall be baldness, and every beard cut off.*

The affecting consequences of the predicted destruction of the cities above mentioned, are here represented in a very moving manner. The person spoken of, seems to have been the king of Moab, attended with the inhabitants of Ar and Kir, who had escaped the general devastation. He and they went up to Bajith and Dibon, where there were probably temples, or altars, erected to the god Chemosh, in which idolatrous worship was performed to that idol. There they would bemoan their deplorable condition, and the heavy losses which they had sustained, by the sudden desolation of their chief cities: they would ask advice and assistance from their god, and offer sacrifices unto him.—*Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba*, other two cities in the land, which were taken, plundered, and desolated. The former might derive its name from a Hebrew word, which signifies

* Amos i. 5.

to prophecy; or from an Arabic word, that denotes *eminence*. If this conjecture be just, Nebo imported the elevated situation of the place; or that there the pretended oracles were delivered, by the priests of the deities whom they served. Not far from this city stood a mountain of the same name, from whence Moses, the servant of the Lord, was favoured with a view of the land of Canaan before he died*. The latter city, Medeba, was situated by a large plain of the same name, mentioned Joshua xiii. 16. Josephus speaks of it as a city of Moab, in the time of Alexander †. Though destroyed at the period to which this prophecy looked forward, it might afterward have been rebuilt.—*On all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off.* The Moabites, who survived the destruction of their cities, to testify the greatness of their distress and sorrow, according to the custom of the times, were to tear off the hair from their heads, so as to make themselves bald, and to cut off, or shave their beards. Hair was anciently esteemed an ornament; and therefore when persons bewailed the loss of friends, or other calamities with which they were visited, they cut it off, as a token of sorrow and affliction. In reference to this practice, our prophet foretels, that, in the significant manner here described, the distressed Moabites were to express their grief and anguish.

3 In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth: on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly,

How pungent must have been the grief of the Moabites in the day of their calamity! how affecting the demonstrations of their sorrow, which are here specified! Moab was a proud and haughty people;

* Deut. xxxii. 49, 50.

† Antiq. lib. xiii. cap. 15,

and therefore we suppose, that their dress corresponded with their temper and character, and, by its fineness and elegance, would shew their pride and vanity. Their prosperous condition being reversed, and exchanged for a calamitous state, they were not, as formerly, to retire into their chambers to put on their gay attire; but, in the open streets, and on the tops of flat-roofed houses, they should gird themselves with sackcloth, made of the coarsest materials. The practice of wearing sackcloth was anciently used as a symbol of sorrow and distress. The patriarch Jacob put it on, when he supposed that his beloved son Joseph was dead. When famine prevailed in Samaria, the king of Israel put sackcloth on his skin, below his royal robes; and when the people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast, they put on sackcloth, from the greatest even to the least of them. In like manner also did the Moabites clothe themselves with this rough, coarse sort of stuff, at the time in which this prediction received its accomplishment. In this habit, they howled and wept abundantly, loudly bemoaning their misery, and deploring, with tears in great plenty, the afflictive circumstances to which they were reduced.

4 And Heshbon shall cry, and Elealeh: their voice shall be heard *even* unto Jahaz: therefore the armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out: his life shall be grievous unto him.

The prophet proceeds farther to exhibit the moving scenes of distress which he had very affectingly represented in the foregoing verses. Heshbon was a famous city, that stood over against Jericho, about twenty miles distant from Jordan. Sihon, king of the Amorites, took it from the Moabites; who afterward re-united it to their possessions*. Elealeh was another city of Moab, situated not far from Heshbon;

* See Jer. xlviii. 34. 45.

and is said to have been built with it, by the children of Reuben *. The inhabitants of these cities were to cry and lament over the desolation of their country with a very bitter and loud lamentation.—*Their voice shall be heard even unto Jabaz*; a frontier-town, in the border of their land. This circumstance shews the great extent of the calamities which the Moabites were to suffer at this period, and the grievous mourning which was to be made on account of their complicated distresses.—*Therefore the armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out*, not with shouts of triumph and joy, but with shriekings arising from anguish and consternation, from fear and terror. Not only were the weak, unarmed inhabitants of Moab to be distressed with timidity and vexation, but even the strong, the stout-hearted, and those prepared for battle, were to be greatly afflicted and dejected.—*His life shall be grievous unto him*. This was to be the lamentable condition of almost every one of the Moabites, who would therefore be ready to prefer death to life itself.

5 My heart shall cry out for Moab, his fugitives *shall flee* unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old: for by the mounting up of Luhith with weeping shall they go it up: for in the way of Horonaim, they shall raise up a cry of destruction.

Deeply affected by a view of the approaching miseries which were to befall the Moabites, Isaiah here expresses the tender compassion which he felt for them.—*My heart shall cry out for Moab*, in sorrowful strains, on account of the complicated calamities which, ere long, shall seize upon them. The words plainly intimate, the reality and intenseness of the grief and affliction which his generous heart felt, on contemplating, by the spirit of prophecy, the awful judgments

* Numb. xxxii. 37.

with which the avowed enemies of his country were to be visited. In this prospect, he was inwardly and greatly afflicted.—*His fugitives shall flee to Zoar*; the name of the city to which Lot, the renowned progenitor of this people, fled, when he escaped for his life out of Sodom*: and, in the season of public danger to his posterity, that city, or one of the same name, was to become a place of resort, for safety, to the fugitives of Moab.—*An heifer of three years old* has, at first sight, a strange appearance in this place. The words may be intended to express the strength and vehemence with which the Moabites would howl and cry, in their flight, when they were to make a loud, doleful noise, like the lowing of a heifer. I rather suppose, with some learned men, that the words, thus translated, may signify the name of another place beside Zoar, to which the fugitives ran for shelter.—*For by the mounting up of Luhith with weeping shall they go it up.* Whether Luhith was a rock, a city, or fortress, it seems to have been situated on a considerable eminence, and the ascent to it was probably very steep. In climbing their way up, for safety, the Moabites were to weep, and bewail the losses which they had sustained, the riches they had left behind them, the friends of which they had been bereaved, and the great dangers to which they were still exposed. Placing their happiness in the possession of worldly good things, having nothing desirable to expect beyond this present life to support their minds, and unable to govern their passions, they gave way to immoderate grief; they were dissolved in tears, they wept, they cried, they howled.—*For in the way of Horonaim, they shall raise up a cry of destruction.* There were probably two Horons; the one of which was called the Upper, and the other the Lower, for the sake of distinction. The name signifies *caverns*; and was given to the place because it abounded with caves

* See Gen. xix. 20, 21, 22.

and dens, wherein people might conveniently hide themselves in times of danger. In the way leading to Horonaim, the cry of destruction was raised. The mournful tidings of devastation made by an enemy, were loudly published on this road; and the news of the distress, which was thereby excited, were spread far and near. These cries were, no doubt, accompanied with earnest entreaties for assistance, poured forth to those from whom any relief might be expected.

6 For the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate: for the hay is withered away, the grass faileth, there is no green thing.

These words suggest some more reasons for the weeping and crying, mentioned in the preceding verse. Nimrim was either a town situated near to some fine springs of water, which were seldom or never known to fail, or the valley in which these waters took their rise. To increase the calamities of Moab, the waters, which were known by this name, were to become desolate; the fountains being either stopt or marred by the enemy, in their progress through the country, or dried up by a great drought, which, at the time referred to, was to come upon the land.—The low grounds about Nimrim, that were commonly covered with grass, which was made into hay, were to assume a very dismal appearance; the grass, and the herbage, with every green thing, were to wither, insomuch that provision for cattle was to become exceeding scarce, and very difficult to be obtained.

7 Therefore the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have laid up, shall they carry away to the brook of the willows.

Another ground of lamentation to the Moabites is described in these words, which admit of two interpretations

pretations that are somewhat different. First, They may signify, that the abundance which that people had acquired, and the treasures which they had amassed, in the time of their prosperity, were to be carried away, and secretly deposited by them near a river, whose banks were covered with willows, in order to preserve them from being seized by their enemies. In this view, the words suggest what would doubtless be one cause of sorrow and vexation. Secondly, They may denote, that their enemies, when ravaging the country, would seize upon their riches and treasures, and convey them away to the water known at that time by the name of the Brook of the willows, which ran between Moab and Babylon, that they might afterward, when they should have more leisure and convenience, carry them to that great city, which was situated on the river Euphrates, where willows grew in vast numbers. The Moabites being thus deprived of their best effects by the Assyrians, would prove to them another source of grief and lamentation.

8 For the cry is gone round about the borders of Moab: the howling thereof unto Eglaim, and the howling thereof unto Beer-elim.

Our prophet, having contemplated the several movements of the Moabites, when seized with consternation, and overwhelmed with sorrow, now supplies any defect with which his representation might be attended, by pointing out the universality of that sorrow and lamentation which he had in his view. The cry of destruction, and the howling, on account of desolation, should not only be heard in the interior parts of the country of Moab, but was to extend through all their borders, even to those places which were situated in the most remote corners of the land, such as Eglaim and Beer-elim.

9 For the waters of Dimon shall be full of blood: for I will bring more upon Dimon, lions upon him that escapeth of Moab, and upon the remnant of the land.

Another reason is here subjoined, of the mourning and crying which were delineated in the preceding verses, in very strong colours. Dimon seems to have been the name of a river in the land of Moab, whose waters being mingled with the blood of the slain inhabitants of that country, their taste and colour should resemble blood.—For I will bring more slaughter and devastation upon that part of the country: and that all might know what those additional judgments were which God was to inflict upon that neighbourhood, it is added, *Lions upon him that escapeth of Moab, &c.* Those who were not slain by the sword of the enemy, were to be destroyed by lions, or other beasts of prey, who would fall upon the remnant who remained in the land of Moab. Some commentators have supposed, that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, with his army, who is spoken of as a lion by the prophet Jeremiah*, was intended by this figurative description. He indeed justly deserved this character, on account of his pride, ferocity, and cruelty: and if he, and his troops, were here meant, the prediction intimates, that the Moabites, whom Sennacherib, king of Assyria, left behind him, should be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The foretold calamity would in effect be much the same, whether the lions were rapacious animals, or savage men.

Thus have I considered, in a cursory manner, the first part of the prophecy concerning Moab, recorded in this chapter. Jeremiah hath introduced into his larger prophecy against the same people, contained in the forty-eight chapter of his book, several of Isaiah's predictions, by the attentive perusal of which, you

* Jer. iv. 7.

may be assisted in understanding the burden of Moab. To that prophecy I refer you for the illustration of this subject, which suggests many instructive lessons, that I shall not stay to point out. Permit me to mention one, by which I hope you will profit, I mean the great danger that arises from reproaching and injuring the people of God. This seems to have been one of the sins of Moab, which exposed them to the awful judgments above written. ‘They said, The house of Judah is like unto all the Heathen *.’ By such opprobrious language, they blasphemed God, and calumniated his people: and ‘therefore, saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, I have heard the reproach of Moab—Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, even the breeding of nettles, and salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation †.’ This was to be the just retribution of their pride, and contempt of the inheritance of the Lord. They were mighty men, they had strong cities and fortifications; yet could they not prevent the judgments of the Almighty, which they had incurred, from desolating their land. They were trodden down as straw is trodden down for the dunghil, which makes no resistance to the foot that treads it.—Let us remember, that the people of God are precious in his sight; that they are the jewels of the Lord of hosts, his dear children, and the friends of his beloved Son. Such is his tender regard for them, that he hath declared, He that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye: he suffers no man to pass unpunished who doth them wrong; yea, he hath reprov’d kings for their sakes. Would you then avoid those terrible calamities which beset the Moabites? beware of those sins which brought down upon them such awful displays of the divine displeasure. Take heed that you do no harm to any one, particularly to the servants of the Most High. Honour them that fear the Lord, and esteem them as the excellent ones

* Ezek. xxv. 8.

† Zeph. ii. 8, 9.

of the earth. Do not even unnecessarily repeat their faults; do not voluntarily expose their weakneses; and learn to profit by the instances of their misconduct which you may observe. This you will find to be a much better and safer way, than following those malignant, injurious practices, whereby many have brought upon themselves certain destruction.

PRELIMI-

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THIS chapter contains the second part of the prophecy respecting Moab, wherein the prophet gives them good and prudent counsel. He points out the causes of the judgments which he had foretold, and directs them to the proper means, by attention to which they might be greatly alleviated or averted. On the supposition of their proud contempt of the salutary advices which are given them, he denounces certain ruin as the inevitable consequence.—He begins with admonishing them to perform the duty which they owed to the king and people of Judah, that, through the clemency shewn them, they had for some time shamefully omitted, ver. 1.—4. To excite them to compliance with his advice, he suggests a very powerful motive in ver. 5. He then shews, that the contempt which they would discover of these good counsels, originated in their pride and haughtiness, one principal cause of those dreadful calamities that threatened their destruction, ver. 6, 7, 8. After this, he pathetically describes the mourning and lamentation to which they should give rise, ver. 9, 10, 11. The chapter concludes with the assurance of the certain overthrow of Moab within a limited time, ver. 12. to the end.

 CHAP. XVI.

SEND ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion.

In this verse, the Moabites are required to acknowledge the king of Judah as their superior, by paying him tribute. David, the renowned king of Israel, having

having conquered the Moabites, they became his servants, and brought him gifts, as we read, 2 Sam. viii. 2. Mesha, king of Moab, paid unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. After the death of Ahab, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel*. The revolt was soon followed with great indignation, and a great slaughter of the Moabites, who, from that period, probably withdrew the subsidy. Our prophet therefore, addressing that people, advises them to send the tribute that had been stipulated, and which was due to Hezekiah, the ruler of the land; who was the heir and successor of David in his throne and kingdom. The words may be rendered, Send ye the lamb of the ruler of the land; *i. e.* Ye people of Moab, send the tribute which your ruler oweth to the king of Judah.—*From Sela*, which signifies a rock, and seems to have been the name of a chief city in the land of Moab—to the wilderness of Judea, which was situated in the way leading from Sela to Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judea, which was built upon mount Zion, and inhabited by her children.—This admonition may suggest to you, my brethren, the memorable words of Jesus Christ, ‘Render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.’ Give custom to whom custom is due; and faithfully pay to God, the Ruler of the land, the Governor of the world, that sacred homage which he justly demands from you. Neglect not to present before him those humble acknowledgments, those acceptable services, that profound adoration, and unlimited subjection, which you have often promised, and he expects to receive. In this way, you may hope to escape threatened calamities, and to enjoy agreeable tranquillity and safety.

2 Kings iii. 4, 5.

2 For

2 For it shall be *that* as a wandering bird cast out of the nest: *so* the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Arnon.

These words clearly state the grounds upon which the preceding advice was founded; *viz.* the calamitous, destitute condition to which the Moabites were suddenly to be reduced. If they should prove so foolish and stubborn as to refuse to comply with our prophet's admonition, such was to be their deplorable and helpless condition, that it would resemble that of a bird when deprived of its nest, which, being greatly affrighted, flies about, not knowing where to go for shelter. In like manner, the feeble among the Moabites, after their habitations were destroyed by the enemy, uncertain where to flee for safety, were to find themselves in very destitute circumstances, at the fords of the river Arnon, which lay at the boundaries of their country. Filled with consternation, and not knowing where to flee from danger, they should be reduced to a very pitiable and perplexed condition, like that of a bird whose nest is destroyed.—To what straits and embarrassments doth the sin and folly of mankind often bring them, especially when to this is added, contempt of good counsel, which, had it been accepted by the Moabites, they might have enjoyed external peace, and inward serenity of mind.

3 Take counsel, execute judgment, make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noon-day, hide the outcasts, bewray not him that wandereth.

What a valuable cluster of excellent advices is contained in these words! *Take counsel.* If the prophet here refers to what preceded this admonition, its import will be, Refuse not to comply with the advices you have received, which, if carried into execution, will assuredly be attended with signal advantages, and

greatly contribute to your real welfare. If he had chiefly in view what follows, its meaning will be, that the king, the princes, and people of Moab, ought deliberately to consult what measures were most proper for them to take, at this critical season, for the defence and preservation of the kingdom. In order to form a proper decision on this important subject, it would be highly expedient, that they maturely consider the matter, and seriously attend to present circumstances. Unto you, O men! I call: hear especially ye young people: take counsel. ‘The way of a fool
 ‘is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth
 ‘unto counsel, is wise. Hear counsel, and receive
 ‘instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter
 ‘end*.’ Diffident of your own judgment, be ever ready to receive direction from the wise and good, and thankfully to accept of the salutary advices that are given you.—*Execute judgment.* Employ your minds in discriminating truth from falsehood, and justice from injustice; that which is equitable from what is base and iniquitous. Support, with firmness and constancy, that which is lawful and laudable; clearly discover, by your words and actions, what are your real sentiments and designs. By the measures which you adopt, give satisfying evidence of the equity of your decisions, that they are dictated, not by foolish caprice, or malevolence and envy, but by reason and conscience, humanity and prudence; and that you mean to do justly, and to pay a sacred regard to the great laws of veracity and honesty.—This is an excellent advice, to which you would do well to take heed, and reduce to practice. It is suited to all times, and necessary to be attended to by every person. It is not enough that we choose judgment; having made this wise choice, we ought to follow whatsoever things are just and honest, and diligently to carry them into execution.

* Prov. xii. 15. xix. 20.

Make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noon-day. In warm countries, the heat of noon-day is very intense, when the rays of the sun beat vehemently upon those who are exposed to them. This circumstance must render the benefit of a shadow very desirable; and therefore this is promised, among other blessings, to the godly, ‘The sun shall not smite thee by day. The displeasure of princes, exalted to the greatest dignity, clothed with majesty and power, extending its influence to those against whom it is directed, is expressed, in scripture, by the sultry heat of noon-day. In this figurative sense, I suppose, the words before us must be understood, denoting the consuming, distressing heat of persecution with which the people might be afflicted, for whose relief the shadow was to be prepared.—*Make thy shadow as the night.* The shadow of the night excludes the burning heat of the sun: it prevents objects from being seen; and is so extended as to conceal all that come within its reach. By this metaphorical language, our prophet calls upon the Moabites to hide those exiles that fled to their country for shelter, from violence, oppression, and danger, to screen them from their persecutors; and to perform the various acts of humanity, hospitality, and charity, which might alleviate their distress. He requires, that they administer suitable provision to the hungry; that they clothe the naked; that they support the weak, and perform the duties of kindness and urbanity toward the dejected and distressed. In few words, he inculcates, on that haughty and cruel people, the exercise of generosity, and the love of mankind.—Such seems to be the import of this excellent advice, to which you, my brethren, ought carefully to attend. In seasons of prosperity, men commonly have many friends, who are ready to do them kind offices; but when poverty and distress befalls them, they often, alas! withdraw those acts of beneficence which are most necessary to
give

give ease under the pressure of affliction. Remember the words of the wise man, 'A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity *.' That is the time in which acts of kindness are most acceptable and useful; and we are born for the very purpose of relieving and comforting our afflicted and injured brethren.

Hide the outcasts, bewray not him that wandereth. In the country of Moab there were many caverns, where persons might take refuge from those who harassed them, and hunted after them with hostile intentions. To these caves and dens, in time of danger, many of that people, and some from other nations, particularly from among the Israelites, resorted for safety. Elimelech, and his wife Naomi, in the time of scarcity in their own country, went into the land of Moab until the famine had ceased. David, when persecuted by Saul, brought his father and mother to the king of Moab, until he should see what God would do for him. And, in after-times, when the kingdom of Judah was distressed by their enemies, not a few of that people fled to the land of Moab, whom the Moabites ungenerously brought forth from their lurking places, and delivered up to the hands of them that sought their life. The prophet therefore, with great propriety, directs them to hide the outcasts, who were obliged to flee from their own country, to seek for that safety in a foreign land which they could not find at home. Allow them to hide themselves in places where they may enjoy a safe retreat from danger, afford them an agreeable asylum, entertain them with kindness, and protect them from the hostile power of their enemies. Do not discover to those who would injure them where they lie concealed; and, on no account whatsoever, betray them into the hands of those who seek their life.

* Prov. xvii. 17.

4 Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab, be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land.

The generous conduct recommended in the foregoing verse, is here enforced by a powerful consideration.—The outcasts, whom our prophet particularly intended, and to whom he claimed protection from Moab, were those who were expelled from the land of Judah, and fled to them for covert from the face of the spoiler, when their own country was to be invaded by their enemies. These he required them, in a special manner, to treat with lenity and hospitality, and to permit them to enjoy undisturbed residence in their territories—for this good reason, *The extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, &c.* What is here affirmed was literally accomplished, when the power of Assyria, by which the land of Judea had been spoiled, oppressed, and consumed, was destroyed by the righteous vengeance of the Almighty. The certain prospect presented to the Moabites, of that important predicted event, should have effectually determined them to comply with the salutary advice contained in the preceding verse, and repeated in the first part of the one before us. When that great empire, which had disturbed and molested the nations of the earth, should be overthrown, the kingdom of Judah was to rise to importance and glory, so as to be highly respected by the neighbouring states. In this view, it was the unquestionable duty and interest of Moab, to treat the exiles of Judah with tenderness and compassion, to avoid every thing that might incur their displeasure, and to do every thing that tended to conciliate their favour and friendship.—In the event to which this prophecy primarily referred, we behold an instructive representation of a still more glorious conquest over the great spoiler and oppressor

for of mankind, who hath distressed them by his grievous yoke, to be accomplished by the breath of God's mouth, and the brightness of his coming, when he shall destroy them that destroyed the earth. Did you believe as you ought, that this interesting period is fast approaching, you would not, in the smallest degree, injure those whose wrongs the Son of God will then avenge, who will render tribulation and wrath to them that trouble them,

5 And in mercy shall the throne be established, and he shall sit upon it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking judgment, and hastening righteousness.

These words suggest a powerful motive to induce to the diligent performance of the duties which our prophet had inculcated in the foregoing verses.—The throne which he had more immediately in view, was that of Hezekiah, king of Judah, which, in some respects, was typical of the far more glorious and eternal throne of the Messiah. This throne, the ensign of majesty and authority, whereon Hezekiah was seated, should be established, after the abolition of the oppressive, adverse power whereby it had been often assaulted, so that none of its enemies would be able, by their strongest efforts, to shake the firm foundations upon which it rested. It was to be confirmed and perpetuated *in mercy*; the great mercy of God promised to the patriarch David, to whom the Lord said, ‘ His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne ‘ as the sun before me *’—in the mercy and clemency of that illustrious prince, displayed among his subjects—and by the duties of mercy, beneficence, and charity, which were to be practised by the people.—*And he shall sit upon it in truth*; according to the truth of Jehovah, pledged in his faithful promises made

* Psa. lxxxix. 36.

to his servant David, concerning his family and kingdom; and in the exercise of truth and integrity of heart, as to which this pious prince appealed to God, in the prospect of death: ‘Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight *.’—*In the tabernacle of David.* By which seems to be intended, the palace belonging to the kings who descended from that illustrious hero, called by him, ‘The tabernacle of his house †.’ The restoration of this house, after its decay, was foretold in these words, by the prophet Amos: ‘In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old †.’

Judging, &c. Three things are mentioned in the following words, which were to occupy the attention of the prince whose throne was to be established. The first is, *judging*; deciding, with the utmost impartiality, and without respect of persons, on the various causes that might be brought before him for his determination.—*And seeking judgment.* The expression denotes, that the prince, who is the subject of this prophecy, in pronouncing sentence upon the parties who were to be sifted at his tribunal, would perform his royal function with the utmost attention and assiduity, accurately inquiring into the conditions of his people, and carefully investigating the circumstances relative to every matter on which he was to deliver his judgment.—*And hastening righteousness*: taking care that all his decisions should be executed with the greatest dispatch and alacrity, that righteousness, like the mighty waters, might speedily run its course through all his dominions. Causes brought for judgment should not be protracted; justice should not be delayed; sentences should not be deferred; nor was

* Isaiah xxxviii. 3. † Psal. cxxxii. 3. † Amos ix. 11.

the execution of them to be retarded.—These predictions were remarkably verified in Hezekiah, king of Judah, who is represented, in scripture, as having been one of the best kings that ever reigned over the posterity of Israel: ‘After him was none like him ‘among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were ‘before him*.’ He was eminently remarkable for his strong attachment to truth, justice, and righteousness, and other virtues which give dignity to a prince, as is abundantly evident from the history of the Old Testament. After the wonderful destruction of Sennacherib’s army, his throne was established according to this prediction; he was respected by his subjects, and honoured by neighbouring nations.

What is here affirmed concerning the throne of Hezekiah, may be justly applied, and indeed most properly belongs, in a much higher sense, to the kingdom of Jesus Christ. This is a circumstance which will be contemplated with real pleasure by all who love him in sincerity. In his kingdom, to which, I suppose, Isaiah looked forward by the spirit of prophecy, the foregoing predictions receive a spiritual accomplishment, as their ultimate completion. To the Messiah, a throne is given; and this throne is established in mercy and grace, as it is written, Prov. xx. 28. ‘Mercy and truth preserve the king, ‘and his throne is upholden by mercy.’ It is therefore emphatically styled, by the writer of the Epistle ‘to the Hebrews, ‘The throne of grace;’ from whence he dispenses to his people, with the utmost generosity and liberality, the most valuable blessings.—Upon this throne he sits, who is perfectly free from all guile and dissimulation; who is truth itself, and in whom the predictions delivered by the prophets receive their fulfilment.—He is enthroned in the true and heavenly tabernacle, which the Lord, and not man, hath built, where he reigns

* 2 Kings xviii. 5.

as King over his church for ever.—*Judging*; searching into the causes that are laid before him; determining with consummate equity, and the utmost dispatch, all the matters relative to his kingdom. ‘Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne: mercy and truth shall go before his face*.’—As Jesus Christ, who should arise from Judah, was to abolish all oppression and iniquity by his regal power, our prophet naturally suggests the properties of his throne and government as a powerful argument to convince the Moabites, into whose hands this prophecy might fall, that compliance with the above advices was the best way that they could take to mitigate, if not prevent, the calamities with which they were threatened, and to acquire the favour of the prince, whose throne he described.—Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King, whose throne is for ever and ever; and who himself is just and righteous, meek, and having salvation. Though, by your subjection to him, you may not enjoy worldly riches or honours, but may be exposed to poverty and contempt, you shall have peace of conscience, divine protection, and eternal life in the society of angels, and a crown of glory that fadeth not away,

6 ¶ We have heard of the pride of Moab, (he *is* very proud) *even* of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: *but* his lies *shall* not be so.

In these words, the reason is pointed out why the foregoing advices would be rejected by the Moabites. This was no other than the pride and haughtiness of that people, which stirred them up against the Jews, and made them flatter themselves with the hopes of long-continued prosperity. Several causes might contribute to cherish the natural vanity of their minds,

* Psal. lxxxix. 14.

for which, as a people, they were very remarkable. Among these, may be reckoned their strong cities, and fortified places, which seemed to promise them security from danger, and the friendship of Assyria, with whom they were probably at this time allied, so that they had little to fear from that quarter. On these, and other accounts, they were greatly elated with pride. Of this unhappy temper which prevailed among the Moabites, our prophet, his countrymen the Jews, and the neighbouring nations, had often heard. It was generally known, and acknowledged as a true report, that Moab was very proud. Pride and haughtiness reached their highest summit among that people; and, as frequently happens, they were accompanied with wrath and indignation against those who presumed to dictate to them, to give them advice, or to oppose them in their sentiments and interests.—*His lies shall not be so*; or, His lies are vain, and to no purpose, as the words may be translated. The Moabites had among them diviners, who prophesied to them false things, whereby they were dreadfully deluded and imposed upon. In the end, all these divinations were to prove vain and fruitless, and then they would be undeceived. Our prophet, foreseeing the rejection of his counsel, foretels what would be the certain consequences of their pride and obstinacy, which he immediately proceeds to represent.

7 Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab, every one shall howl: for the foundations of Kir-harefeth shall ye mourn, surely *they are* stricken.

In this and the following verse, the calamities are described which were to be inflicted on the Moabites, for despising the good advices which were given them.—One part of the inhabitants of Moab were to howl and lament over the miseries which were sustained by the other: distress and sorrow was to spread
like

like a contagion through the whole land, until they became so general, that every one would mourn and howl.—*For the foundations of Kir-hareseth, &c.* This seems to have been the name of a considerable city in the land of Moab; and was probably the very same place that was called Kir, in the beginning of this prophecy.—The foundations of this city were to be stricken, which would give rise to the mourning here foretold. The word translated *foundations*, signifies also, *bottles, flaggons, or large vessels*, wherein liquor is kept; which is perhaps the preferable sense here, it being more natural to say, that foundations are destroyed, and that vessels are stricken. To this interpretation I am the rather inclined, as, in the beginning of next verse, the vine of Sibmah is mentioned, which would require many large vessels to contain its fruits. These vessels being stricken and broken, would give occasion to lamentation and sorrow, especially when taken in conjunction with what follows in the next verse.

8 For the fields of Heshbon languish, *and* the vine of Sibmah, the lords of the Heathen have broken down the principal plants thereof, they are come *even* unto Jazer, they wandered *through* the wilderness, her branches are stretched out, they are gone over the sea.

Heshbon was the name of a city in Moab, which was surrounded with vineyards, very fruitful fields, and rich pasture-grounds. At the time to which this prophecy referred, the fields situated in the vicinity of this city languished, and lost the beautiful, luxuriant appearance which they were wont to assume, because a sufficient number of hands were not left to cultivate and improve them, the people being either engaged in military services, or having fled before the enemy, or already wasted by slaughter.—*The vine*

of

of *Sibmah*, &c. Though this place is seldom mentioned in scripture, it appears, from what is here said, that it was renowned for the excellent vines which it produced. When this prediction was fulfilled, they were in a languishing state; the enemies of Moab, called the Lords of the Heathen, having plucked up the best plants, and broken off the branches, and carried them to Jazer. The land of Jazer, which is said to have been about fifteen miles from Heshbon, was pitched on by the Reubenites and Gadites, as a proper place for feeding cattle; and therefore they requested Moses and Eleazar, and the princes of the congregation, that it might be given to them for a possession *. The wines of Heshbon and Sibmah, having been in high reputation among the princes and great men of neighbouring nations, vines of the species which grew in these places, were propagated not only over all the land of Moab, but cions of them were sent over seas into foreign countries. And, at the period to which our prophet looked forward, when this prediction should be verified, these vines were to be almost totally demolished, and left in an uncultivated condition; and many of them were to be dispersed through the wilderness of Moab. Striking proofs of the deplorable, forlorn state of that kingdom!

9 ¶ Therefore I will bewail with the weeping of Jazer, the vine of Sibmah: I will water thee with my tears, O Heshbon, and Elealeh: for the shouting for thy summer-fruits, and for thy harvest, is fallen.

Our prophet, contemplating the calamities which he had predicted, in his own name, and personating the Moabites, declares what was his own determination, and what would be their conduct, in the time

* Numb. xxxii. 1. *et seq.*

of their distress.—*I will bewail*, with tears of sorrow, and bitter lamentations, the desolation of the fields of Heshbon, and the vines of Sibmah.—*With the weeping of Jazer*; with those strong expressions of sorrow that the inhabitants of that place had mourned over some great loss, or to which their destruction had given rise.—*I will water thee, O Heshbon, and Elealeh, with my tears*, which shall flow in such abundance, as to moisten some of thy neglected fields and vineyards.—*For the shouting, &c.* When the people of Moab were employed in gathering the summer-fruits, in collecting the vintage, and reaping their harvest, they enlivened and encouraged each other by joyful acclamations. In this manner they might amuse themselves at proper seasons, and be thereby excited to proceed in their work with greater alacrity and pleasure. These loud and joyful shouts were to fall low, and cease. All their mirth and festivity were to be laid aside; and the whole joyous scene exhibited in the seasons of grape-gathering, and reaping the corns, was to be reversed in the land of Moab, and to be succeeded by desolation and mourning.

10 And gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field, and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no wine in *their* presses; I have made *their* vintage-shouting to cease.

The Moabites were accustomed to reap their luxuriant crops with much joy and gladness, and to gather the grapes of their vineyards with singing and shouting. Being worldly men, who had their portion in this present life, and the fruits of the vine and of the field being of all others the most excellent and valuable, they had no greater joy than that which they felt on these occasions. Our prophet therefore, in describing the calamities with which they were to be visited,

visited, on account of their incorrigible transgressions, suits the representation to the prevailing sentiments of that people. As they placed their chief happiness in the things of this world, he declares, that the desolation which they would greatly lament, should arise from their being deprived of worldly abundance, and the joy wherewith the possession of it was accompanied.—The whole prediction before us, delivered in language greatly diversified, plainly intimates, that the time was then fast approaching, when the miseries that were coming upon Moab, would deprive them of all the joy and gladness, the singing, shouting, and festivity, which they had hitherto enjoyed in prosperity.—That so great were to be the foretold calamities with which the land should be visited, that sorrow and anguish, weeping, howling, and lamentation, should be substituted in their place, and prevail as universally among the inhabitants, in the time of their distress, as the opposite practices had done in happier days.

11 Wherefore my bowels shall sound like an harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kir-haresh.

Isaiah, with his accustomed elegance, pathetically describes the tender, painful emotions which he would feel, on account of the distresses of Moab. These compassionate feelings he illustrates by a beautiful similitude. *My bowels shall sound like a harp*, which is a musical instrument, the strings of which being extended, pressed with the hand, and touched with the fingers, emits a pleasant, melodious, grave sound. In like manner, when the inward parts are distended with grief, when the animal spirits are depressed, and the bowels are moved, the heart, thus oppressed and overcharged, seeks relief in sobs and sighs, which form a sound, in some respects, like a mournful tune. Similar expressions with that now before us frequently

frequently occur in scripture *. The words import, that our prophet's bowels were to be sensibly touched by the calamities of Moab, and his inward parts so strongly moved by the distresses of Kir-haresh, as to produce a mournful, affecting sound, expressive of his poignant sorrow.

12 ¶ And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray, but he shall not prevail.

The unsuccessful attempt of the Moabites, to escape the foretold desolation, is here strongly depicted.—After the above-mentioned threatened judgments had become visible, by their execution on Moab, that people were to become weary of the high place to which they had resorted, that they might sacrifice to their gods on altars, which were commonly erected on places of eminence, that they might weep before them, and implore their assistance. Having wearied themselves in vain in the service of their idols, their cries, lamentations, and sacrifices, having accomplished no valuable purpose, they would desist from these practices, and take another course.—*He shall come to his sanctuary to pray, but he shall not prevail.* The Moabites fatigued with fruitless expedients, which hitherto had produced no good effect, they would repair to Jerusalem, where was the sanctuary of the God of Israel, that they might supplicate relief from distress, and his merciful interposition in their behalf. But they shall not prevail: they shall not be able to reach the sanctuary of the Lord, being prevented by their enemies; and, though some of them might get there, they shall not prevail with God to obtain deliverance, who had determined, for just reasons, to afflict them in the manner foretold.—The words

* Job xxx. 27. Jer. iv. 19.

admit of another interpretation. Almost every nation anciently had their sanctuaries, as well as their altars and gods, so that Moab might also have a sanctuary. Having betaken themselves without success to the altar, and there in vain invoked their idols, they would enter into the principal sanctuary or temple, wherein was placed the image of their god Chemosh, and there pour out prayers to him for assistance and deliverance. But they shall not prevail. This expedient was not to be attended with any good effect, nor were they to obtain by it any valuable advantage. This was the last shift of the Moabites, when conflicting with various calamities; they cried to their god for that relief which they could not obtain. Thus did they experience the vanity of their foolish and absurd superstition, and the utter insufficiency of their idols to deliver them from misery.—In the temper and conduct of Moab, we see a lively image of our own foolish temper and conduct. The Lord God, by his servants, hath denounced the most awful threatenings against us, as the just desert of our transgressions, the execution of which shall be followed with weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. That we may escape those terrible judgments to which we have exposed ourselves, he hath been graciously pleased to give us the most salutary advices, pointing out how we may avoid deserved calamities, and become his faithful subjects, whose throne is established in mercy. By despising his good counsel, we shall incur the dreadful effects of his displeasure, from which human wisdom and power cannot possibly extricate us. Let us then learn instruction from the obstinacy and pride of Moab, and diligently beware that we harden not our hearts against his fear, nor reject his counsel against ourselves. ‘Hear instruction, be wise, and refuse it not.’

13 This *is* the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning Moab since that time.

The

The prophecy concludes with a solemn assurance of its divine authority, and certain accomplishment within a limited time.—This which you have now heard, is the discourse which Isaiah delivered concerning the desolation of Moab. This, saith he, is the word that the Lord hath spoken; the true sayings of God, and not of man, and therefore they shall certainly be fulfilled in their season. ‘God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good. Behold, I have received commandment to speak; and he hath spoken, and I cannot reverse it*.’ He abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself: the united opposition of earth and hell cannot frustrate his designs, nor prevent him from executing his promises and threatenings.—This much the Lord spake concerning Moab long ago, or since the time in which that people became the subject of prophecy. Or the words may be rendered, This is that word which the Lord then spake concerning Moab; namely, in the year King Ahaz died. According to this interpretation, the expression may serve to ascertain the date of this prophecy, which hath the time of its accomplishment fixed in the following verse.

14 But now the LORD hath spoken, saying, Within three years, as the years of an hireling, and the glory of Moab shall be contemned, with all that great multitude; and the remnant *shall be* very small *and* feeble.

At the time wherein God was pleased to reveal his mind to our prophet, he thus spake, *Within three years, as the years of an hireling, &c.* The words may denote, that from the time of the delivery, until the

* Numb. xxiii. 19, 20.

fulfilment of the prophecy, was to be exactly three years; or, that from the period in which the accomplishment of the predictions commenced, until all the glory of Moab should be treated with contempt, was to be precisely three years.—*As the years of an hireling, who labours, during a set time, for a stipulated reward. As soon as the time agreed upon is expired, which is commonly reckoned with the greatest accuracy, and his engagements are performed, his wages are demanded. The years of an hireling are often troublesome and vexatious, through the toil, weariness, and sorrow, which he is obliged to endure. By this similitude, therefore, is represented the affliction and distress to which the Moabites were to be subjected during this period, and the precise length of time which was to elapse, from the delivery to the accomplishment of the prophecy, when—The glory of Moab shall be contemned, with all that great multitude, &c. The glory and multitude of Moab, consisted in the strength and number of their cities, their inhabitants, and their soldiers, with all the riches and opulence whereof they boasted. All their strength and magnificence were soon to be considered as insignificant, and despised by the armies which were to attack, invade, and conquer them.—And the remnant shall be very small and feeble. The few who were to escape the general devastation, deprived of their wealth, driven from their habitations, and enfeebled by fatigue and hardships, were to become weak and languid.—This prophecy having been published, according to my supposition, at the same time with the former, in the year king Ahaz died, when the Jews much needed the friendly offices of the Moabites, it must have been fulfilled in the third year of Hezekiah's reign, after the death of his father, when Salmanezer, king of Assyria, went on an expedition against the Ephraimites, assaulted the Moabites, and destroyed their cities. Being so closely connected with the speedy accomplishment which it received, it would*

would afford a striking proof of the divine inspiration of our prophet to his cotemporaries, who attended to predictions, and their corresponding events. To us who enjoy the evidence for the truth of divine revelation, which, instead of being diminished through length of time, is daily increasing, every new accomplishment of prophecy gives a new attestation to its sacred authority, and ought to confirm our faith in what is therein declared.

PRELIMI.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE fourth discourse contained in the second part of these prophecies, is recorded in this and the following chapter. In the chapter now before us, the prophet treats of the future fortunes of the Syrians, who were joined in alliance with Ephraim, for the purpose of invading Judah, and besieging Jerusalem. He shews, that, ere long, Damascus, which was the capital of Syria, should be totally destroyed, and the kingdom, of which it was the metropolis, should be abolished.—That, at the same time, the kingdom of Ephraim was, by a great defeat, to be deprived of its strength and beauty. To these predictions are subjoined a noble description of the formidable invasion, and sudden overthrow of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, exactly corresponding with the event.—By this prophecy, the Almighty hath clearly shewn, that all those, however powerful they may be, who endeavour to vex and injure his people, shall, in the end, be disappointed, and suffer his righteous vengeance.—The whole discourse may be distributed into four parts. The first announces the fixed determination of the Most High respecting Damascus, ver. 1, 2, 3. The second declares the decree which he had formed concerning the Ephraimites, ver. 4.—11. The third unfolds his purpose as to the Assyrians, ver. 12, 13, 14. The last foretels the overthrow of the Assyrian army, chap. xviii. which is ordered to be published to the whole world.

 CHAP. XVII.

THE burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from *being* a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.

Damascus,

Damascus, which was the metropolis of the kingdom of Syria, was situated in a rich plain, upon the river Chryforchoas, about one hundred and forty miles south from Jerusalem, and nearly as far north from Antioch. It is perhaps the most ancient city in the known world, being mentioned as existing in the days of the patriarch Abraham * ; and is said to have been one of the most delightful places on the earth. The adjacent country is famous for the great abundance of plants, flowers, and fruits, of almost every kind, which it produced. Though, in the revolution of ages, it hath been assaulted and desolated, and suffered many changes, it still remains in existence. Whilst larger and stronger cities have perished, and been buried in ruins, it is still respected on account of its riches. In process of time, this city became the metropolis of the kingdom of Syria: between which; and the posterity of Israel, there were almost continual wars, which originated from different causes, and terminated with various successes; and therefore an inspired writer remarks, as an uncommon circumstance, that three years elapsed without war between Syria and Israel †. Among the kings of Syria, three are mentioned in the sacred history, who grievously vexed and distressed the Israelites; namely, Benhadad, Hazael, and his son Benhadad. Though Judah lay at a greater distance from Syria than the Ephraimites, they were often at variance with each other. These animosities and differences sometimes issued in favour of the one nation, and sometimes in favour of the other, according as the Almighty was pleased to order, for carrying forward the designs of his all-wise providence. Rezin, who now sat upon the throne of Syria, inflamed with the desire of gratifying his ambition and revenge, having joined in confederacy with Pekah, king of Israel, meditated the destruction of Jerusalem. Being afterward vanquished

* Gen. xv. 2.

† 1 Kings xxii. 1.

and slain by Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, the future fortunes of Judah were intimately connected with this event. Attention to these circumstances may assist you in understanding the following predictions.

The prophecy which we are now to consider, bears the inscription of the Burden of Damascus. This title was probably affixed to it, either by Isaiah himself, or by some sacred writer, who transcribed these discourses, and digested them into the order in which they now stand. It justly deserves the name of the Burden, as it contains awful denunciations of the very grievous calamities which were to be inflicted upon the city Damascus, and the kingdom whereof it was the capital.—The prophet begins by foretelling the total overthrow of this opulent city: *Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.* So certain was this remarkable event, and so soon was it to take place after the delivery of this prediction, that it is spoken of as if it had been already accomplished. Its riches are despoiled; its walls are demolished; its magnificent buildings are thrown down; its inhabitants are taken captive or slain, or fled from the enemy; in consequence of which, it is become a ruinous heap of stones and rubbish.

2 The cities of Aroer *are* forsaken; they shall be for flocks which shall lie down, and none shall make *them* afraid.

Another instance of the desolation which was to be made, at the time of fulfilling this prophecy, is here mentioned. Aroer was the name of a considerable city, situated on the river Arnon, once in the possession of the Amorites, and afterward given by Moses to the Reubenites and Gadites, as part of their inheritance. From them it had been taken by the Syrians, in whose hands it seems to have been at
this

this time *. The lesser cities around it, were called the cities of Aroer, as the cities in the neighbourhood of Heshbon, were named the cities of Heshbon †. These populous towns, deserted by their inhabitants, were to become solitary places, in which flocks of cattle were to lie down without any fear of disturbance. So great was to be the desolation here foretold, that the condition of the country should be entirely reversed from its former populous, improved state.

3 The fortrefs also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the LORD of hosts.

The calamities here foretold, were to extend both to Ephraim and Syria.—By the fortrefs of Ephraim might be meant, the city Samaria, which was the metropolis of that kingdom, and probably their best fortified city, on the strength of which they greatly depended in times of danger. This fortrefs, with their other strong holds, were to cease from affording them any protection, and to be taken from the Israelites, who were to be carried captive by their enemies. This event the prophet Micah expressly foretold in the following words: ‘Therefore I will
 ‘ make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as plant-
 ‘ ings of a vineyard; and I will pour down the stones
 ‘ thereof into the valley, and I will discover the
 ‘ foundations thereof †.’ *And the kingdom from Damascus.* Damascus was the chief city of Syria, and the royal residence of their kings. From this city and nation the kingdom was to cease: it was no longer to be a separate kingdom by itself, but henceforward to be subject to foreign powers. The chief cities of Ephraim and Syria, Samaria and Damascus,

* See 2 Kings x. 33. † Joshua xiii. 17. ‡ Micah i. 6.

were no longer to retain their former importance and grandeur, but to sink into obscurity, or to be buried in ruins.—*They shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the Lord of hosts.* The glory of the children of Israel, of which I had occasion to speak, when treating of chap. x. 3. might comprehend all that was esteemed excellent and valuable by that people; their religious institutions, their military forces, their liberty and prosperity, their princes and respectable men. The prediction imports, that the remnant of Syria should share the same fate with the glory of Israel. Their kingdom was to be destroyed; their strong cities were to be demolished; their best citizens were to be spoiled of their riches and dignity, and carried away captives into a foreign land. As these two powers of Israel and Syria had united in hostile designs against Judah, so they were to participate in the same, or very similar calamities, as the just retribution of their daring presumption.—To give certainty and effect to these predictions, it is added, *Saith the Lord of hosts.*—This prophecy seems to have received its accomplishment in the third or fourth year of Ahaz, when Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the inhabitants captives to Kir, and slew Rezin. Though after that period Damascus be often mentioned, another city seems to be intended than that which was anciently the capital of Syria, which kingdom was never more re-established in its former power and grandeur.—From this prophecy, we deduce a clear proof of our prophet's divine inspiration, and that he spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. He not only foretold events which were to happen at remote periods of time, but those also which were soon after to be accomplished, as in the instance that we have now been considering. By the fulfilment of the predictions of this last sort, the people among whom he lived, would have opportunity of comparing the prophecy with the event, and observing the exact correspondence

spondence between them, and their faith, in his prophetic character, would be established and confirmed. This circumstance, taken in conjunction with others, ought to confirm our belief in the divine mission and inspiration of Isaiah, on whose testimony we may at all times safely rely.

4 And in that day it shall come to pass, *that* the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean.

The Ephraimites having been guilty of similar transgressions with the Syrians, our prophet proceeds to foretel, that, at the time to which he looked forward, they should share with them in punishment.—The judgment to be inflicted upon them, he represents by a natural similitude, taken from a person enjoying health, strength, and comeliness, who, suddenly losing the vigour of his constitution, soon becomes thin and emaciated; his strength fails, his bones stick out, and he assumes quite a different appearance from what he formerly made. In like manner, the glory of Jacob, which was constituted of the prudent, respectable, and good men among the Ephraimites, with all that contributed to their opulence, splendour, and magnificence, was to be remarkably diminished, and taken away. They were to be deprived of their best citizens, their wealth, and their ornaments; their cities were to be divested of their treasures, palaces, and fortifications, and only a few poor helpless people were to remain. In a word, whatever they esteemed excellent and valuable, was to be taken away from them.—The royal prophet points out the proper improvement of this article in these words: ‘Be not
‘thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory
‘of his house is increased. For when he dieth, he
‘shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend
‘after him*.’

* Psal. xlix. 16, 17.

5 And it shall be as when the harvest-man gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim.

The subject of which the prophet treats, is here illustrated by another similitude, drawn from reaping fruits in summer, and the corns in harvest.—When grapes, olives, or other fruits, are gathered, a few, not of the best sort, are left upon some of the branches. When corns are reaped, a few of the inferior kind of ears are left here and there, which are overlooked or neglected. By these comparisons, our prophet teaches, that the enemies of Ephraim were to cut them down, and to collect together all their riches, whilst only a few of the meanest sort should be left in the land. The nation, though spoiled of their beauty and strength, at the time to which the prophecy refers, was not to be wholly destroyed; some of the people were still to remain. The divine judgment to be executed on Ephraim, was, in some measure, to be moderated.—The valley of Rephaim, or of giants, as the word signifies, was a rich and fruitful plain, at no great distance from Jerusalem, in which the corns grew remarkably strong and luxuriant; great care therefore would be taken in gleaning the fields, that very few of the good ears might be left. By this resemblance, is represented the diligence and success of the enemies of Israel, in collecting and carrying them away from their own land, so that a very inconsiderable number should be suffered to continue in it.

6 ¶ Yet gleaning-grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive-tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof; saith the LORD God of Israel.

The calamity, which the prophet predicted in the foregoing verses, he now declares, was to be so mitigated, that some remains of Israel should be left in their own land. This subject he illustrates in the verse before us, by a similitude taken from what happens in the time of vintage and olive-gathering. When the grapes are pulled, and the olives are shaken, a few are left on the tops of the highest branches, which the hand cannot reach, and some upon the outmost branches, which escape the eye of the gatherer. In like manner, it should come to pass, when the Ephraimites were to be gathered by the Assyrians, only a few of the less respectable and less conspicuous people were to be allowed to remain in the land, whilst the more rich and opulent were to be led captive into foreign countries.—To give certainty and firmness to this prediction, the following solemn words are subjoined: *Saith the Lord God of Israel*, who orders and adjusts every circumstance relative to his people; and who hath declared, that he will not make a full end of them, but will correct them in measure, though he will not leave them altogether unpunished.

7 At that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the holy One of Israel.

The fulfilment of the above predictions should be accompanied with the conversion of some of the Ephraimites to the service of the living and true God.—At the period wherein the predicted judgments were to be executed, when some of the Israelites were to be left as gleaning grapes, this prophecy should be fulfilled. That people, by apostatizing from the God of their fathers to the worship of dead idols, brought upon themselves the direful calamities mentioned in the preceding verses. Those of them who were to survive, and who were not thereby hardened
and

and blinded, should be excited to consider the absurdity and vanity of their foolish superstition and idolatry, from which they would turn with indignation, that they might pay their dutiful homage to him who made them. This wise step it behoved them to take; and our prophet foretels, that some of them actually would take it, after having learned by experience the folly and wickedness of their past conduct. Renouncing the abominable superstition of former times, some of the residue who were left, should return, in the exercise of true repentance, to the worship and service of the true God, the God of their fathers, who is emphatically stiled,

His Maker. God is the Creator of every man: his hands hath made and fashioned us, and his inspiration hath endowed us with understanding. In this sense, God is the Maker of every penitent Ephraimite, in common with all mankind. He is the Maker of every one, in as much as he hath appointed him the particular station and condition in which he is placed, whether high or low, rich or poor, prosperous or adverse, whether in the church, or without its boundaries. ‘The rich and poor meet together: the Lord ‘is the Maker of them both*.’ Somewhat beside this, seems to be intended in the character here given of God. He was the Maker of the Israelites in a more peculiar manner, as he formed them into a people for himself, and conferred upon them many important privileges, whereby they were highly advanced above all other nations. In this view, Moses, their renowned legislator, addressed them in the sublime song which he spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel: ‘Is not he thy Father who hath ‘bought thee? Hath he not made thee, and established thee†.’ Such seems to be the import of the character here ascribed to God.—Considering him in this relation, our prophet foretels,

* Prov. xxii. 2.

† Deut. xxxii. 6.

A man shall look to his Maker. The conversion of men from dead idols to the living God, is significantly expressed, by looking to him with suitable affections, as revealed in his word. Therefore, because all worldly connections and dependences are vain, saith the prophet Micah, ‘I will look unto the Lord *,’ and turn away from lying vanities. Faith consists in looking unto the Lord, for the mercy and grace suited to relieve our necessities †. True repentance is spoken of in the same terms by the prophet Zechariah, in these remarkable words: ‘They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him ‡.’ Trust and dependence upon God, with all that sacred homage which is due to him, is comprehended in this expression, as in Psal. xxxiv. 5. where the Psalmist affirms, ‘That they looked unto him, and were lightened.’ Indeed, all the exercises of true godliness may be included in contemplating God, the perfections of his nature, the operations of his providence, and the dispensations of his grace, when accompanied with suitable dispositions, and a corresponding good conduct. In looking to him, we ought highly to esteem him as our Maker, who hath formed us with those noble powers of which we are possessed, and conferred upon us the inestimable benefits that we enjoy. Viewing him in this relation, we ought to be filled with shame and remorse for our ingratitude and disobedience to him, who hath crowned us with loving-kindness and tender mercy; we ought to confide in his goodness, to obey his precepts, and to submit to his appointments. Looking to God then with humility, faith, and love, is the source from whence all true religion takes its rise, and the exercise in which it chiefly consists. The man then who looketh aright to his Maker, convinced of his own indigence and unworthiness, hath recourse to the mercy of God through Jesus Christ; he ear-

* Micah vii. 7.

† Isaiah xlv. 22.

‡ Zech. xii. 10.

nestly implores from him the remission of sins, his gracious aid, and the gift of eternal life. With supreme affection, he views him as the rock of his salvation; and, through the whole of life, he cleaves to him with purpose of heart, sincerely solicitous to walk according to the rule of his word. This duty is farther explained in the following words:

And his eyes shall have respect to the holy One of Israel. In lecturing upon this prophecy, I have had repeated opportunities to speak of the character here given to the Son of God, and therefore I shall not stay at present either to abridge or enlarge what hath been said. I only observe, that this designation is often given him, to express the purity and excellence of his nature, by whom Jehovah formed the Jewish church, and by whom he conducted, instructed, and protected it, and in whom he requires to be honoured and worshipped by his people.—To this illustrious person, a man shall have respect. Unless proper regard is shewn to him, we can neither look to God aright, nor justly expect to be accepted of him, or to please him. In every exercise of grace, in every duty of obedience, in all the acts of devotion, in all the returns of gratitude, profound respect must be testified to the holy One of Israel.' On him a man's hopes must be wholly founded, through him all his homage must be presented to his Maker, and by him all his services must be rendered acceptable; for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever*.—Look to your Maker, my friends, for all the blessings that you need; for pardon of sin, for assistance, protection, comfort, and eternal glory. Have respect to the holy One of Israel in all your intercourse with God, would you have abundance of righteousness and strength, and the seasonable supply of all your necessities. To him you are required to have respect; and to him the

* Rom. xi. 36.

people of God, in all ages, have looked, and have not been ashamed.

8 And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall respect *that* which his fingers have made, either the groves, or the images).

The person described, having turned to the living God, shall abandon the idolatrous practices to which he was formerly addicted. He shall pay no regard to the altars, which he had erected to the honour of the idols whom he formerly served, and on which sacrifices were offered to them. That which his fingers have made, is explained in the next words, to have been, either the groves which he planted, to form pleasant places of retirement, where the worship of idols was performed—or the images that were made to represent the deities to whom homage was paid.—By this prediction, which received its primary accomplishment among the residue of the Ephraimites, after their country was desolated by the Assyrians, we are instructed in the high importance of discovering a proper respect for our Maker and Saviour, which takes off culpable attention from every other object. If once we look to God as we ought, and have a just respect to the holy One of Israel, our esteem will be withdrawn from our own performances, and fixed upon him who alone can save us; we shall turn away our eyes from lying vanities, and renounce with detestation our former evil practices.

9 ¶ In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough, and an uppermost branch, which they left, because of the children of Israel: and there shall be desolation.

This and the following verse, contain the illustration and confirmation of the foregoing predictions.—

The

The words now before us, describe the awful judgment which God was to inflict upon Ephraim, at the period to which the prophecy refers. Though their land had been already pillaged by the enemy, still there remained a few grapes, which had not been gleaned. After several years however, their cities, which were significantly represented by fruits which had escaped the notice of the gatherer, should be as a forsaken bough, and uppermost branch. Their formerly strong and well-fortified cities were to be desolated, and to become a mere solitude, so as to resemble the bough of a tree, or the uppermost branch, after it hath been stripped of its leaves and fruit.—*Because of the children of Israel.* These predicted calamities were to be inflicted on account of the multiplied and aggravated transgressions of the degenerate posterity of the patriarch Jacob.—*And there shall be desolation,* greater and more extensive than in any former period. Thus it came to pass, in the sixth year of the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when Shalmaneser entirely overthrew and desolated the land of Israel.

10 Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength: therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips:

The reason is here specified, which fully justifies the execution of the judgments above mentioned.—Salvation of every kind belongeth unto the Lord: it proceedeth not from man, nor from princes; not from angels or saints, or the idols of the Heathen; but from Jehovah alone, to whom all the glory and praise ought to be ascribed. The Israelites, who ought ever to have been mindful of this important truth, had forgotten the mighty One, from whom all their salvation took its rise. God had mercifully delivered them out of the land of Egypt, and from the house
of

of bondage: he wrought salvation for them at the Red Sea; and often afterward did he rescue them from impending dangers which threatened their ruin. Though he was still ready to be their Saviour in the time of trouble, they basely revolted from his service; they shook off the remembrance of his mercies; they made light of his offered assistance, and discovered that veneration for false gods which was due to the true God alone.—*And hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength*, or thy strong rock, which hath supplied thy manifold necessities, which hath been thy defence from evil, and thy support in weakness. Such ungrateful conduct was highly criminal, attended with many heinous aggravations, and justly exposed to the righteous judgment of God, who, in this manner, had been lightly esteemed.—Beware, my brethren, of forgetting the God of your salvation, the rock of your strength. To you God may justly say, as to his people of old, ‘Have I been a wilderness to you, or a land of darkness?’ Hath not all his paths towards you dropt down fatness? and hath he not been a light and defence to you whithersoever you have gone. Every creature, every providence, every ordinance, is intended to bring God to your remembrance, who is ever mindful of you. Be not then so insensible as to forget the God of your salvation, lest you thereby incur the judgment denounced in the next words:

Therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips. As the just punishment of their sins, the Ephraimites were to be obliged to cultivate and improve their country at much trouble and expence, after it had been desolated by their enemies. Thou shalt plant it with fruit-trees, with shrubs, flowers, and roots; thou shalt set it with foreign slips, brought from other countries, labouring hard, that, in some measure, you may repair the ravages made on your land by those who invaded it.

11 In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: *but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief, and of desperate sorrow.*

The subject introduced in the preceding verse, is here continued and illustrated.—The expressions used for this purpose plainly intimate, that the utmost assiduity and diligence should be employed to promote the growth of the plants and slips, after they were set in the ground. They were not to be neglected, like the plants of the sluggard; nor should any means be left untried that might tend to their improvement. In the day, and particularly in the morning, the Israelites would endeavour, with the utmost vigilance and constancy, to cultivate their plants, and the seeds which they had sown, in the hopes of enjoying similar success and fruitfulness with their fathers, who reaped in great abundance.—*But the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief, and of desperate sorrow.* When the fruits of the earth were ripe, and ready to be gathered, they were to be collected into heaps, not by their proprietors, but by the enemies who invaded and desolated their land, that they might either serve them for present use, or be afterward carried out of the country.—Contemplate, in this prediction, the evil and danger of sin, and its exact correspondence with the instructions delivered to the progenitors of this people, by Moses, the servant of the Lord: ‘Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God.—And ‘it shall be, that if thou do at all forget the Lord ‘thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve ‘them, and worship them, I testify against you this ‘day, that ye shall surely perish*.—The above predictions were accomplished, when Tiglath-pilezer, king of Assyria, whom Ahaz, king of Judea, called to his assistance against the confederate princes of Sy-

* Deut. viii. 18, 19.

ria and Ephraim, slew the king of Syria, destroyed Damascus, and carried away the inhabitants into Assyria and Media—When he greatly distressed Pekah, king of Israel, spoiled his land, and obtained possession of the most flourishing provinces of Gilead and Galilee; so that the glory of Jacob was made thin, and the harvest of Ephraim was gathered. The prophecy was afterward completely fulfilled by Shalmaneser, his son, who took Samaria, the capital of Ephraim, with other fortified cities, whose inhabitants he carried away captive, in consequence whereof the land of Israel became almost a desert *. A few people however were left, who had respect to the holy One of Israel, to whom Hezekiah sent letters, wherein it was thus written: ‘ Ye children of Israel, turn again
 ‘ unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
 ‘ and he will return to the remnant of you, that are
 ‘ escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria.
 ‘ And be ye not like your fathers, and like your
 ‘ brethren, which trespassed against the Lord God of
 ‘ their fathers, who therefore gave them up to deso-
 ‘ lation, as ye see.’ 2 Chron. xxx. 6, 7.

12 ¶ Wo to the multitude of many people, *which* make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, *that* make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters.

A new subject is here introduced, and continued in the two remaining verses of this chapter.—The prophet now turns his attention to the future fortunes of the Assyrian army, which he foresaw, by the spirit of prophecy, would assault the kingdom of Judah. That great army, which was to march under the command of Sennacherib against Judea and Jerusalem, was to be composed of a multitude of many nations; *viz.* the Assyrians, the Syrians, the Babylonians, &c.

* See 2 Kings xv. 29. and xvii. 3.

Certain wo and destruction awaited them. The Hebrew word translated *wo*, is sometimes used to excite attention, as in chap. lv. 1. ‘Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.’ In this sense our prophet uses the expression, and calls to the people, informing them of the certain consequence of their rash and wicked enterprise. That no mistake might arise concerning the people intended, they are described by the hideous noise which they would make in their march toward Jerusalem, and when lying before that city. The rattling of their armour, the sound of their martial instruments, the prancing of horses, the reeling of chariots, and the clamour of the troops, were to form a loud and awful noise, like that made by the sea when agitated by a storm.—This very numerous army, by their impetuosity and strength, were to make a rushing sound, like the rushing of mighty waters, which run with such violence and rapidity, as threatens to carry all before them that lies in their way, and to spread desolation wherever they come.

13 The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but *God* shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.

The sudden confusion and dispersion of the great and noisy multitude, by the rebuke of the Almighty, is illustrated by a beautiful similitude.—When the Most High brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, the waters of the sea were divided at his rebuke. In like manner, at his command, the vast multitude whereof the Assyrian army was composed, were to flee far off into a distant country, as if pursued by an enemy.—*And shall be chased as the chaff,*

chaff, &c. The royal prophet, who compares the righteous to a tree planted by a river of water, immediately adds, 'That the ungodly are not so: but they are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.' Chaff is easily dispersed and blown away by the wind, even in the valley, and in the barn-floor; but especially when exposed on high ground to the violence of a storm.—*And like a rolling thing* (or thistle-down, as the word signifies) *before the whirlwind*. So powerful and violent sometimes is a whirlwind, that it removes very heavy bodies, and carries them to a considerable distance. With far greater ease doth it snatch away things which are light, and have little or no weight, such as the thistle-down. When there is hardly a breath of wind, this rolling thing will be moving from place to place. With what ease and rapidity then must it be chased away by the whirlwind? By this beautiful image, our prophet represents the violent agitation, the sudden dispersion, and irresistible overthrow of the Assyrian army, by the rebuke of Omnipotence.

14 And behold, at evening-tide trouble, *and* before the morning he *is* not: this *is* the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.

The trouble at evening-tide, which is here spoken of, may either refer to the distress and confusion which prevailed in the Assyrian camp, in that memorable night wherein one hundred and eighty-five thousand of their army were slain, and the remainder, filled with consternation and dismay, precipitately fled to their own country—or to the perplexity and terror with which the inhabitants of Jerusalem were distressed, whilst the Assyrians besieged that city. Attentively consider the great affliction which both these classes of people must have felt at the time now mentioned, and you will not be surprised that you are called

called to contemplate this mournful scene. I shall not attempt to represent it: but if you are not lost to feelings of humanity and sympathy for those in distress, you must be deeply affected with the view which it exhibits.—*Before the morning he is not.* Great part of the vast Assyrian army were slain; and those which remained, with Sennacherib at their head, were not to be seen, having fled with the utmost expedition to their own land.—To this prophecy the following remark is subjoined, which justly deserves attention:

This is the portion of them that spoil us, &c.; not only of the Assyrians, but of all the inveterate enemies of God's people in every age, who spoil and rob them of the important advantages which they possess. The expression may allude to what happens at entertainments, where the provision is divided, and every one hath his share or portion. Sudden, unexpected destruction is the certain portion and lot of the wicked adversaries of God's people. Death is the wages of sin due to the servants of unrighteousness; this is the inheritance which belongs to the children of wrath and disobedience. They may often enjoy the best things of this present life: the riches, the honours, and pleasures of this world may fall into their lot. Of these, God sometimes gives them a large share. To Jehu, the son of Nimshi, he gave the throne and crown of Israel, for the services he performed in destroying the house of Ahab. To Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, he gave the land of Egypt; because he wrought for me, saith the Lord God. By conferring such liberal donations on the wicked and unworthy, God is pleased to give rich displays of his exuberant goodness and forbearance; he gives them the best opportunities of discovering their real character; he tries the faith and patience of his saints, and renders their foes inexcusable for their abuse of his benefits, and their monstrous ingratitude. Though, on these, and similar accounts, some

some ungodly men are, in great measure, exempted from the present calamities which fall to the lot of those who spoil the servants of God, yet death and misery are the heritage which, in due time, shall be assigned them as their portion. To these they are every moment obnoxious: the thick cloud now hangs over their heads; and who can say how soon it may burst? the decree is past, which may be executed ere ever they are aware. Destruction and misery are in their ways: their prosperity becomes a snare to them, their glory quickly decays, their increase goes into captivity, and they themselves are often cut off in the midst of their days. I conclude at present with the salutary advice of the king of Israel: ‘Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart*.’

* Psal. xxxvii. 1. *et seq.*

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

IN several respects, this seems to be one of the most obscure prophecies in the whole book of Isaiah. The subject of which it treats, the people to whom it was addressed, the persons who dispatched the messengers, and the nations to whom they were sent, the design of the predictions it contains, and the history to which it refers, are all doubtful and uncertain. At the time this prophecy was delivered, our prophet very probably contemplated the mountains nigh to Jerusalem, occupied by the Assyrian forces, who there erected their standards, and were preparing to carry into execution the hostile designs of their ambitious monarch. At this critical juncture, almighty God was pleased to interpose in favour of that city, and to execute righteous judgment upon the proud, insulting enemy of his people. In this prospect, he requires the Egyptians, who stood in awe of the power of Assyria, as well as the Jews, to warn other nations, by means of ambassadors dispatched on purpose, diligently to observe for their instruction, the awful divine judgment which they might expect to be inflicted on Assyria.—The prophetic discourse consists of three parts: First, The determined punishment of Assyria, which is ordered to be published to the Egyptians, and by them to other nations, ver. 1, 2, 3.: Secondly, The description of the terrible approaching judgments to be executed on the enemies of God's people, ver. 4, 5, 6.: And lastly, The certain consequences with which that calamity was to be accompanied, ver. 7. According to this hypothesis, I proceed to explain the prophecy, which seems to have been primarily designed to give intimation to the Egyptians, of the counsel of God respecting the destruction of their great and powerful enemies, and to
excite

excite them carefully to attend to the promised, visible interposition of the Most High in favour of them and the Jewish nation.

C H A P. XVIII.

WO to the land shadowing with wings,
which *is* beyond the rivers of Ethiopia.

The prophet elegantly describes the country against which he denounces wo and destruction, by mentioning three peculiar circumstances that demand attention.—It was a land shadowing with wings. Some commentators have supposed, that the predictions in this chapter are connected with those recorded in the three last verses of the preceding chapter, and relate to Assyria, the stretching out of whose wings is spoken of in chap. viii. 8. of this book. This opinion, however, does not appear to be so well founded as that which supposes Egypt to be the country here intended. The land of Egypt is a large plain, bounded on the east and the west by ridges of high mountains, which almost meet together toward the south, and extend farther and farther distant toward the Mediterranean Sea. These two chains of mountains would cover the low country which lay near them with very large shadows, especially in the mornings and evenings. On this account, it might be delineated, a land shadowing with wings. The Bishop of London translates the Hebrew words, “Ho, to the land of the winged cymbal;” which, he says, is the most probable of the many interpretations that have been given. The Egyptians had a musical instrument called a sistrum, which was of a circular form, having projections on each side that had somewhat the appearance of wings; and, as the Hebrews had no name for it in their lan-

guage, they called it the cymbal with wings. From this well-known and much-used instrument in the land of Egypt, he thinks that country received this description.

Which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia. As the word here translated *beyond*, signifies both on this side and on the other side, the meaning of this expression is somewhat ambiguous, and difficult to be ascertained. I pretend not therefore to determine what country is intended in these words, if Egypt is not meant. I cannot say what were the rivers which our prophet had in view, whether they were the Astaboras and Astapus, or the eastern branches of the Lower Nile, which bounded Egypt toward Arabia, or the parts of the Upper Nile toward Ethiopia; and therefore I leave the matter undecided, and proceed to the third article, in the description of the people of whom Isaiah here speaks, contained in the first part of the next verse.

2 That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of bulrushes upon the waters, *saying*, Go ye swift messengers to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden down, whose land the rivers have spoiled.

It is well known, that timber proper for building ships was very scarce in Egypt: to supply this deficiency, the Egyptians used bulrushes, or a reed called papyrus, of which they made vessels fit for sailing. Ships and boats built of this sort of materials, being extremely light, and drawing very little water, were admirably suited to traverse the Nile, along the banks of which there were doubtless many morasses and shoals. They were also very convenient and easy to be managed at the water-falls, where they might be carried with no great difficulty to smooth water.

From

From such circumstances as these, we may conclude, that they would sail exceeding fast, and afford a very speedy conveyance of all kinds of intelligence from one part of the country to another, and from Egypt to neighbouring nations. In them therefore ambassadors, or messengers, were often sent to different places with various kinds of information, after having received their orders in terms such as these: *Go ye swift messengers; ye travellers, ye merchants, ye agents of common fame, who usually convey the news of one place to another, and ye who on this occasion may be especially appointed to this office. Ye are commanded to publish the declaration made by the prophet Isaiah throughout all Egypt, yea, to the whole world.* In the next words, there is a just and variegated description of Egypt, whose inhabitants were dispersed into every quarter of that rich country, residing in the vast numbers of towns and villages with which it every where abounded. The nation is likewise described as peeled, or smoothed; probably referring to the practice of shaving off the hair from their skin, or to the smoothness and plainness of the country, occasioned by the overflowings of the Nile.—*To a people terrible from their beginning hitherto*, on account of their very grim and black appearance, and the prodigious armies which they sent forth to battle against their enemies. This character they retained from the early period wherein they had been formed into a nation, through every stage of their existence as a people.—*A nation meted out.* This expression may refer to the frequent necessity of having recourse to mensuration of the lands in Egypt, in order to determine the boundaries of the many proprietors and possessors of grounds, after the inundations of the Nile.—*And trodden down.* This may allude to a particular kind of husbandry used among the Egyptians, after the Nile had retired within its banks, and the ground had become somewhat dry: they sowed their land, and then drove in their cattle to tread the seed into the

the ground. This very easy process, without farther labour, was all that the Egyptians thought necessary for them to do, to give them the expectation of a plentiful crop in harvest.—*Whose land the rivers have spoiled*; having had no sufficient defence to protect it from the encroachments of the water, by which it was often covered. It has been said, that the Hebrew word rendered *spoiled*, signifies also *nourished*; and, according to this sense, the expression may denote the happy effects experienced in Egypt from the inundations of the Nile, which gave richness and fertility to the soil. Such is the description of the land and nation whom our prophet requireth, with the utmost expedition, to spread the news of the divine judgment inflicted upon Assyria through their own kingdom, and those with whom they had any commerce.

3 All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, see ye, when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountains; and when he bloweth a trumpet, hear ye.

Intimation is here given to the nations of the earth to expect the downfall of the Assyrian empire, and a universal invitation is directed to all people to contemplate this astonishing event. The season in which this wonderful spectacle was to be exhibited, is thus marked, When he, the king of Assyria, lifteth up an ensign upon the mountains of Judea, and layeth siege to the city Jerusalem, be ye prepared to view the execution of the threatened judgment upon the Assyrian army. When he bloweth the trumpet, with the hostile design of marching his troops against the metropolis of Judea, be ye ready to receive the account of his total overthrow, of which you shall very soon after be informed, for the news of this extraordinary awful dispensation shall be circulated with the utmost dispatch.—Let us not imagine, that we
have

have no connection with the great event to which the attention of all the inhabitants of the world is here demanded. As it is frequently placed fully in our view in this prophecy, let us always consider it in a practical light, as designed to teach us some important, useful lessons, which we ought to be solicitous to derive from it. The words of Jesus Christ to his disciples, recorded Luke xxi. 19, 20. 22. exactly correspond with the call directed to us in this verse: ‘ In
 ‘ patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall
 ‘ see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know
 ‘ that the desolation thereof is nigh.—For these be the
 ‘ days of vengeance, that all things which are written
 ‘ may be fulfilled.’

4 For so the LORD said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling-place like a clear heat upon herbs, *and* like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.

This and the two following verses, particularly relate to the very terrible punishment which God was about to inflict upon the enemies of his people, as a memorable instance of his justice and severity. The prophet solemnly declares, that Jehovah had revealed to him what he had spoken, and what he was about farther to deliver respecting this interesting subject.—*I will take my rest*, saith the Lord; plainly intimating, that he hath the most perfect enjoyment of himself, and always possesses the most undisturbed tranquillity amidst all the commotions and convulsions which happen in the world:—that, in this state of uninterrupted serenity, he would not interpose between his people and their haughty, powerful enemies, whom he was to allow to proceed in their hostile designs to their own destruction.—*And I will consider in my dwelling-place*. Heaven is the dwelling-place of the Lord, where he, in a peculiar manner, resides in sensible magnificence; where he displays visible majesty and
 glory;

glory; and where his servants serve him without interruption, and without end. From this habitation, he looketh down upon all the inhabitants of the earth, all whose words and actions, and even their very thoughts and purposes, he directeth and controlleth at his pleasure. From thence, saith God, I will view, with the utmost attention, all the designs and movements of the proud enemies of my church, that I may seasonably appear to frustrate their inimical intentions, and to secure the safety and comfort of the objects of my paternal care.—If the Hebrew words are translated, as in the margin of some Bibles, I will regard my set dwelling, the sense is changed, but the meaning is good. The dwelling is not then the place from whence God beholds what is done upon earth, but the object which he graciously regards and considers; namely, Zion and Jerusalem, which he desired for his habitation. Speaking of Zion in Psa. cxxxii. ‘This is my rest, saith he, for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it.’ Over this place of his residence, he declared, that his heart and his eyes should be continually.

Like a clear heat upon herbs, or after rain, as in the margin. All the dark clouds being dispersed, and the sky become clear and serene, the heat then revives the precious fruits of the earth, causes them to spring quickly, and to grow up to maturity. In like manner, the gracious regard and distinguishing favour which God often discovered for Zion, especially after he had showered down judgments upon their enemies, and particularly after he punished Assyria, should be most refreshing and comfortable to them that feared his name among the Jews.—*And like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest*, which cools the air, and nourishes the corns, and, in many respects, proves both acceptable and useful. By this similitude, the kindness of God toward Jerusalem, and his merciful interposition in behalf of its inhabitants, are beautifully illustrated, in a way suited to the meanest capacity.

city. At the season referred to, God would afford them the most desirable refreshment, which was to be productive of their real advantage and consolation. The prophet David uses the same comparison, when foretelling the happiness of the Messiah's kingdom: 'And it shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain *.' Such was the gracious regard which God was to manifest for his peculiar people, in the time of their greatest perplexity and danger, when environed by their enemies.

5 For afore the harvest when the bud is perfect, and the four grape is ripening in the flower; he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning-hooks, and take away *and* cut down the branches.

The prophet now represents, in beautiful, figurative language, in what manner God would act toward the enemies of his people, who were destined to destruction.—The nation who was the subject of this prediction, is elegantly compared to a vine, after it hath budded and flowered, and the four grapes have begun to ripen, prognosticating the approach of a plentiful vintage. In this promising condition, the vine is violently destroyed; its larger branches and smaller shoots, laden with four grapes, are broken down, and left a prey to the birds of heaven, and the beasts of the earth, as mentioned in the next verse. The Assyrian nation, which is elsewhere compared to a cedar, is doubtless meant by the vine, whose condition is here described. Under the emblem of a vine, producing buds, flowers, and four grapes, is represented the particular state of that people, whose counsels and hostile designs against Jerusalem were advan-

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 4.

cing to maturity, and approaching to execution, when they expected to attain the end they had in view. At this critical juncture, when they thought to have soon reaped the harvest of their labours, the most high God cut off both the sprigs and the branches; and, by one terrible stroke, killed both great and small in their numerous army, and for ever deprived them of all expectations of success in the scheme which had been formed. When every thing wore a promising appearance of terminating in the accomplishment of their wishes, all their prospects were disappointed, and their designs frustrated. At once they were divested of their beauty and strength, and reduced to a miserable, forlorn condition, which is farther described in the following words :

6 They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth : and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them.

The dead bodies of the Assyrians, slain by the angel of the Lord, as above represented, were so very numerous, that they could not possibly be interred; and therefore were to remain without burial, for food to the fowls of the mountains, and the beasts of the earth. Both the young, who were signified by the sprigs, and the more robust and advanced, intended by the branches of the vine, being cut off together, were to be left in the open fields, to become provision for the fowls of heaven in the summer-time, and for the beasts of the earth in the winter-season.—Contemplating this extraordinary event, we may justly adopt the words of Job: ‘ Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity *?’ Whilst they vainly flatter themselves with the hopes of prosperity and felicity, unexpected,

* Job. xxxi. 3.

inevitable destruction suddenly seizes upon them. How often, in the most awful manner, hath the Lord laid the axe of punishment to the root of transgressors, and cut down both root and branch! Knowing the terror, as well as the mercy of the Lord, we persuade you to break off your iniquities by repentance, and carefully to avoid those criminal pursuits whereby you might bring yourselves into the wretched condition forcibly described by Eliphaz, the Temanite: ‘The wicked man travelleth with pain all his days.—A dreadful sound is in his ears; in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him.—He is waited for of the sword.—Trouble and anguish shall make him afraid; they shall prevail against him, as a king ready to the battle*.’

7 ¶ In that time shall the present be brought unto the LORD of hosts, of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the LORD of hosts, the mount Zion.

These words present to view, the happy consequences that were to follow the tremendous judgment which all the inhabitants of the earth were invited to behold. The Egyptians particularly, who were to enjoy great benefits from the above-mentioned awful event, were thereby to come to the knowledge of the one true God; they were to join themselves to his church, and to consecrate their all to his honour and service.—*In that time* (or, after that time, as the words signify) *shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts.* The present consisted of those honorary gifts which persons, especially of rank and opu-

* Job xv. 20. *et seq.*

lence, were to offer to Jehovah, as testimonies of reverence and respect; and those free-will offerings, whereby they were to do homage to the God of Israel, to demonstrate their faith, love, and subjection to him, who doth, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, whatsoever he pleaseth.—*Of a people scattered, &c.* The same character which was given of the Egyptians in verse 2d, is now repeated. What was there said on this subject, may serve now to assist you in understanding who were the people that are here intended.—The present was to be brought *to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion*; to the church of the living God, where his great name is invoked and celebrated, where his word is published, his ordinances are administered, where, in a peculiar manner, he resides, and affords his gracious presence and enriching blessing to his servants. As I shall have occasion to treat this subject more fully in the next chapter, I conclude at present with a few short remarks, respecting the accomplishment of the foregoing predictions.

This prophecy was fulfilled by the well-known memorable fact, which I have had occasion frequently to mention in our progress through this sacred book, I mean the wonderful overthrow of the Assyrian army. The haughty Assyrian monarch having gone into Egypt with part of his troops, to distress that kingdom, on his return, having advanced to Jerusalem, he erected his standards, and blew his trumpets, on the mountains of Judea, meditating the total destruction of its metropolis. Whilst he was expecting soon to enjoy the completion of his hopes, God, who, at all times, exercises paternal care over his people, seemed to take rest, and to allow the scheme, projected by their enemies, to be carried into execution without molestation. In this emergency, he looked down from heaven with kind affection, and beholding his dwelling place in imminent danger of being demolished, he determined at once to cut off the insolent invaders

invaders of the city called by his name, and to impart reviving consolation to his anxious, dejected people. By the terrible slaughter of one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian forces, among whom were all their mighty men of valour, the leaders and captains, he saved Jerusalem, he delivered his disconsolate servants, and rescued the Egyptians from that oppressive power which threatened their ruin. This astonishing deliverance was attended with many important consequences; and, among others, the Egyptians, though extremely addicted to superstition and idolatry, filled with gratitude for this very extraordinary interposition of divine providence, publicly honoured and worshipped the God of Israel, and brought him presents to Jerusalem. Princes came out of Egypt, because of God's temple at Jerusalem, and brought presents unto him: Ethiopia stretched out her hands unto God. Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth: O sing praises unto the Lord*.

* Psa. lxxviii. 29, 31.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE fifth discourse, comprehended in the second part of this book, on which we now enter, delineates the future fortunes of the ancient and renowned kingdom of Egypt. The discourse consists of two parts. The first contains an elegant description of the great calamities that were to befall the Egyptians, whereby their power was to be considerably abridged. The second exhibits a pleasing view of their restoration from that enfeebled condition into a more prosperous state, wherein they should begin to imbibe the knowledge of the true God, as a happy preparative to their future conversion to him, and the faith and obedience of the promised Messiah.—Under the first article, after the inscription, the prophet recounts the various evils which were to happen to the Egyptians, ver. 1.—4. : of this sort were, intestine wars, bad counsel, and subjection to a tyrannical prince.—The dangerous consequences resulting from these evils are next mentioned, ver. 5.—10. : among which were, general sorrow and lamentation, and the diminution of the waters of the Nile.—The sources of all these calamities are then pointed out to have been the want of good advice, the stupidity of their princes, and the prevailing perversity of spirit among the people, ver. 11.—17.—Under the second article, is exhibited the grace of God, and his kindness to that people, in communicating to them the knowledge of true religion, which is signified by their speaking the language of Canaan, and swearing to the Lord, &c. ver. 18, 19, 20. The causes from whence this immense benefit proceeded, are next delineated; and the remarkable effects with which it should be accompanied, are specified, such as agreeable intercourse among the people of God, and their enjoyment of his enriching blessing, ver. 21. to end of the chapter.—This prophecy seems designed to teach

teach the church, that the God of Israel presides over all human affairs: that all events, whether prosperous or adverse, which befall kingdoms and empires, as well as individuals, are ordered and adjusted by his wisdom and righteousness, so as exactly to fulfil his counsel and purpose: that, amidst all the changes that happen among the nations, the wisdom and duty of the saints consists, in observing the all-directing hand of Jehovah, and in attending to his dispensations, which serve to unfold his counsels, to explain the designs of his providence, and to accomplish the predictions delivered by the prophets. As the fulfilment of prophecy bears testimony to the veracity of God, the Governor of the world and the church, so it demonstrates the divine authority of the prophet who delivered it, whose doctrine therefore demands the most cordial belief.—This discourse was also well adapted to convince the Egyptians, to whom it might be published, of those heinous crimes whereby they had exposed themselves to awful judgments: of this sort were, their detestable superstition and idolatry; their intolerable pride and confidence in their own wisdom, riches, and strength. To all which I may add, that it was admirably suited to console the minds of the godly, then expecting the kingdom of the Messiah, who were thereby taught to look forward to the future conversion of the Egyptians to the faith and obedience of the word of God.

CHAP. XIX.

THE burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.

The following prophecy bears the inscription of *The burden of Egypt*. No one kingdom in the world hath boasted more of its antiquity, of the fertility of its soil, of its natural fortifications, of the number, the riches, the wisdom, and ingenuity of its inhabitants, and of astonishing works performed by labour and art, than Egypt. As it is the subject of the predictions delivered in this chapter, the country wherein the posterity of Israel were detained in bondage, the theatre upon which God displayed his wonders of old, and frequently mentioned in scripture, I shall make a few remarks on the several articles now mentioned.—The kingdom was probably founded by Mizraim (the Hebrew name of Egypt), who was the grandson of Noah, about eighteen hundred years after the creation of the world, and from him derived its name.—Such was the surprising fertility of its soil, that the same land is said to have yielded three or four different crops in one year. It produced great plenty of the most excellent fruits; and so rich were the pastures, that they soon fed the cattle to a large size. Such were the immense crops of corn that grew in the country, that the very numerous inhabitants were not only plentifully supplied, but vast quantities were exported to the great cities of Rome and Constantinople.—Egypt, which was strongly fortified both by nature and art, kept continually in pay, and ready for actual service, four hundred thousand well-disciplined troops. More than double that number were raised on some emergencies. Shishak went up against Jerusalem with twelve hundred chariots, sixty thousand horsemen, and people without number.—It anciently comprehended a prodigious number of cities, which contained an almost incredible multitude of inhabitants. Some historians have affirmed, that there were once twenty thousand inhabited cities in Egypt*.—This country was considered by the ancients, as the

* Herodot. lib. ii. cap. 177.

most renowned school for wisdom and learning, and the source from whence the arts and sciences derived their origin. Moses, the servant of the Lord, is therefore celebrated in scripture, as having been learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.—The magnificent pyramids, temples, palaces, and the labyrinth, which adorned this kingdom, the remains of which still strike the beholders with wonder, displayed the skill, the riches, and abilities of those who planned and executed them. What a grand city must Thebes have been, which is celebrated for having had a hundred gates, from each of which it could have sent out ten thousand fighting men; and wherein there was a palace, having in it a hall supported by one hundred and twenty pillars, six fathoms round, and proportionably high! One of the pyramids built in Egypt, is said to have had a square base, each side of which measured one hundred and ten fathoms, and raised to the amazing height of seventy-seven fathoms, with stones that were thirty feet in length. According to some writers, each side was eight hundred feet broad, and as many high. The labyrinth was an astonishing pile of building, containing twelve palaces regularly disposed, and communicating with each other, in which were fifteen hundred rooms, ranged round twelve great halls, and having the like number of buildings under ground. These are a few specimens of Egyptian grandeur.—Of all the wonders in Egypt, the greatest is the river Nile, whose waters cover the whole country, by its regular inundations, and supply the want of rain, by bringing in the waters of other countries. This famous river, which takes its rise in Abyssinia, being much swelled in its progress, by the great rains which fall, at certain seasons, in the countries through which it passes, and having received large accessions from different quarters, begins to rise about the middle of June, increases until the end of September, and then gradually decreases during October and November, after which

it returns to its own channel. The inundations rise commonly to the height of about twenty-four feet upon the low grounds. The fruitful part of Egypt is one long vale, through the midst of which runs the Nile, bounded on each side to the east and west by a long chain of mountains.—Such is the land of Egypt, of which this prophecy is called *The burden*. The predictions which it contains, of severe calamities that were to befall that kingdom, would, no doubt, be very distressing to our prophet when he delivered them, and looked forward to their accomplishment; and they would be still more grievous and afflicting to that people, who were obliged to hear and to sustain them.

Behold the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, &c. The supreme Governor of the universe is here introduced, going into Egypt with the utmost speed, and the effects of his advent are described.—Though the most high God is at all times every where present, he is, in scripture-language, said to come into a place, where he gives striking proofs of his presence, by remarkable displays of his majesty, mercy, or justice. Hence he is said to have descended in a cloud, to promulgate his law to the children of Israel at mount Sinai; and, at the end of the world, the Son of God will come in the clouds, to execute judgment on all nations. The expression before us, hath a manifest allusion to the conduct of a prince, who, having received intelligence of certain enormous crimes being committed in some distant part of his dominions, immediately goes thither in person, that he may speedily put a stop to the insults that have been offered to his authority, and execute vengeance upon the guilty. For similar purposes, the King of nations is represented riding into Egypt, *upon a swift cloud*.—How magnificent the idea conveyed by these words, of the divine Majesty riding upon the heavens, making the clouds his chariots, and walking upon

upon the wings of the wind *. At his approach, the most powerful kingdoms of the world are filled with dismay and terror. The expression plainly intimates, the perfect knowledge that God hath of all human affairs; that he clearly observed the pride, the superstition, and wickedness of the Egyptians, which called for righteous vengeance from heaven. It likewise gave instructive warning, that the time of God's long-suffering patience being expired, he would quickly bring upon the Egyptians, unexpected, irresistible, awful judgments, which their sins deserved, and prove a swift witness against them.

And the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence. Of all nations, the Egyptians were the most abandoned to the grossest superstition and idolatry. They universally adored Asiris and Isis, which are supposed to have been the sun and moon. Besides these gods, and images made with hands, they worshipped several kinds of beasts, such as the ox, the dog, the cat, &c. So great was their respect for these animals, that, in the time of a severe famine, rather than feed upon any of them, they chose to eat human flesh. At the divine presence, the idols of the Egyptians should fall down, like Dagon before the ark of Jehovah. When God was to appear, executing righteous judgment upon that people, the deities which they honoured, being utterly unable to afford them the assistance that they expected, were to tremble, in dread of the threatened calamities; they were to be removed from the places they occupied, and to be deprived of the respect formerly shewn them.—*And the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it.* The hearts of the most valiant and courageous among them were to fail, and to melt like wax before the fire, terrified at the impending judgments which threatened their destruction. In this sense the phrase is often used in scripture, as in Deut. xx. 8. where the officers were

* See Psal. civ. 3.

ordered to speak thus unto the people of Israel, when they went out to battle: ‘What man is fearful and faint-hearted, let him go and return to his house, lest his brethrens heart faint (or melt) as well as his heart.’ At the approach of the predicted calamities, not only were the idols to be removed, but the Egyptians themselves, unable to make any effectual resistance, were to become extremely anxious and timid.—This prophecy, with the predictions delivered by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, respecting the destruction of the idols of Egypt, were fulfilled, when Nebuchadnezzar marched into that country. The approach of that haughty, powerful monarch would, no doubt, overwhelm the Egyptians with fear and dread; and, on his entering the country, their idols would be contemned and abolished. It was more fully accomplished afterward, when Cambyfes invaded Egypt, killed the bulls which were worshipped, spoiled the temples of the ludicrous images to which the inhabitants did homage, and then demolished them.

2 And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; city against city, *and* kingdom against kingdom.

In this verse, a civil war is foretold to arise in Egypt, whereby the kingdom was to be greatly distracted, and divided into factions. The calamities which were to befall the Egyptians, should be occasioned, not by foreign invasion only, but also by intestine commotions. One part of the inhabitants were to act in hostility against the other; even those who were most intimately connected by the ties of blood, as brothers, and by local situation, as neighbours, laying aside brotherly kindness, and the offices of good neighbourhood, one individual would prove inimical

mical to another; one city, and one kingdom, would rise up against another. This terrible calamity, of civil discord and contention, was to diffuse itself through the whole empire, and to be one mean of bringing it to desolation.—This prediction was verified in the days of Manasseh, king of Judah. Though, prior to that period, Egypt was but one kingdom, governed only by one prince, yet, after the death of Sethon, the people disagreeing about the succession, they continued near two years in a state of anarchy, during which time great disorders arose among them. After this period, twelve of the principal noblemen determined to seize upon the kingdom, to divide it into so many parts, of which each of them was to preside over one. Having governed the kingdom upon this plan for about fifteen years, the princes differed among themselves, and excluded one of their number from the government; who, collecting together an army, fought and conquered the other eleven princes, and reigned over the whole country*.

3 And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards.

These civil discords among the Egyptians, and the contentions of citizens, were to be accompanied with the want of wisdom and counsel, which were requisite to direct them in various perplexing circumstances. Though they were highly renowned for erudition and learning, so that philosophers, from different countries, went thither for their improvement in knowledge; yet, at the time to which this prophecy referred, their wisdom and ability to give counsel were to be greatly impaired. That spirit by which

* See Rollin's History of the Kings of Egypt.

they had acquired great celebrity should fail, like brooks of water during the drought of summer, so as never more to be conspicuous.—*And they shall seek to the idols, &c.* with which the land every where abounded; and to the charmers, who used incantations and enchantments.—*And to them that have familiar spirits, &c.*; to magicians, forcerers, and conjurers, with whom they frequently consulted in difficult cases, and in whose wisdom and skill they had much confidence. To persons of these descriptions, they were to have recourse for advice in their divided, perplexed circumstances, that they might be directed in what manner they ought to conduct themselves.—Were it necessary here to adduce historical proofs, they might easily be brought to shew, that the Egyptians were actually reduced to this distressed condition before that Cambyfes, with his army, entered their country. I suppose it sufficient at present to have mentioned this circumstance.

4 And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts.

The oppression of Egypt by a tyrannical prince, is foretold in this verse.—This is the greatest and most grievous calamity of any that hath yet been mentioned. The word translated *give over*, signifies also *to shut up*, as it is rendered in the margin; and emphatically expresses the abject manner in which the Egyptians were to be subjected to the power of the cruel, arbitrary prince, who is here intended. He would rigorously rule over them; and treat them with such severity and cruelty, that his tyrannical oppression was to be felt as a heavy divine judgment.—It is unnecessary to enlarge. This cruel lord, and fierce king, was probably Psammiticus, who became so very obnoxious to his subjects, through his rapacity and violence,

violence, that two hundred thousand of his soldiers are said to have deserted, and to have gone into Ethiopia—or the Persian princes, Cambyfes and Ochus, who are reported to have been imperious, cruel kings. These last-mentioned subdued the Egyptians, and reduced them to a state of servitude and vassalage. To give the utmost certainty and stability to this declaration, it is solemnly ratified by the faithful God, the Lord of hosts.

5 And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up.

The above-mentioned calamities were to be attended with a very considerable diminution of the waters of the Nile, which were highly necessary to the fertility of the soil, and the prosperity of the country. The vast confluence of waters, which, through the overflowing of the Nile, covered the land of Egypt, discharged themselves into the sea. In dry seasons, when the inundation did not rise above eighteen, instead of twenty-four feet, a famine was dreaded; and, after the waters were conveyed, by various ways, into the country, and disposed of with great care, that all the inhabitants might share in the benefit, it is supposed, that a tenth part of them did not reach the sea. In this manner the prediction before us was fulfilled; the river was wasted and dried up, on which depended both the trade and fertility of Egypt. A great drought, which was to be followed with a scarcity of provisions, is the judgment threatened in these words.

6 And they shall turn the rivers far away, and the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither.

In this and the next four verses, are represented the sad effects of the drought above predicted. Pharaoh-Necho, the son of Psammiticus, formed the vast design

design of joining the river Nile with the Red Sea, by means of a large canal; in which arduous enterprize, he is said to have lost one hundred and twenty thousand men. Though he was unable to complete this great work, it is very probable that the waters of the Nile might be thereby considerably diminished, to the no small detriment of the land of Egypt. To facilitate this design, the waters, as here predicted, might be turned far away.—*And the brooks of defence shall be emptied, &c.* The brooks that were supplied with water from the Nile, and the rivers that were useful to defend the country from foreign invasion, should be either much impaired, or wholly dried up, so that they could not serve the purposes to which they had been improved.—*The reeds and flags shall wither.* In the land of Egypt, there were many marshes, fens, and low grounds, situated by the brooks, where reeds and flags, and a kind of rushes, grew to a great height. These were exceedingly useful to the inhabitants, who made them into boats, and various sorts of vessels employed in sailing, into nets for fishing, and mats for covering their beds. Deprived of the waters and moisture whereby they were nourished, they would soon wither and decay, to the no small loss of the Egyptians.

7 The paper-reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks shall wither, be driven away, and be no more.

The subject introduced in the former verses is here continued.—The paper-reeds were the reeds of which the paper was made, used by the Egyptians. From the root of this plant grew up many triangular stalks, near a span in thickness, to the height of nine or ten feet. After the root and top were cut off, the pellicles or coats were stripped off, then they were extended upon a table, and being pressed and dried, they

they were glued together and smoothed. This process being finished, they were used for the same purposes with paper among us. Of this article, an amazing quantity was manufactured in Egypt. These paper-reeds grew in greatest abundance, and to highest perfection, by the brooks; and especially at the mouth of the brooks, where the water was most apt to stagnate. It is evident then, that when this species of plants, together with every thing sown near them, withered, and were driven away, provisions must have been very scarce, the trade and manufactures of Egypt must have suffered very much, and the people must have been reduced to a deplorable condition. The loss would be still increased by the want of materials for building and rigging of ships, and several other articles of commerce, which are said to have been made of these reeds.

8 The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish.

The lamentable effects of the above-mentioned calamities, on the different classes of people, are next represented.—The waters being greatly diminished or dried up, those who had been employed in fishing with nets, or angling with the rod, for profit or amusement, would be greatly distressed, by being deprived of the opportunity of following that occupation. Those who were engaged in the several employments here specified, must have formed a very numerous class of people in Egypt, where there was so much water, and where the inhabitants, through their foolish superstition, lived much upon fish. Those who were fishers by trade, and those who occasionally fished for recreation, were to mourn and lament the loss which they sustained, by the waters being dried up: the former would bewail the poor, straitened condition

condition to which they were reduced, and the latter would much regret the want of their former amusement.—*They that spread nets upon the waters shall languish*, and become enfeebled, through want of employment and subsistence.

9 Moreover, they that work in fine flax, and they that weave net-works shall be confounded.

The manufacturers, as well as the fishermen, were to suffer greatly by the diminution of the waters in Egypt.—Prodigious quantities of flax grew in the land of Egypt, and formed a considerable branch of commerce with foreign countries. Hence we read, that ‘this kingdom traded with Tyrus in fine linen and brodered work*.’ And in the days of king Solomon, ‘the Israelites had linen yarn brought them from Egypt, which the king’s merchants received at a price †.’ The spinning of flax into yarn, and the working that yarn into cloth, employed an immense number of hands, who carried this business to great perfection. Of their flax, the Egyptians not only made linen of various kinds, but they also wove net-works, which served different purposes. The Hebrew word signifies *white works*; and may denote thin shewy cloth, like that called gauze, among us intended chiefly for ornament. The people employed in this trade, our prophet declares, shall be confounded, at the time to which this prophecy referred. The flax being withered and gone, they were to have very little or none to spin into yarn, and consequently little or no yarn to weave into linen or net-work. The tradesmen therefore, deprived of work, and the means of subsistence, would be filled with astonishment and confusion, at the lamentable change of circumstances which they experienced.

* Ezek. xxvii. 7.

† 2 Chron. i. 16.

10 And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof, all that make sluices *and* ponds for fish.

These words, as they stand connected; require little or no comment to render them more intelligible. Those who wove net-works, and wrought in flax, being deprived of the supplies of that article which they formerly received, were to be disappointed in their designs, and frustrated in their expectations. Dispirited and confounded by this remarkable change of circumstances, they, their connections and dependents, along with those who used to be employed in making sluices for letting in and off the water, and in forming fish-ponds in fields or gardens, were to unite in bewailing their forlorn condition, and that all their purposes and projects were entirely baffled and broken.—In this manner were the various enterprises of these different classes of citizens defeated, and their devices made of none effect, as the just punishment of their having put that confidence in the means of acquiring wealth, and in idols, which they ought to have placed in God alone, who gave them all things richly to enjoy. Such was the severity of God's judgments upon the Egyptians, that it reached to all their enjoyments, and to every description of persons among them. They had strong cities; and among them civil discord was to prevail. For a long period they had continued unconquered; a fierce king was to subdue and rule them. They had great rivers; but they were to be considerably diminished and dried up. They had an extensive commerce; but the chief articles of which it consisted, were to fail from among them.—Beware then, my friends, of trusting to external advantages, lest ye provoke God to deprive you of them. If they are multiplied, set not your hearts upon them, as if they could screen you from danger, or afford you permanent happiness. We are too apt to set our hearts upon present enjoyments; and, therefore, we are required to keep

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them with all diligence. The more moderately that we value our temporal comforts, the longer we may hope to possess them; the more fondly that we dote upon them, the shorter we may expect will be their duration.

II ¶ Surely the princes of Zoan *are* fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I *am* the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?

The prophet now proceeds to point out the more immediate causes of the calamities which befel the Egyptians; and the first which he assigns, is the want of good counsel.—The proposition contained in this verse, is introduced by the word *surely*, which seems intended to confirm the truth which is asserted—*The princes of Zoan are fools.* The princes of whom Isaiah speaks, were those illustrious personages of the first rank, who were admitted into the counsels of the king of Egypt, and called to give their advice in difficult cases. Zoan was a very ancient city in Egypt, where the Lord, by the hand of Moses, performed those stupendous miracles before Pharaoh and his people, whereby they were compelled to allow the Israelites to depart the kingdom. In that early period, it was a royal city, wherein the king and his court resided. The princes, or counsellors of this city, at the time here referred to, are pronounced fools, weak imprudent men, who advise and act inconsiderately, and foolishly suggest to their sovereign those pernicious counsels, the execution of which would prove extremely injurious to him and the interests of his kingdom.—*The counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish.* The sentiment contained in the preceding clause, is again expressed in stronger terms. Pharaoh was the name anciently given to the reigning princes of Egypt. The advice offered to the monarch by his wise counsellors, is affirmed to be brutish,

brutish, destitute of reason and prudence. The wisest men about the throne were, it seems, incapable of giving wholesome advice to their prince: they were infatuated and corrupted to such a degree, that they could not direct what measures were proper to be adopted in the management of public affairs.—If such was the character of these pretended sages, the following words, in which their vain confidence is exploded, are with great propriety addressed to them: *How say ye, &c.* Having given bad counsel to your prince, how can ye have the effrontery to boast of your royal descent and dignity? After ye have given repeated proofs of your folly and sottishness in conducting the most important affairs, and acted most unworthy of those great ancestors from whom ye boast of being descended, how can ye presume to apologize to Pharaoh, by claiming kindred with ancient kings?

12 Where *are* they? where *are* thy wise men? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the LORD of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt.

The prophet next sarcastically addresses the king of Egypt, whom he upbraids for consulting with those who vainly pretended, by magical skill, to foretel future events.—*Where are they? where are thy wise men*; thy soothsayers, astrologers, and those who have the highest pretensions to wisdom and knowledge, whose advice thou hast often asked, and on whose counsels thou hast placed much confidence? Let them now declare, if they can, the purpose which the Almighty is about to execute upon Egypt, and the calamities which, ere long, he will inflict upon its inhabitants, as the just punishment of their crimes, the approach of which he hath clearly announced by his servants the prophets.

13 The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived, they have also seduced Egypt, *even* they that are the stay of the tribes thereof.

The princes of Egypt are here charged with having given occasion to the destruction of their country, by their own folly, and by allowing themselves to be imposed upon by those who pretended to assist them by their advice.—To the princes of Zoan, mentioned in the 11th verse, are subjoined the princes of Noph; which some commentators say, was the city Memphis, much celebrated in ancient times, and which now bears the name of Grand Cairo. This city, finely situated on the western banks of the Nile, was the metropolis of Upper Egypt, and sometimes the residence of Pharaoh and his court. The princes of Zoan and Noph were those renowned counsellors, whose business was to assist the king with their advice in difficult emergencies; and who discovered their weakness and folly in the counsels which they gave to their sovereign, as to the public measures proper to be adopted at the time referred to.—*They have also seduced Egypt, &c.* As the children of Israel were divided into twelve tribes, so the land of Egypt was distributed into twelve nomes, or provinces. The princes who resided in the chief cities of these districts, who ought to have been the stay and support of the people, had led them into dangerous errors, and fatal mistakes, which threatened to ruin those provinces over which they presided. Of all men, kings, and those who are in places of eminence, are in the greatest danger of being deceived and seduced by bad counsel; and, therefore, in our prayers for them, we ought to recollect the delicate circumstances in which they stand, and the dreadful consequences that may arise from their being deceived, to animate us in our intercessions in their behalf.

14 The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit.

The true cause of the stupidity and folly of the princes of Egypt, is clearly pointed out in this verse.—Some among the ancients were of opinion, that the particular state of the mind and affections was to be attributed to the influence of spirits, who, they supposed, were active for this purpose. The spirit which operated in the Egyptian princes and counsellors, was exceedingly perverse and obstinate, inflexible and stubborn. This spirit the Lord is said to have mingled in the midst thereof. The expression seems to allude to the practice of those who compound liquors, and when they are in fermentation, mix with them some noxious, strong ingredient, that may produce certain effects upon those who drink of the liquid thus prepared. Divine judgments are often spoken of in scripture in reference to this practice, as in Psal. lxxv. 8. ‘ For in the hand of the Lord there
‘ is a cup, and the wine is red: it is full of mixture,
‘ and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs
‘ thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring them
‘ out, and drink them.’ Calamity, fear and sorrow, infatuation and despair, are the bitter ingredients which compose this horrible mixture.—In consequence of this perverse spirit having been mingled with the Egyptians, they would not make a proper use of their reason and understanding, and their foolish plans of operation were to be disconcerted. This perverse spirit it is here affirmed, that the Lord hath mingled in the midst thereof. This, and the like expressions, must always be understood in perfect consistency with the righteousness and holiness of God, who cannot be tempted to evil, neither tempteth any man. With this limitation we say,
the

the infatuation of their counsels proceeded from the Lord, who in this manner punished those who vainly presumed to boast of their profound skill and ability, to give direction in every circumstance.—*They have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof.* In civil affairs, they formed such projects, and advised to such enterprizes, as were highly injurious to the interests of the nation. In religious matters, they caused the people to err, by encouraging them in foolish superstitions, and abominable idolatries.—The subject is illustrated by the following comparison: *As a drunken man staggereth in his vomit.* The similitude points out the detestable and dangerous conduct of those who were led astray in the manner above described.

15 Neither shall there be *any* work for Egypt, which the head or tail, branch or rush may do.

The greatness and the extent of the divine judgments, which were to be executed upon the Egyptians, is here represented in strong terms.—Deprived of trade, manufactures, and husbandry, divested of wisdom and counsel, there should be little or no business carried on in Egypt. By the head may be meant, those who were in high and elevated stations; and by the tail, those who were in mean and low conditions. By the branch may be signified, those who were possessed of power and influence; and by the rush, those who were considered as of the least consequence among them. All classes and ranks of men in the kingdom, were to become feeble and dispirited, through want of employment, and the prevalence of supine idleness.

16 In that day shall Egypt be like unto women: and it shall be afraid and fear, because
of

of the shaking of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he shaketh over it.

The weakness and timidity of Egypt, described in this and the next verse, was another source of their distresses.—At the period to which this prophecy referred, the Egyptians were to be like to women. Having laid aside their manly fortitude and firmness, and being divested of their martial valour, for which, in former times, they had been renowned, they were to become weak, indolent, and timid, by which means the destruction of their kingdom should be accelerated. Similar expressions frequently occur in the prophetic writings: the men of Babylon are said, by the prophet Jeremiah, to have been as women*; and the people of Nineveh are affirmed, by the prophet Nahum, to have been women†, for the same reasons that this character is ascribed to the Egyptians.—*And it shall be afraid and fear, &c.* All ranks of people among the Egyptians, were to become fearful and apprehensive as to their fate; they were to be seized with consternation and dread—*Because of the shaking of the hand of the Lord of hosts.* Shaking or lifting up the hand, is a posture used by those who threaten severely to chastize the persons with whom they are highly displeased, and to express their resolution of revenging the injuries which they have received. In allusion to this practice, the shaking of the hand of the Lord of hosts may denote, the certain intimations which were given to the people of Egypt, of the speedy approach of terrible, threatened calamities, with which they were soon to be visited, by a power which they could not resist. In the immediate prospect of deserved, awful judgments, they were to be overwhelmed with fear and dread, arising from manifold considerations.

* Jer. li. 30.

† Nahum iii. 13.

17 And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof, shall be afraid in himself; because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts, which he hath determined against it.

A circumstance is mentioned in this verse, which appears somewhat surprising and paradoxical. Whilst the Egyptians were greatly distressed with the judgments of heaven, and reduced to a low and afflicted condition, they should recal to their remembrance the predictions which had come to their knowledge, that related to the calamities wherewith they were to be visited. By the recollection of these, and comparing them with their present adverse state, many of them would be convinced of the truth of these prophecies, and by that means be gradually brought to the knowledge of the God of Israel. Besides, the people of Judah, who had almost at all times been terrified at the power of Egypt, were, in their turn, to become the object of terror to the Egyptians, so that the condition of both nations was to be reversed.—The reason of this fear and terror is subjoined: *Because of the counsel of the Lord of hosts, &c.* The purpose of Jehovah, which gave rise to the fear and terror felt by the Egyptians, was that which respected the destruction of their power and kingdom, with the preservation and safety of the Jewish nation, the knowledge of which had some how reached the land of Egypt. The great designs which God intended to accomplish in that populous country, had been published by his servants the prophets; and such terrible things in righteousness were contained in their denunciations, that the Egyptians were afraid at the very mention of them.— — Those who are acquainted with the ancient history of Egypt, may observe the exact accomplishment of the above predictions. As the records which are extant of this famous kingdom are
involved

involved in much obscurity, and intermixed with pompous fables, commentators entertain different sentiments as to some of the events whereby this prophecy was fulfilled. I shall therefore only add a few words to what I have already said upon this subject. Not many years after the destruction of Sennacherib's army before Jerusalem, the affairs of Egypt were thrown into confusion by intestine broils, which ended in an anarchy that lasted some years. This was succeeded by the tyrannical government of twelve princes, who divided the country among them; and, at last, by the reign of Psammiticus, which continued for fifty-four years. Not long after, Egypt was invaded and conquered by Nebuchadnezzar; and then by the Persians, under Cambyfes, the son of Cyrus. The yoke of the Persians was so grievous, that the conquest of that kingdom by Alexander, may be considered as a deliverance to Egypt, especially as he, and his successors, favoured and improved that country.

By the predictions contained in the seven last verses that we have been considering, we are taught, that the destruction of kingdoms proceeds not from chance or fortune, but from the purpose of Jehovah. When a people abuse the blessings which he confers upon them, when they become corrupt and wicked in the extreme, he infatuates, or baffles, the counsels of their princes and wisest statesmen. The purpose that he determined, was against Egypt; and, therefore, all the efforts of those who presided over that country, could not afford it any effectual relief. The counsel of Ahitophel was the best that could have been given, to facilitate the hostile designs of Absalom against his father's throne: but the Lord turned it into foolishness; and thus disappointed the crafty, that he might fulfil his own pleasure. By the authority of princes, the wisdom of counsellors, the equity of judges, the success of trade, the valour of troops, and plenty of provisions, he establishes kingdoms,

and makes them flourish. By removing these supports, or permitting them to decay, the glory and strength of nations soon fade, and come to nothing. As when the vision faileth, the people perish in their spiritual capacity; so when counsel, industry, and courage fail, they perish in their civil capacity, as a body politic. These considerations strongly inculcate upon us the practice of that righteousness which exalteth a nation, which teacheth the governors to rule with wisdom, to negotiate with success, and to defend with resolution; and instructeth the people to pay a strict regard to sincerity and truth, to justice and equity, to mercy, charity, and public spirit.

18 ¶ In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts: one shall be called the city of destruction.

The latter part of this prophecy, contained in this and the following verses of the chapter, represents the important blessings which God would confer upon Egypt, after the calamities above foretold had been inflicted. After having described the awful judgments which the Almighty was about to execute upon that superstitious, idolatrous nation, the prophet proceeds to announce the approach of better times, wherein the knowledge of true religion was to be communicated to that people. The Lord of hosts having clearly revealed to him the future vocation of the Gentiles to the kingdom of the only true God, and the promised Messiah, he embraces the opportunity now afforded him, of speaking concerning that glorious event, and the precious blessings which God would bestow upon the Gentile nations. He had already declared, that the Egyptians, when distressed with grievous calamities, seeing the inability of their gods to work their deliverance, should seriously lay to heart the causes which contributed to bring upon them

them the severe judgments with which they were afflicted, that had been foretold by the God of Israel. The fear and dread arising from the consideration of their deplorable condition, was to prove the happy mean of inducing many of them openly to acknowledge the true God, who was worshipped in Canaan.

In that day. About the time, or not long after the foregoing predictions were verified, the following remarkable events should take place. This expression, which very often occurs in the prophetical writings, must be frequently explained in a large and extensive sense, as including a considerable portion of time. In this manner the apostle James paraphrased the words of the prophet Amos, which he quoted in his speech before the synod at Jerusalem. The prophet had marked the season for the accomplishment of his prediction, as Isaiah here does, by the words, ‘in that day:’ of which the apostle gives the true sense, when he saith, ‘after this;’ after God had sifted the house of Israel, and the sinners of his people died by the sword, he would raise up the ruinous tabernacle of David. In the same way we understand the words in this passage, and in many others; of which when we come to treat, it will be unnecessary to repeat what hath now been said. In that day, wherein the affliction and servitude of Egypt should be followed by the restoration of the kingdom, in some measure, to its former prosperity, liberty, and glory.

Shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan. There were anciently, as I have already observed, a vast number of cities in the land of Egypt: five of which are here mentioned; this determinate number being, as I suppose, intended to signify an indefinite number. Instances of this sort occur in several places of scripture; as in Leviticus xxvi. 8. where Moses, recounting the blessings which should attend the Israelites if they walked in God’s statutes, assured them, ‘Five of you shall chase a hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand’

‘ sand to flight.’ And in the parable delivered by Jesus Christ concerning ten virgins, distributing them into two classes, he says, ‘ That five of them were wise, ‘ and five of them were foolish *.’ What proportion the five cities here specified bare to all the cities in the land of Egypt, I pretend not to determine; nor dare I affirm, which of them were the cities that our prophet had in his view. Perhaps he had in his eye five principal cities in Egypt; and meant to affirm, that Memphis, Bubaste, Sais, Alexandria, and Heliopolis, should accede to the worship and service of the true God. He indeed mentions the name of one city, which, he says, shall be called the City of Destruction, perhaps to intimate the approaching demolition of the magnificent temple that stood there, which was destroyed by the orders of Vespasian, after that of Jerusalem. In the margin, the Hebrew word is translated the City of the Sun, probably because there was in this city an elegant temple, which was dedicated to that great luminary. The prophecy of Jeremiah, respecting the destruction of Egypt, seems to favour this last interpretation of the name of the city; for speaking of Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of this kingdom, he foretold, that he would break in pieces the images of the house of the sun †.

Concerning these cities, it is said, that *they shall speak the language of Canaan*. These words literally understood, import, that they were to speak the same tongue and dialect which was used by the posterity of Abraham, who inhabited that country, which was very different from that spoken by the Egyptians. This, however, cannot be the meaning of the prediction; for would it not be absurd to maintain, that a few cities in Egypt would exchange their language for that of the Israelites, when, by such an alteration, they could not have acquired any valuable compensation? An event of much greater magnitude, a bene-

* Matth xxv. 1. *et seq.*

† Jer. xliiii. 13.

fit of far higher importance, seems to be intended by this prediction; though it must be acknowledged, that the Egyptians would, no doubt, learn to read the Hebrew tongue, that they might be qualified to understand the Hebrew scriptures. Harmony and good agreement, desirable intercourse, with unanimity of sentiment in the doctrines of religion, and particularly in matters relating to the worship of the living God, should happily be established between the inhabitants of both countries. In this sense, the apostle Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, uses a similar expression: ‘ I beseech you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing; that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment *.’ Acknowledge the same divine truths, and express them in nearly the same terms. To speak then the language of Canaan, according to this prophecy, is to discourse on sacred subjects in a manner peculiar to those who enjoy divine revelation, and are taught of God. It is to treat of spiritual matters in that dialect which is best suited to their nature and importance, and which hath been employed for this purpose by patriarchs and prophets, by Jesus Christ himself, his apostles, and disciples in all ages. This language of the people of God hath in it somewhat peculiar, whereby it may be distinguished from all other kinds of speech. It is quite free from vanity, detraction, falsehood, impurity, and folly, with which all other conversation is more or less tinctured, whilst much is said concerning the only true God, the great Messiah, the promises, ordinances, and commandments of Jehovah, with many other such delightful topics. This is undoubtedly the meaning of the words, as appears from the scope of the prophecy, and the subject of which it treats.

And swear to the Lord of hosts. The Egyptians were not only to honour the God of Israel by a holy

* 1 Cor. i. 10.

conversation, but they were also to bind themselves to his service by the strongest and most solemn ties. To swear to the Lord is a very solemn religious act, whereby men express a sacred veneration for God, and bring themselves under the most powerful obligation to perform their oath. It may here denote, the solemn manner in which they would enter into covenant with the Most High, and consecrate themselves to the belief and obedience of his blessed word. This seems to be the meaning of the expression in chap. xlv. 23. of this prophecy, where the Lord saith, 'To me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear.' The import then of this prediction will be, that the Egyptians were wholly to abandon their former superstitious and idolatrous practices, and solemnly to dedicate themselves to the worship and service of the living God. Having thus opened their mouths unto the Lord, they were to cleave to him with purpose of heart, to walk in his ordinances, and to keep his judgments, and do them. A surprising happy change indeed, surpassing all human probability! but the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

19 In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD.

The good effects which were to arise from the accomplishment of the foregoing prediction are here foretold. The Egyptians, having adopted the language of Canaan, and solemnly sworn allegiance to the true God, were to make public profession of their faith, and to erect an altar to Jehovah. The altar to be raised in the midst of the land, was not intended for ostentation, such as were those consecrated by Heathen nations to their gods, but for sacred purposes, in connection with the temple and ministers of the Lord. It was not to be erected merely to commemorate some great event, but that the servants of
God

God might thereon present the sacrifices and oblations of which we read in ver. 21. Though the Israelites were prohibited from offering sacrifices to God in any place but where the Lord their God had appointed, this prohibition might not extend to Gentile converts. However this might be, Isaiah only foretels the event, without saying any thing as to the lawfulness or illegality of the matter. The Egyptian converts then, according to this prophecy, were not to leave their own country, that they might go and sacrifice to the Lord at Jerusalem; but they were to build an altar themselves, in the midst of their land, where it would be most convenient for persons from all quarters to resort, that they might present their oblations unto God.

And a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. It was an ancient custom, worthy of imitation, that when some eminent favour was conferred upon a person or society, a pillar or monument was erected upon the spot where it was received. Upon such monuments, inscriptions were often made, to celebrate the mercy of God, from which the benefit proceeded, to explain and perpetuate the remembrance of the blessing which was thus gratefully acknowledged. Several instances of this sort are recorded in the Old Testament. In the history of the patriarch Jacob, we read, that when he was at Bethel, he took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it, in commemoration of the distinguished kindness of God which he enjoyed in that place*. After the men of Israel had smitten the Philistines at Mizpeh, the prophet Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, 'Hitherto the Lord hath helped us †.' In like manner, the Egyptians, having experienced the divine goodness, and consecrated themselves to the service

* Gen. xxviii. 18, 19.

† 1 Sam. vii. 12.

of God, were to set up a pillar in the border of their land, as a monument, to testify, that even the most distant places of the country had submitted to the obedience of the Lord of hosts, of which it was to be a sign and witness.

20 And it shall be for a sign, and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour and a great one, and he shall deliver them.

Having mentioned the design for which this pillar was to be erected, in the first part of the verse, our prophet proceeds, in the latter part of this and the two following verses, to assign the reason of the remarkable change which was to happen in the land of Egypt, and the happy consequences with which it would be attended.—Oppressed by powerful enemies, and reduced to forlorn circumstances, they were to cry unto the Lord, and earnestly to implore with success his gracious assistance. To cry unto the Lord, and to entreat with importunity his merciful interposition in their favour, was undoubtedly the best measure which they could have adopted in the season of their calamity. When Israel anciently was grievously oppressed by the progenitors of this people, they cried unto the Lord; and he heard their cry, and their groaning, and wrought deliverance for them*. When fools are afflicted because of their transgression, they cry unto the Lord in their trouble; and he saveth them out of their distresses. When those who do business in the great waters are in extreme danger, they cry unto the Lord; and he delivers them, and bringeth them into their desired haven †. ‘ God will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise

* Exod. ii. 23. *et seq.*

† Psal. cvii.

‘ their

‘ their prayer. This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people that shall be created, shall praise the Lord. For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary: from heaven did the Lord behold the earth: to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death*.’ How great are his tender mercies, who alloweth none to seek him in vain! The Egyptians, who cried to him, when oppressed by cruel lords, and fierce enemies, were heard, and their requests granted; for it is added,

He shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them, from the power of those who tyrannized over them, and effectually vindicate them from the many hardships which they sustained under the despotic princes of Persia. God was to send them a saviour for this kind purpose. He was not to arise from among themselves, but to be sent them from a distant country, that he might perform this necessary and generous design.—A great one, who himself should be a very illustrious person, a magnanimous prince, and the author of a very great deliverance to the Egyptians. This great deliverer, to whom our prophet primarily referred, was Alexander, king of Macedonia, who was called the Great. This heroic prince rescued Egypt from the tyranny of their oppressors, and restored the kingdom to its former prosperous and flourishing condition in civil affairs.—The Egyptians, however, had worse oppressors than the Persians; the powers of darkness, who rule mightily in the children of disobedience, and their own strong corrupt propensities, whereby they were more grievously afflicted. These, I have no doubt, made them cry more earnestly to God for deliverance, than all the cruelty exercised upon them by their fierce lords. Though the prophecy therefore might refer to the illustrious prince I just now mentioned,

* Psal. cii. 17. *et seq.*

and the freedom which he wrought for Egypt, yet, I apprehend, it chiefly and ultimately received its accomplishment in the mission of Jesus Christ, and his advent among them by the ministry of his servants. The Messiah is indeed a great Saviour: great in his person, 'who is God over all, blessed for ever;' great in the characters he sustains, in the works he performs, in the salvation he bestows, and in the glory to which he is now exalted. This almighty Saviour, according to this prediction, was to be sent to the Egyptians, and revealed to them, that they might participate in the blessings of his salvation; and that, being rescued from the hands of their enemies, they might serve God in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives.

21 And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation, yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform *it*.

This verse describes the happy effects which were immediately to result from the fulfilment of the preceding prediction. Jehovah was to be known in Egypt, which had, for a long period, been involved in ignorance, superstition, and idolatry. The foundation of all true religion, and real felicity, consists in the knowledge of God, and in acquaintance with the manifestations which he hath given of himself. The existence, perfections, providence, and grace of God, were to be announced to the Egyptians, by the judgments that he was to execute, the wonders that he was to perform, and the revelations of his mercy with which they were to be favoured. By these various ways, Jehovah was to be known in Egypt, as the only living and true God, as the Governor among the nations, and the sole object of all religious worship and adoration.—*And the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day.* Mens ignorance of God is the fruitful
source

source of all their sins and miseries; and this must be removed by the knowledge of the Almighty, that they may become acquainted with true religion and happiness. When therefore God is about to send salvation to any people, he makes himself known to them, and then they become acquainted with him. For this purpose, he, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, was to reveal himself to the Egyptians; in consequence of which, they would attain that understanding which is the first step toward salvation. Sensible of its high importance, and the pleasure with which it is accompanied, they would follow on to know his loving-kindness, expressed in his promises, and communicated by his providences; his wisdom and grace, displayed in his covenant; his love, authority, and holiness, stamped on his laws; and his gracious designs toward his people in all his dispensations.

And shall do sacrifice and oblation. Sacrifices and oblations were those offerings which were, in obedience to the divine appointment, presented before God by his people, as an acknowledgment of their obligations to him, dependence upon him, and obedience to what he required, and to express their hopes of his promised mercy. If sacrifices and oblations here signify things somewhat different, the former may denote those animals which were slain, that they might be offered, and the latter may express the gifts which were to be presented unto the Lord. Convinced that all they possessed belonged to God, and acknowledging their manifold obligations to his providence and grace, the Egyptians were to bring sacrifices and oblations to the Lord, of the various kinds which he had required.—*Yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord.* A vow is a solemn promise made to God respecting some matter of high importance, of which we have right and power to dispose, and the performance of which is perfectly consistent with what is unquestionable duty. In many passages of scripture, we read of

vows made by good men unto the Lord. Jacob vowed to devote to God the tenth part of all that he would give him; and David, the king of Israel, acknowledged, that the vows of God were upon him. The Egyptians, having come to the knowledge of the Lord, were to adopt all the pious practices whereby good men had bound themselves to the service of God. They would firmly resolve, they would solemnly vow and promise fidelity to God, and manifest their inviolable attachment to his worship, their inward purpose of heart, by express declaration in words, or by some significant action, such as submission to the ordinance of baptism or circumcision.— Having made a vow to the Lord, they would perform it. Convinced that it is better not to vow, than to vow and not to pay; that having opened their mouths unto the Lord, they could not go back. Persuaded that in justice and gratitude they were obliged to pay their vows, and that by unfaithfulness they would expose themselves to divine judgments, they punctually performed their promises unto the Lord. An example this highly worthy of our imitation.

22 And the LORD shall smite Egypt, he shall smite and heal *it*, and they shall return *even* to the LORD, and he shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them.

The restoration of Egypt to its ancient splendor, and the removal of its distresses, is here foretold.— The Lord shall smite Egypt with various afflictive providences and severe judgments, which were to prove the happy means of bringing them to a just sense of their sins, their danger, and duty. By his word of truth, accompanied with the power of his Spirit, he would smite their hearts, so that they should be filled with shame and remorse on account of their transgressions. When they were to be in this distressed condition, the Lord, who woundeth and healeth,

eth, would restore them to health and soundness. According to this prediction, he was to heal Egypt of the discords that had arisen in that kingdom, and to remove the distresses occasioned by the calamities with which they had been visited. He was to cure that people of their spiritual maladies, by his pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace, which he would liberally dispense among them.—*And they shall return even to the Lord*, in the exercise of unfeigned repentance, from the error of their ways, into which they had departed. Some there are, who return, but not to the Most High: they abandon one error, that they may run into another: they stop short of God, and may be said rather to return to themselves than to their Maker. To distinguish the Egyptian converts from persons of this description, their return is foretold to be to the Lord; to his worship and service, to his protection and conduct, to his favour, and the enjoyment of its blessed effects.

And he shall be entreated of them. The Egyptians, returning to the Lord, shall earnestly supplicate his mercy and forgiveness, that he would love them freely, and receive them graciously into his favour and family. To their earnest prayers and entreaties, God would be pleased to hearken, and they were to prevail with him to grant them the blessings which they requested. He would give them a kind reception at his throne of grace, and fulfil their just desires which were agreeable to his will.—*And shall heal them.* Of this mercy they are again assured, whilst intimation is given, that it shall be conveyed to them in consequence of their importunate supplications to the God of all grace. This inestimable blessing hath been often obtained in this manner by those who were in distress. When the royal psalmist prayed, in Psal. vi. 2. ‘Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed,’ he thus triumphs, at ver. 9. ‘The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer.’ What he elsewhere says on this subject, hath been
verified

verified in every age: ‘ They looked unto him, and
 ‘ were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.
 ‘ This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him; and
 ‘ saved him out of all his troubles *.’ This remark,
 thus exemplified, suggests strong encouragement to
 us in all our afflictions, to have recourse to God for
 cure and deliverance.—These predictions which
 were delivered concerning Egypt, ought to be verified
 in us, my brethren, who profess to have solemnly de-
 voted ourselves to the Lord of hosts, and to have
 sworn allegiance to him as our Lord and Master.
 We ought to speak the language peculiar to his
 people, and to maintain a conversation becoming the
 gospel and our holy profession. Acknowledging that
 Jesus Christ is the altar that sanctifieth every gift, we
 ought to present through him, those spiritual sacri-
 fices of prayer, of praise, and doing good, which are
 well-pleasing unto God. Impressed with a sense of
 his distinguishing goodness, and the memorable de-
 liverances that he hath wrought for us, we ought to
 raise grateful monuments to his mercy, which may
 witness our firm attachment to his service. In all our
 distresses, let us cry unto the Lord, in the humble
 hope that he will send us seasonable deliverance, by
 the mighty Saviour whom he hath raised up. As the
 Lord hath made himself known to us by his word,
 let us thankfully receive and improve the light he af-
 fords us, by vowing perpetual obedience to him, and
 by daily performing these vows in the presence of all
 his people. When he smiteth us, convinced that he
 alone can heal, let us return to him, humbly implor-
 ing his mercy, in the pleasing expectation that he will
 heal us, as he did the Egyptians.

23 ¶ In that day shall there be a high-way out
 of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come

* Psal. xxxiv. 5, 6.

into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians.

The joyful consequences which were to result from the accomplishment of the foregoing predicted events, are represented in this and the two following verses. The effects are truly wonderful, far surpassing all human expectation.—*In that day*: at the time, or soon after the above prophecy was to receive its fulfilment.—*Shall there be a high-way, &c.* A plain, public, and much-frequented way of communication should be opened between Egypt and Assyria, whereby an intimate correspondence would be carried on between these two kingdoms, which were formerly at variance with each other. Laying aside their enmity, and hostile designs, the most entire concord, and the most intimate intercourse, was to subsist between these two nations, which would be cultivated, on both sides, with great assiduity and success.—*And the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians*, the one great Lord of all, who is rich in mercy to all that call upon him, and accepteth, in every nation, him that feareth God, and worketh righteousness. With one consent, they were to cry unto him, to do sacrifice, to offer oblation, to vow unto him, and to perform their vows, and to pay him the sacred homage which he justly requireth.

24 In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt, and with Assyria, *even* a blessing in the midst of the land.

Egypt and Assyria, by uniting with Israel, were to derive a blessing upon the new connection which they had formed. Their connection with the people of God was to prove a remarkable benefit; for the blessing which God had commanded upon Israel, who inhabited the midst of the land or the earth, was to be by them transmitted to other nations, according to
the

the promise which God made to their father Abraham, recorded Gen. xii. 2. 'I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thee a blessing.' The posterity of that great patriarch were honoured to be the instruments of communicating the divine blessing to Egypt and Assyria, whilst they exhibited to them a striking instance of its powerful influence. The blessing of Abraham, which was to come upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, consists in restoration to the divine favour, in the participation of divine grace, with the hope of eternal life. In the enjoyment of these high privileges, the true felicity of man consists; and, destitute of them, in the judgment of God and his saints, we are lying under the curse, and excluded from the number of the blessed. To this blessedness the kingdoms here mentioned were to be called, and Israel was to be the medium through which it should be conveyed; and, with Israel, they were to rejoice in the possession of the glorious prerogatives accompanying the service of God. As from among that people the great promised Messiah was to arise, in whom all nations were to be blessed, from whom all the blessings of grace were to proceed, and by whom the gospel was to be preached, which publishes the most precious blessings, and is the instituted means whereby they are attained—on these and other accounts, our prophet foretels, that Israel shall be a blessing in the midst of the earth.

25 Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

These words contain the solemn benediction which the almighty God pronounced upon the three kingdoms here mentioned. In the prophecy relative to Egypt that we have now been considering, the august title of the Lord of hosts is used no less than eight times,

times, a circumstance which deserves to be remarked. He who foretold these very extraordinary events, and who will abundantly bless his church, gathered from among different nations, is the Lord of hosts, for whom nothing is impossible, who will certainly fulfil all his promises and predictions.—Blessing is a word which, though often used, is little understood, and less attended to by too many. Men bless God, when they express the pleasure which they feel in the contemplation of his glorious all-sufficiency, and the gratitude that arises from the view of his inestimable benefits. Men bless one another, when, to express their tender affection for those whom they love, and to shew that they would make them happy were it in their power, they earnestly request that God would bless them. But when the Lord of hosts shall bless, as an evidence of his excellent loving-kindness, he doth not pronounce empty words, or ineffectual wishes, but communicates real permanent blessedness to those who are the objects of his favour. When he blessed the Father of the faithful, he rendered him as happy as a man can be in this present life. He conferred upon him the gift of faith; and that faith he accounted to him for righteousness, of which he gave him both the sign and the seal. He gave him great riches, and children; and promised that his posterity, who were to be multiplied as the stars of heaven, should be heirs of the world: and being not ashamed to be called his God, he prepared for him a city, to which the patriarch looked forward with hope and joy. From hence it is easy to learn, what is included in being blessed by the Lord of hosts, and what that blessing is which cometh upon the Gentiles.

Saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, whom I have delivered from the hands of their enemies, admitted into covenant with me, and the enjoyment of the glorious prerogatives connected with this relation. My people, who, thoroughly convinced that they are my rightful property, have voluntarily surrendered themselves to

my service, and consecrated themselves to my honour and glory, that they may shew forth my praises. The Egyptians were to be the people of the Lord of hosts, not merely by external profession, whereby they enjoyed many outward privileges, but by a hearty surrender and resignation of all their concerns to his direction and disposal, who, by a day of his power, subdued the obstinacy and perversity of their hearts, and made them his willing people. Besought by the mercies of God, as intimated in the foregoing verses, they presented their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which was their reasonable service. They yielded themselves unto the Lord, and their members as instruments of righteousness unto God; and this sacrifice, or oblation, was to be sanctified by the Holy Ghost, that it might be acceptable. They were to gather themselves together, and to resort to the great Messiah, that they might subject themselves to him as their common head, enter into covenant with him, wait upon his law, and serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind. In this manner they were to demonstrate the truth and sincerity of their professed subjection and obedience to the Lord of hosts, and their entire devotedness to him and his service. The people in Egypt, who were to be of this description, are pronounced blessed by the most high God; and, therefore, they must have been blessed indeed.

And Assyria the work of my hands. All the people of the earth are the work of God's hands: he made them, and not they themselves. For this reason, common to mankind in general, who are all the creatures and workmanship of God, I apprehend, the Assyrians are not called the work of God's hands in this benediction; but this character is given to them on another and more peculiar account. In the expression, there seems to be an obvious reference to the work of God's grace, whereby he createth his people in Christ Jesus unto good works, and forms them after his

his image, that they may shew forth his praise. In performing this blessed work, he removes the veil of ignorance and prejudice, which hung over their minds; he takes the direction of the heart, which had gone far from him; he regulates the affections, which were dissipated among improper objects; he writes his law upon the inward parts, which were very wickedness; he pours divine light into the mind; he reduces to order all that had gone into confusion; and forms the most amiable beauty in place of the most odious deformity. In this manner the Lord of hosts purifies the servants of sin, and converts them into servants of righteousness: he transforms them from likeness to the first earthly man, into resemblance of the second Adam, who is the Lord from heaven; and changes the carnal into a spiritual man. He translates them from the power of Satan into the kingdom of his dear Son; he sheds abroad his love into their hearts; he adorns them with divine gifts and graces; and sanctifies them in soul and body, by his Holy Spirit. This is the work of God, which, in scripture, bears the names of regeneration, renovation, creation, illumination, and transformation. These privileges distinguish the sons and daughters of the Almighty, who are the work of his hands, from the other classes of mankind; and bring down upon them the benediction of heaven. For these reasons, I suppose, the Assyrians are described as the work of God's hands.

And Israel mine inheritance. Though Israel be last mentioned, that people were honoured with precedence in the kingdom of God: to them the oracles of God were first committed, to them the gospel was first preached, and to them Jesus Christ was first sent, to bless them, in turning them from their iniquities. At the time, however, in which this prophecy was to receive its full accomplishment, they were to be incorporated into one church and kingdom with the Gentile nations: all distinctions of this sort being then
abolished,

abolished, Israel was no longer to hold the pre-eminence.—This people God was pleased to distinguish by the name of his inheritance, whom he appropriated to himself from among all the nations of the earth, that he might reside among them in a peculiar manner, that he might promulgate to them his laws, that he might make known to them his promises, that he might establish among them his worship, and defend them from their enemies. This description, which is repeatedly applied to Israel in the Old Testament, intimates, that they were the objects of God's distinguishing favour and regard, and consequently of his tender care and protection; that by them he was honoured and served, and from them received those precious fruits which were acceptable in his sight. Such were the highly favoured people whom our prophet declares, the Lord of hosts would bless.—Would you, my brethren, participate in the enriching blessing of Jehovah (and who does not wish to be blessed of the Lord)? consecrate yourselves to his service, and commit all your interests into his hands, deeply sensible that this dedication is both your duty and your honour, and will redound to your highest advantage. Impressed with a humbling sense of your depravity and corruption, earnestly implore, that God, who is all-sufficient in power and grace, may make you his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works; and accompany your prayers with the diligent use of all those means that he is pleased to render effectual for this purpose. Be solicitous that you may be admitted among his peculiar people, and become part of that noble inheritance which he hath chosen, and will abundantly bless.

This prophecy was in some measure fulfilled, after the boundaries of the kingdom of God were extended to Egypt and Assyria, and many profelytes from these countries joined in the Jewish religion. Of this subject Josephus speaks in his Antiquities, lib. xii. cap. iii.—It was more fully accomplished, after the
divine

divine lamp of the gospel was carried into Egypt, under the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius, and his successors, when the Egyptians, in great numbers, became the disciples of Jesus Christ, and were dedicated to the Lord in baptism. By means of the holy scriptures, they were instructed in the knowledge of the true God; they frequented the public assemblies for divine worship; they were employed in the solemn exercises of religion, and erected public monuments of their Christian profession. United by the strong bonds of love and peace to those in Syria and Assyria, who joined with them in the service of God, they became intimately connected with them, by the faith, hope, and practice of the gospel, as history relates; and with them they were blessed of the Lord of hosts. This wonderful work of Jehovah, which was begun about the time of Alexander, called the Great, hath made considerable progress; and shall be gradually carried forward to its full consummation, when the prophecy shall receive its completion, to the glory of God.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE predictions contained in this chapter, may be considered as a supplement to our prophet's fifth discourse, recorded in the foregoing one. By divine command, Isaiah appears before his countrymen the Jews, naked and barefoot, not having on the garb which he was accustomed to wear, that, by this significant sign, as well as by verbal instructions, he might place fully in their view, the import and certainty of what he was commissioned to declare. Whilst the Assyrian empire flourished in its glory, and its boundaries were continually enlarging, the Jews, the Phœnicians, and inhabitants of Palestine, were struck with terror at the uninterrupted success that attended their arms, which that exorbitant power meditated to carry into Egypt itself. In the mean time, the Jews and Ephraimites, neglecting the God of their fathers, looked to Egypt and Ethiopia chiefly for assistance, preservation, and deliverance. As a proper correction of their sin and folly in this respect, these nations became a scourge to them instead of a defence. The Egyptians and Ethiopians having been vanquished by the Assyrians, many of them were taken captive, and led away, almost naked, into servitude in distant countries. This event God was pleased not only to foretel, but to prefigure by our prophet, that the Jews and Israelites might be convinced of the weakness of those in whom they confided, and the absurdity of placing their trust in an arm of flesh. In this forcible manner did the Almighty instruct his people, that the united power of Egypt and Ethiopia though to human view sufficient to oppose the strength of Assyria, and to support the hopes of those who were distressed by its tyranny in Palestine, yet all their expectations from these quarters were to be disappointed. In consequence whereof, they would severely upbraid themselves with temerity.

merity and folly, whilst they beheld the most sensible proofs, that all human affairs are entirely under the direction of the God of Israel, in whom they ought to have trusted rather than in man.—The chapter before us is composed of two parts: the inscription, which admonishes us of the time wherein it was published, with other circumstances proper to be known; and the prophecy itself, with the emblematical representation that accompanied it, and the remarkable effects with which it should be attended.

C H A P. XX.

IN the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod (when Sargon, the king of Assyria sent him) and fought against Ashdod, and took it.

These words clearly ascertain the time wherein this prophecy was delivered, by a then well-known event, of which we are entirely ignorant, the history of it having been buried in the ruins of time. The king of Assyria, who is here mentioned by the name of Sargon, was probably either Shalmaneser, the father of Sennacherib, or Sennacherib himself. Tartan was the general whom he sent as commander in chief of this expedition, to which our prophet refers. This was the name of the first in rank of the three general officers whom Sennacherib sent from Lachish, with a great host, against the city Jerusalem; and was probably the very person of whom our prophet here speaks. Ashdod was one of the principal cities which belonged to the Philistines. It is not improbable, that this expedition was undertaken about the seventh year of Hezekiah's reign, after the Ephraimites had been led captive by the Assyrians. The Assyrian monarch having subdued the Israelites, and being enraged at the Egyptians and Ethiopians, who refused

to submit to his authority, that warlike prince turned his arms against these nations; and ordered his troops, in their progress, to attack Ashdod, and to take possession of the city. From this period, until the tenth year of king Hezekiah, he carried on war against Egypt and Ethiopia, which, after three years, he so far vanquished, as to lead great numbers belonging to both countries into captivity. Then,

2 At the same time spake the LORD by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, Go, and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, and put off thy shoe from thy foot: And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.

Our prophet, having specified the time in which he received the following instructions from God, proceeds to relate the revelation that was communicated to him.—The word of the Lord delivered to Isaiah this express order, which, by his ministry, was made known to the people among whom he lived: *Go, and loose the sackcloth from off thy loins, &c.* Sackcloth was a very coarse, rough sort of cloth, which was often made of goats or camels hair; and was anciently worn by those who mourned in times of great affliction, whether personal or public. The king of Israel, during a terrible famine in Samaria, had on an inner garment of this sort. On hearing the prophecy of Jonah, the king of Nineveh issued a proclamation, that all his people should fast, and put on sackcloth*. Of the same kind of coarse stuff the prophets of old wore an upper garment, as a badge of their office. On this account, I suppose, the prophet Elijah was called a hairy man; and John the Baptist is said to have been clothed with a garment of camel's hair. This garb might be intended as an emblem of the austerity of their life and doctrine. This upper gar-

* Jonah iii. 8.

ment, or cloak, Isaiah was required, on this occasion, to lay aside.—Besides, he was ordered to put off his shoe from his foot, which he was accustomed to wear, after the manner of his countrymen, that, by this new and uncommon appearance, he might attract the attention of his fellow-citizens, and excite them to inquire into the reasons of this extraordinary change of his habit.—The prophet's prompt obedience to this divine command is mentioned in the latter part of the verse :

And he did so, walking naked and barefoot. He did not, under some specious pretext, decline to execute the order given him from Heaven ; but, without hesitation, he immediately carries it into execution, be the consequences what they may. Sensible that as the thing formed hath not right to say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus ? so the creature ought never to question the wisdom or authority of its Creator and Lord. The appointment of God renders those things and actions which in themselves seem mean and contemptible, momentous and useful : it stamps them with real dignity and importance, and makes them truly instructive. View the ceremonial institutions of the Old Testament, such as circumcision, abstinence from particular kinds of food and of raiment, uncleanness contracted by touching certain objects, and sprinkling the tabernacle with blood, and they appear trifling and ridiculous. Contemplate them again as the ordinances of God, infinitely wise and gracious, and you may discern their excellence and extensive utility. Look at our prophet as he is here described, and you see an odd appearance ; but consider him acting by divine commission, that he might represent to his countrymen the future naked and destitute condition to which those nations were to be reduced, in whom they foolishly placed their confidence, and every circumstance acquires new consequence.—Such is the amiable goodness and condescension of God, that he

instructs his people, not only by words, but by signs; and in this manner speaks in a language easy to be understood, that makes the truth more evident and more effectual in its operation. Whilst the word reaches the ear, the figure attracts the eye; and both united, make the most powerful impression on the heart.—Both these modes of instruction are beautifully conjoined in the establishment of God's covenant, wherein he hath declared, that 'there shall not 'any more be a flood to destroy the earth*.' This solemn assurance he hath illustrated and confirmed, by setting his bow in the clouds: and in the instance before us, both were wisely connected, for the benefit of the posterity of Israel. Isaiah now prefigured what he predicted.—Walking abroad among the people without the usual badge of his office, with which he commonly appeared in public, and having on no more than one shoe, in the scripture-style he is said to have walked naked. Thus Saul, the son of Kish, when destitute only of a prophet's garment, is said to have prophesied naked †; and David, king of Israel, having laid aside his royal and military robes, is said 'to have danced naked before the ark of God, 'notwithstanding he had on a linen ephod ‡.' In the same manner, Isaiah is said to have walked naked, when having laid aside his upper garment, the external badge of his prophetic character, and one of his shoes, he exhibited himself to public view. Though this order imposed a considerable hardship upon him, and might expose him to some degree of ridicule, if not contempt, yet he yielded the most punctual and exemplary compliance, that he might shew his unlimited obedience to God, that he might give useful instruction to those among whom he exercised his ministry, and present to the servants of God, in every age, a pattern of submission highly worthy of imitation.

* Gen. ix. 11.

† 1 Sam. xxx. 24.

‡ 2 Sam. vi. 20.

3 And the LORD said, Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and bare-foot three years *for* a sign and wonder upon Egypt, and upon Ethiopia.

This and the following verse contains an exposition of the sign above mentioned. Our prophet, by acting in this instance as he was commanded, exhibited to the people a striking representation of a distant and obscure event; and, by the novelty and strangeness of his appearance, excited their astonishment and inquiries into the reasons of his conduct. Though his figure might seem surprising and absurd, it was designed to awaken his fellow-citizens from their insensibility, and to rouse the attention of all who beheld him to his predictions and discourses. Whatever new and uncommon external aspect he assumed, his gesture, habit, and actions, were intended to convey, to the most reluctant and inconsiderate among the people, some knowledge of the will of God.—The time Isaiah continued this practice was *three years*. The expression here used is remarkable; for whilst the prophet explains the divine command which he received from God, he gives an exposition of the order itself. The order was, that he should shew himself naked and bare-foot, to intimate to all who beheld him, that within three years they might expect the calamity which he foretold, that was likewise to continue for the space of three years. The words are so placed in the Hebrew, that they may be connected either with the former or latter part of the sentence, and so the time specified may refer either to the distance or continuance of the predicted judgment upon Egypt and Ethiopia. I can hardly think (but I pretend not to determine) that our prophet shewed himself in public without his upper garment and shoe during the long period of three years; and therefore I am willing to suppose, that a day was given him for
a year.

a year, as was done to the prophet Ezekiel on another occasion (chap. iv. 6.).

4 So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and bare-foot, even with *their* buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

The uncommon appearance which Isaiah made in public, was intended to represent to the men of Judah, the naked and destitute condition to which the Egyptians and Ethiopians were to be reduced by their enemies the Assyrians. At the time this prophecy was to be fulfilled, great numbers of both these nations were to be taken prisoners, and led away into captivity, with hardly any clothes upon them to cover their nakedness, which should be at once their shame and reproach. To the Egyptians especially, who, like other polished nations, were accustomed to wear fine clothes, and to value themselves on account of their dress, this harsh treatment would be exceedingly distressing; and therefore it is added, *to the shame of Egypt*. This circumstance does not equally apply to the Ethiopians, who were to share the same fate with their allies, as they were far inferior to them in respect of dress and politeness; and, on this account probably, they are not mentioned with Egypt in the latter clause of this verse. Of the truth of this prediction, which ere long was to be verified, the Jewish people had a sensible demonstration presented to their view, which demanded their serious attention and practical regard.—God was pleased to instruct them, and he still continues to teach us by similitudes. He inculcated upon them many important lessons, by the seething-pot, the linen-girdle, the potter's vessel, the basket of figs, and the yoke of iron, of which you read in the prophecies of Jeremiah. In the

the prophecy before us, he adopted the same insinuating mode of instruction: and in the parables of the lost sheep, the prodigal son, the barren fig-tree, and the ten virgins, he gives us many useful lessons, which he that hath ears to hear will diligently endeavour to learn and practise.

5 And they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.

The publication of this prophecy being intended to convince the Jewish nation of the extreme folly and vanity of placing their trust in Egypt and Ethiopia, who could not defend themselves from the encroaching power of Assyria, the wretched condition to which their prisoners were to be reduced should have filled those who confided in them with confusion and terror. The persons who the prophet foretels were to be afraid and confounded, were the Jews (whom he does not deign to mention), who gloried in Egypt and her allies. After the accomplishment of the predicted event, they were to be ashamed of the ill-founded expectation which they had presumptuously entertained, of receiving effectual assistance from the confederate nations; and to become more afraid than ever, of the increasing greatness of Assyria. Those who place their expectation on princes, and trust to human aid, without proper regard to God, shall certainly be afraid and ashamed. Egypt was a powerful kingdom, renowned for the wisdom of its counsellors, the riches of its treasures, and the strength of its armies. Ethiopia was celebrated on account of the vast number of its inhabitants, and the immense multitudes which they sent forth to battle. The strength of these two nations being united, the Jews entertained flattering expectations from their alliance with them; and especially did they boast of the connection they had formed with Egypt. Having placed that dependence
upon

upon an arm of flesh which ought to have been fixed upon the Lord alone, fear and shame were to be their just recompense.—Such disappointments should render us cautious, and excite us to take diligent heed, lest, by similar conduct, we expose ourselves to that shame and confusion of face which arises from ill-placed confidence.

6 And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such *is* our expectation whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?

The embarrassed, perplexed condition of the people, who are here spoken of, is emphatically described in these words.—The inhabitant of this isle, or rather country, as the Hebrew word is translated in the margin of some Bibles, may denote those who dwelt in the land of Palestine, which was situated by the sea-coast, and was nourished and bounded by the sea, especially the Jews and Ephraimites, to whom the oppressive power of Assyria had become a very grievous yoke. At the time Egypt and Ethiopia were to be vanquished, and multitudes of both kingdoms taken prisoners by the Assyrians, no other power existed that could successfully oppose the ambitious designs of that formidable empire; and therefore the people of Judah and Ephraim would, in very strong terms, express their disappointment, perplexity, and consternation, in such language as this: Behold the vain, extravagant expectations in which we long indulged are now frustrated! Those to whom we resorted for help, and hoped for protection from the spreading power of Assyria, are themselves conquered. How then shall we escape who are less able to make any resistance? We shall fall a prey into the hands of our rapacious, cruel enemies: no hope of deliverance now remains.

Such

Such, my brethren, is the miserable disappointment which uniformly attends those who place their confidence in man, and trust not in the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength. To this sin of relying on human aid, the Jews were exceedingly prone; and on that account they often suffered very severely. Sometimes they trusted in their fenced cities *, sometimes in their numerous armies †, sometimes in their wisdom ‡, sometimes in their privileges §, sometimes in the Assyrians ¶, and sometimes in the Egyptians ¶¶, as we learn from the scriptures. God therefore justly brought against them this heavy charge, ‘Thou hast forgotten me, and trusted in ‘falseness,’ in those persons and things that promised assistance and safety, but could not confer them; ‘therefore the Lord hath rejected thy confidences, ‘and thou shalt not prosper in them.’ Instead of helping, they distressed them. Trust not then in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. If they have inclination, they are often unable to assist and protect their friends: though they may have both will and power, their breath may depart, all their thoughts perish, and all your hopes be buried with them. ‘Happy is the man that hath the God ‘of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord ‘his God!’

This prophecy was doubtless exactly fulfilled in its season, though ancient history, handed down to us, does not particularly record the event to which it chiefly refers. From the accounts transmitted to us respecting this period, we naturally suppose, that after that powerful, renowned warrior Shalmaneser had occupied Samaria, in the sixth year of Hezekiah’s reign, he intended to have reduced all the land of Palestine to his subjection. Being diverted from the execution of his purpose by the interposition of di-

* Jer. v. 17.
vii. 4.

† Hof. x. 13.
§ 2 Chron. xxviii. 16.

‡ Jer. viii. 8.
¶ Jer. ii. 37.

¶¶ Jer.

vine providence, he turned his arms against Egypt and Ethiopia, who were then in alliance, and fought with considerable success. Having obtained some signal victories over the confederate nations, many of them were ignominiously led away captive, as our prophet foretold. The people of Judah, who had thrown off the yoke of Assyria, about the tenth year of Hezekiah's reign, being informed of this conquest, were afraid, and ashamed of their condition, dreading that no way of escape was left them from the increasing oppressive power of the Assyrian monarch.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE sixth discourse, recorded in the second part of these prophecies, on which we now enter, treats of the destruction of Babylon—of the future fortunes of the Idumeans—of the Arabians, the inhabitants of the desert. The prophet, who beheld the Babylonians extending their conquests over the world, subjecting all Asia to their empire, and threatening to overturn the kingdom of Judah, rapt into an ecstasy by the spirit of prophecy, had exhibited to his view, the Medes and Persians investing and taking that great city. That wonderful event, far exceeding all human expectation, he minutely describes, and a variety of circumstances with which it was to be accompanied. Notwithstanding the burden of Babylon was related in chap. xiii. the subject, being of high importance, is again resumed, that the people of God might be firmly established in the faith of this astonishing incident, and so neither trust to the friendship, nor dread the enmity of the Babylonians. The destruction of Babylon being emblematical of the overthrow of mystical Babylon, the powerful enemy of the church of God under the New Testament, the prophecy might be repeated, to signify the infallible certainty of both these great events. This prediction seems to have been delivered much about the same time with the former, which I supposed to have been in the seventh year of king Hezekiah's reign. After the inscription, our prophet, divinely instructed in the wonderful subject of which he was about to speak, introduces his instructions relative to the fatal catastrophe which was to put a final period to the glory of Babylon, by mentioning some of the many ills which the people of God had suffered from that quarter, ver. 1, 2.—The Medes and Persians are invited to lay siege to the city, and to execute upon it the just judgments of God, in the latter part of ver. 2.—

Then follows a graphical description of the distress arising from the great calamity which that renowned city was to experience, ver. 3, 4.—Some circumstances with which it was to be attended are next mentioned, ver. 5.—A command is given to the prophet to appoint a watchman, who faithfully reports what he saw, and what was done, ver. 6.—9.—The whole is concluded with a public annunciation, that Babylon is fallen.

CHAP. XXI.

THE burden of the desert of the sea. As whirlwinds in the south pass through; so it cometh from the desert, from a terrible land.

The burden of the desert of the sea, or, The oracle concerning the desert of the sea, is the title, or inscription, given to this prophecy. From the analogy of all its parts, which have a manifest reference to that great city, and particularly from the ninth verse, it is evident, that Babylon is the subject whereof it treats. The names given to some of the books of the Old Testament, and the titles prefixed to several of Isaiah's prophecies, are unquestionably mystical, and intended to express, though obscurely, the matter which they contain. Of this sort are the titles placed before the five books of Moses, before this and the prophecy recorded in the following chapter, where the burden of Jerusalem is called, The burden of the valley of vision. The figurative description here given of Babylon was extremely just, because around the city, especially toward the sea, was a large flat morass, often overflowed by the waters of the Tigris, and the great river Euphrates. Such was its original state, such it became after the taking of the city by Cyrus, and such it continues to this day.

As whirlwinds in the south pass through, &c. These words seem intended to represent the great calamities whereby the Babylonians afflicted the Jewish nation, which brought upon them the awful judgment of Heaven. The subject is introduced with a similitude that deserves attention. The whirlwind comes very suddenly, moving in a circular form; and sometimes blowing with such amazing violence, as to tear up large trees by the roots, and to demolish strong edifices. Winds of this sort were most frequent in southern countries, and from that quarter they were observed to come most commonly: hence these words of Elihu, ‘Out of the south cometh the whirlwind*.’ Our prophet therefore, when he would represent the terrible distresses which the Babylonians had inflicted upon Judea, compares the devastation which they made in that country to whirlwinds in the south, where they spread sudden, unavoidable destruction, carrying away every thing that might impede their progress.—*So it cometh from the desert.* In like manner, desolation came, with the utmost violence, upon the Jewish nation from the desert, even from Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar, stimulated by the desire of conquest and domination, marched with a great army into Judea, vanquishing every opposition that lay in the way: he disturbed the order and tranquillity of the kingdom; he invaded Jerusalem; he laid waste the temple of God; and, after having spread desolation over the country, he carried away into exile great numbers of the inhabitants. These and many other evils which befel the Jews, proceeded

From a terrible land. The land of Assyria justly merited this description, on account of its prodigious extent, and great distance from Canaan, where these predictions were delivered. Great objects with which we are unacquainted, placed at a remote distance, are often considered as dreadful. The Chaldeans were a

* Job xxxvii. 9.

strong and martial people; for thus the Lord God speaks of them by the prophet Jeremiah: 'It is a mighty, it is an ancient nation—their quiver is an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men *.—I know some expositors have considered what is said in this verse, not as the reason of the destruction of Babylon, but a representation of the rapid march of the Medes and Persians under Cyrus, to accomplish the following predictions; and in this view the words are explained, as containing a summary of the whole prophecy that lies before us. Though I will not affirm that this is not the meaning of our prophet, yet I much prefer the exposition now given, to that which applies these words to the Medes and Persians. Babylon being here called a desert, seems to have been the very desert from whence came, with great rapidity and violence, those desolating judgments, which are compared to a whirlwind passing through the southern regions.

2 A grievous vision is declared unto me, the treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth: go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media: all the fighting thereof have I made to cease.

No wonder that our prophet should have pronounced this a grievous, distressing vision. Whether the vision he meant, was the clear discovery afforded him, by the spirit of prophecy, of the calamities which had been inflicted by the Babylonians on his countrymen the Jews, or the terrible judgments which were to be executed upon Babylon by the Medes and Persians, in either view, it must have given rise to great affliction. The character was extremely natural and just, whether it was founded on what was said in the first verse, according to the interpretation now given, or

* Jer. v. 15, 16.

on the predictions which follow, relative to the overthrow of Babylon.—*The treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the spoiler spoileth.* The king of Babylon is doubtless the person of whom these words are spoken. He set no bounds to his avarice, ambition, and injustice; but, in the execution of his designs, persisted in acting most perfidiously, and in plundering those who would not submit to his authority. That tyrannical prince, regardless of the happiness of society, and despising the laws of humanity, overturned those governments which were unable to resist his power, oppressed, spoiled, and led away captive the people into foreign countries. In this manner he acted, consistently with the odious character here given by our prophet; and in this base, iniquitous conduct he obstinately persisted, notwithstanding the remonstrances that were made against it. ‘He is
 ‘ a proud man (saith the prophet Habakkuk), neither
 ‘ keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell,
 ‘ and is as death, that cannot be satisfied, but gather-
 ‘ eth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all
 ‘ people*.’ On good grounds therefore (as the prophet intimates in the verses preceding this quotation), the just look for the fulfilment of the promises made to the church, especially when tyrants, intoxicated with their power and grandeur, are guilty of treachery and cruelty, tyranny and ambition, and thus bring down upon themselves, and their kingdoms, the most terrible divine judgments.—On these and other accounts, the order is published:

Go up, O Elam: besiege, O Media, &c. Rapt in prophetic ecstasy, Isaiah calls upon the Persians and Medes to execute the divine vengeance upon Babylon. This command, like that delivered in chap. xiii. 3. proceeded from the Lord God of hosts, who mustereth the armies of battle, and assigneth to kingdoms, as well as individuals, the various services

* Hab. ii. 5.

whereby they execute his pleasure. The order for going and besieging Babylon is directed to Elam. This was the name of the first-born of Shem, the son of Noah; and from him given to his posterity, which were afterward called Persians, from Perseus, one of their kings. Media was anciently a kingdom in Asia, that subsisted above three hundred years, the capital of which was Ecbatana. It was afterwards united with Persia into one great empire, over which Cyrus was king. To these united powers the call is addressed, which was accompanied with astonishing efficacy. Though our prophet had not the least ability whereby he could induce the nations to obey the order that he published, yet, coming from the God of the spirits of all flesh, it produced its full effect. He commanded, and all things stood fast in the beginning: his word brought the flood upon the world of the ungodly; and the Elamites and Medes, from afar, against Babylon. All preparations and attempts are in vain, when God doth not call for them. Men have sounded the trumpet, and gone forth to battle in vain, because God prospered them not. All the creatures must hearken to his voice, and execute his pleasure.—
All the sighing thereof have I made to cease. The sighs and groans, the complaints, tears, and sorrows, to which Babylon had given rise, by her many insidious attempts upon the liberties and possessions of neighbouring nations, and particularly of Judah, were to come to a period with that great oppressing city. The cause being removed, the effect should cease.

3 Therefore are my loins filled with pain; pangs have taken hold upon me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth: I was bowed down at the hearing of it, I was dismayed at the seeing of it.

4 My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me.

Whilst

Whilst the Holy Spirit placed fully in the view of our prophet, the dreadful calamities which the Medes and Persians were to inflict upon Babylon, he is seized with dread and consternation, which he describes in very strong terms. This terror and dismay with which he was now afflicted, afforded a striking emblem of the terrible anguish and perturbation that the execution of the divine judgments he foresaw were coming upon that great city would excite in its inhabitants. In like manner, the deep sleep, and horror of thick darkness, which fell upon the patriarch Abraham, when he had a vision of the future oppression of his posterity in Egypt, might prefigure that affliction, and their stupid insensibility when in that condition. The description before us, is copious, emphatical, and extremely moving.—*Therefore are my loins filled with pain.* The strength of man is chiefly seated in his loins; and when they are much pained, the person, in this state, must be greatly debilitated, and exceedingly distressed.—*Pangs have taken hold of me, as the pangs of a woman that travaileth.* Representations of this sort are sometimes illustrated in scripture by this strong similitude, to express the extreme anguish felt by the person in distress; and this idea is plainly intended to be conveyed by it here.—*I was bowed down at the hearing of it,* as one unable to sustain the intolerable burden that is laid upon him.—*I was dismayed at the seeing of it.* While he beheld the vision presented to his view, he was greatly terrified, and much disquieted.—*My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me.* Our prophet seems to have been in a condition similar to that of Eliphaz, the Temanite, ‘when a thing was secretly brought to him, and his ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon him, and trembling, which made all his bones to shake*.’ He

* Job iv. 12, 13, 14.

was exceedingly agitated and affrighted. Fear came upon him like an armed man, and overwhelmed him with unutterable distress—*The night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me.* The season wherein I have been refreshed with such comfortable repose as God giveth to his beloved people, and favoured with visions of sovereign mercy and grace from the Almighty, is now become a season of perplexity, fear, and dread. All this complicated distress, felt by Isaiah, as I have already hinted, was only the anticipation of what should be experienced by the king and people of Babylon, in the fatal night wherein that city was to be taken by its enemies.

5 Prepare the table, watch in the watch-tower, eat, drink; arise, ye princes, *and* anoint the shield.

Some circumstances respecting the capture of Babylon are here mentioned, with equal minute exactness as if the prophet had been actually present at this catastrophe, and related them from accurate recollection.—*Prepare the table*, or as the Hebrew words may be rendered, the table is preparing, or prepared. In that memorable night wherein Babylon was taken, a very great festival was celebrated by the princes and the people, during which they were accustomed to indulge in drunkenness and debauchery. On that occasion, the Babylonish monarch gave a magnificent entertainment to the chief officers of his kingdom, and the ladies of his court. The table was prepared, and richly furnished.—At the same time that the order was given that supper should be got ready, a command was also given, *Watch in the watch-tower*, that the earliest notice may be communicated to those in power, should any disturbance, or riot, take place during their festivity and joy.—These orders were followed by an invitation to *eat, drink*; to feast and rejoice, now that the entertainment was prepared, and
 necessary

necessary precautions taken for preserving the peace of the city.—*Arise ye princes, and anoint the shield.* The large and deep trenches being now finished which Cyrus intended to make around the city, and being well informed of the confusion which generally prevailed at this festival, both in the palace and city, he gives orders to the princes and chief officers under his command, to take their proper stations, to anoint the shield, and immediately prepare for actual service. Having posted part of his troops on that side where the river Euphrates entered into the city, and another part on that side by which it went out, in the evening he opened the large ditches, which were formed as receptacles to contain the water of the river, and commanded his officers and men to march along the channel so soon as it became fordable. The channel soon becoming almost dry, the troops advanced from opposite sides toward each other, the gates leading to the river having been left open, through the negligence or dissipation of those to whom that service belonged. The army of Cyrus having in this manner penetrated into the heart of the city, and the troops meeting at the palace-royal, surpris'd the guards, and cut them to pieces. The doors of the palace being opened by some person, to know what was the cause of the noise that they heard, the soldiers rushed in; and meeting the king, they killed him, and put all his attendants to the sword. Thus was Babylon taken by the Medes and Persians.

6 For thus hath the LORD said unto me, Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth.

Our prophet is required by divine command to appoint a watchman, who should give what information he could communicate respecting this great event, whereby the above prediction might be confirmed. The watchman was ordered by infinite wisdom to do duty, that, from the watch-tower in which he was

stationed, somewhere in the neighbourhood, and full view of Babylon, he might carefully attend to every movement of the troops that marched toward the city, and immediately report whatever he observed. In obedience to the admonition which Isaiah received from God, a watch is set, the station is fixed, his business is assigned him; and he soon sees what claimed his attention, of which he gives the following account:

7 And he saw a chariot *with* a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, *and* a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed.

The prophet next proceeds to relate the report made by the watchman, in consequence of his faithful attention to the duties of his office.—The first object which he saw, was a chariot with a couple of horsemen. The eastern nations anciently often fought with chariots, which were driven furiously into the field of battle, where they made terrible havock among the enemy. In these chariots of war, there were commonly two persons, one of whom managed the horses, whilst the other was employed in shooting arrows and throwing darts. Probably these were the couple of horsemen seen by the watchman.—*A chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels.* The one chariot was drawn by asses or mules, which were commonly used by the Persians for this purpose; the other was drawn by camels, which were employed by the Medes in drawing their chariots. Those to whom the watchman made this report, might be naturally led to suppose, that a large army, composed of these two nations, were advancing to lay siege to Babylon, under the command of two generals, one belonging to each kingdom.—*And he hearkened diligently with much heed.* With the greatest care and assiduity he narrowly watched their motions, allowing no circumstance

stance to pass unnoticed. That he might be in a capacity to give every possible information respecting these chariots, and the armies to which they belonged, he attentively listened, that he might collect something from what he heard, as well as from what he saw.

8 And he cried, A lion: my Lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights.

The watchman having declared what he saw, proceeds to relate what he heard, in consequence of his diligent attention to his business.—*And he cried, A lion*; i. e. according to the opinion of some commentators, he cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth, as did the angel of whom the apostle John speaks, who set his right foot on the sea, and his left upon the earth, and lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, that time should be no longer*. Though this may possibly be the meaning of the expression, which is addressed by the watchman with great respect to his employer, yet the words may be consistently, and perhaps better explained without supplying *as*, which the above interpretation requires. He cried, A lion. When a centinel or watchman takes his station, a word is given him by the main guard, which being called out on the approach of danger, quickly runs from one to another, until it reach the commanding officer. In conformity to this custom, a lion might be the word delivered to the watchman on this occasion, which he loudly called out, to intimate his having discovered that the Medes and Persians were advancing toward Babylon.—I will venture a third conjecture upon this passage, which by some hath been pronounced unintelligible. Perhaps when the watchman gave

* Rev. x. 3. *et seq.*

notice of the chariots that he observed approaching toward Babylon, he might be asked by his employer, what standard the army had among them? To this inquiry the reply was given, *A lion, my lord.—I stand continually on the watch-tower in the day-time, and I am set in my ward whole nights.* I am constant and assiduous, day and night, in discharging my duty, in order to make farther discoveries of the motions of the enemy.—What a noble example of diligence and fidelity is here set before those whom God hath appointed to be watchmen in his church, who watch for souls as they that must give account to their great Lord how they have performed their office! The church of God, like a besieged city, is continually exposed to many enemies and dangers; and therefore those who occupy the station of watchmen, by unremitting attention and vigilance, ought to be always ready to give early and faithful warning of every approaching danger.

9 And behold, here cometh a chariot of men, *with* a couple of horsemen: and he answered and said, Babylon is fallen, is fallen; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.

The person on the watch-tower now announces another discovery that he made, of a chariot drawn by horses, and occupied by men; of whom nothing can be said with certainty, but that they were advancing toward Babylon, that they might besiege the city.—After giving this intimation, *He answered and said.* In scripture-language this expression frequently denotes no more than the persons continuing to speak, though no question hath been asked that requires a reply; and in this sense the words are here used. The watchman proceeded to declare, *Babylon is fallen, is fallen.* That great city, which was the
glory

glory of kingdoms, and the admiration of the nations, is fallen from her grandeur and magnificence, from her power and prosperity, into a most abject and contemptible condition, from which she shall never more arise. Her fall might be twice mentioned, to denote that the speaker was deeply interested in this subject, the strong emotions which he felt on this occasion, and the absolute certainty of this wonderful event, determined in the purpose of the Almighty.—One can hardly forbear to remark the striking similarity of what is recorded in this prophecy to the proclamation made by the angel, who came down from heaven with great power, and with whose glory the earth was lightened; ‘who cried mightily with a strong voice, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen*.’

And all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground. The Babylonians were much addicted to idolatry, and had among them the images of the gods whom they honoured. One of these images is said to have been forty feet high, and in weight to have been one thousand talents. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits †. It is here affirmed, that when this great city was overthrown, all the images of the deities whom they worshipped were completely destroyed, and the homage paid them by their blinded votaries was to come to a perpetual end. The predictions relative to this remarkable event are clear and explicit. Thus spake the word of the Lord by Jeremiah the prophet, ‘Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard, publish and conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces, her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces ‡.’ In the execution of this judgment, the all-wise providence of God was pleased to employ the Persians; concerning whom an ancient

* Rev. xviii. 1, 2.

† Dan. iii. 1.

‡ Jer. 1. 2.

historian observes, that they erected neither statues, temples, nor altars, and that they considered those who required such things to be made as mad and infatuated*.

Thus fell the great city Babylon, according to the predictions delivered by the prophets of the Lord. Mystical Babylon, which was anciently prefigured by this rich and powerful city, still exists and flourishes. You have read the prophecies recorded in scripture concerning its downfall and destruction. Faithful watchmen, standing in their watch-towers, have carefully observed every commotion among the nations which seemed to bring forward the execution of the threatened judgment. The time fixed in the divine decree is fast approaching, in which those who are destined by providence to be the instruments of overthrowing this power, which hath long been inimical to the people of God, shall be commanded to perform this arduous service. Our fathers beheld the commencement of this great work; and we, standing continually on the watch, may see the work going forward with all expedition. According to the promise of God, we expect that the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be preached unto all nations; that the Holy Spirit shall be poured out upon all flesh more abundantly than in times past, every thing that opposeth or exalteth itself against the knowledge of God being removed. We look forward with hope and joy to the glorious victory of the Son of God over every adverse power, when he shall put down all authority hostile to his government; when he shall display his glory as King of kings and Lord of lords; when infidelity, superstition, error, and Heathenism, shall be abolished; and the cry again heard, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, and shall no more arise. In this pleasing prospect we say, Amen and amen: so let it be, so shall it be.

* Herodot. lib. i. p. 62.

10 O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of the LORD of hosts the God of Israel, have I declared unto you.

These words, which contain the conclusion of this prophecy, are addressed to the church of God by our prophet, who gives the most explicit assurance, that he hath faithfully related what God had been pleased to reveal to him. The church is the threshing-floor, in which the corn is broken off from the straw, and separated from the chaff. The business assigned to the prophets and servants of God with respect to his church, is to reprove, to convince, to threaten, and admonish, in order that they may make a separation between the wheat and the chaff. This is the design of their office; and to accomplish this purpose, all their studies and labours are directed. Under this beautiful figure, John the Baptist speaks of Jesus Christ: ‘Whose fan is in his hand, and he will ‘thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat ‘into the garner: but he will burn up the chaff with ‘unquenchable fire*.’ And our prophet here elegantly addresses the people among whom he performed his ministry in this manner: *O my threshing*; the objects upon whom I exercise the well-meant severity of my discipline, and whom I endeavour to lay open to the instructions which I am entrusted to convey—*And the corn of my floor*, that is committed to my peculiar care, and which it is my proper work to prepare for my Master’s use, to whom belong the cattle and the corns upon a thousand hills—To you I make known, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, those revelations which he hath communicated to me for your benefit.

That which I have heard of the Lord of hosts the God of Israel, have I declared unto you. The most solemn assurance is given, that Isaiah faithfully de-

* Matth. iii. 12.

livered to the men of Judah what he had heard of God, particularly respecting the subject of the preceding predictions. What amiable integrity and simplicity are expressed in these few words! Indeed, honesty and plainness of speech are conspicuous in all the discourses and writings of the prophets and apostles. Peter and John told the council before whom they appeared, that they could not but speak the things which they had heard and seen*: the apostle John affirms, that what he had seen, and heard, and handled, he declared unto us †: and our prophet here gives the most unequivocal declaration of the same truth. The inspired writers did not publish the fictions of their own fancies, nor did they impose upon mankind cunningly devised fables: but they have made known to us the truths which they heard of the Lord of hosts, for whom nothing is impossible; the God of Israel, who will do every thing that is necessary for the safety and felicity of his people.— Deeply impressed with a just sense of the excellency and certainty of the word of God, let us receive divine truths with cordial affection, with profound humility and dutiful submission. Let us diligently look into the perfect law of liberty, and continue therein, being not forgetful hearers, but doers of the work, that we may be blessed in our deeds.

II ¶ THE burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? watchman, what of the night?

This enigmatical prophecy foretels the continuance of former distresses, with the addition of some new calamities, which were to befall the Idumeans, at the time wherein the Jews, being extricated from the darkness

* Acts iv. 20.

† 1 John i. 1, 2, 3.

of affliction, in which they had been involved in common with the Idumeans, were to enjoy deliverance and comfort. The prophet introduces a messenger from Idumea, inquiring, with great earnestness, of some Jewish prophet, as to the time of the night of darkness and affliction. To this inquiry, the prophet, probably Isaiah, returns for answer, That the evils wherewith the Jewish nation were distressed should soon be over, and be succeeded by the cheering light of the morning, whilst the Idumeans, oppressed with new and unexpected miseries, were to remain in thick darkness. Of these two parts, the question and the answer, this prophecy consists; which seems designed to check the incredulity and haughtiness of those who insulted over the Jewish people, because they were involved in similar calamities with themselves.

The prophecy is inscribed, the burden of Dumah. Dumah seems to be a contraction of Idumea, the country possessed by the Edomites, the posterity of Esau, who was called Edom. Similar abbreviation of names often occur in scripture; as where Aram is called Ram, and Jehoshua Joshua. The land of Idumea, in which mount Seir was situated, was given, by divine grant, to Esau, and his posterity; and on this account, the Lord charged Moses not to allow the Israelites to invade the Edomites. There Esau fixed his habitation, as we learn from Gen. xxxii. 3. Seir formed the mountainous part of Idumea, lying toward the land of Canaan, forming the boundary between these two countries. This prediction is said to be the burden of Dumah, because it contained tidings which must have proved exceeding grievous and afflictive to the inhabitants of that land.—A messenger, sent from that country, is introduced, interrogating the prophet (I suppose Isaiah), as to the progress and continuance of the calamities which they sustained in common with the Jews.

He calleth to me out of Seir; or, as the words may be rendered, there is one that calleth to me out of

Seir. The voice which proceeded from an individual, must be considered as expressing the request of great numbers of his countrymen, as appears from the prophet's reply, delivered in the plural. If ye will inquire, inquire ye. The Hebrew word translated *call*, hath a peculiar emphasis in this place, signifying the cry of those who are in distress, impatiently waiting to observe the dawn of the morning. Perhaps the inhabitants of Dumah had been informed, that our prophet was publishing divers oracles respecting the nations surrounding Judea; and therefore they sent to him, wishing to know if he had any information to give them of their future condition. To obtain what intelligence he could get on this subject, the messenger, whom they dispatched, inquires,

Watchman, what of the night? Though all the servants of God may be called watchmen, in as much as their proper business consists in watching over their hearts and lives, in watching against the assaults of their spiritual enemies, in watching for God more than they that look for the morning, and for the best opportunities of doing good, yet this character is ascribed, with peculiar propriety, to the prophets and ministers of the Lord. To them it belongs carefully to observe the providences of God, the seasons of danger and deliverance, and the conduct of those of whom they have the inspection. Like watchmen, they ought to be persons remarkable for courage and fortitude, who will not be easily intimidated, faithful in discharging the trust reposed in them, vigilant that they be not suddenly surprised, constant in attending to the duties of their station, and in continual readiness to give the hour of the night. On these accounts, Isaiah is justly addressed by the designation of a watchman. To him the Most High was pleased to reveal the future fortunes not only of his peculiar people, but of the neighbouring nations; and to acquaint him, in some measure, with the season, the nature, and duration of the judgments to be executed upon them

them in after-times. He was therefore the most proper person in the world to resolve the following inquiry, and of all men the best qualified to give a satisfying answer.—If you are surpris'd that the question before us should have been put to a prophet, in the land of Judea, by the Edomites, who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, you ought to recollect, that the prophets of Jehovah were appointed watchmen, to publish his designs of mercy and judgment to the church and to the world. Their fame had spread abroad among the eastern nations, who entertained a high veneration of their character. Those therefore who were anxious to know their own future destiny, or when God intended to favour Zion, would naturally seek information, as to these matters, from some of this renowned class of men. Besides, it ought to be remembered, that the Edomites were the descendants of the patriarchs Abraham and Isaac, as well as the Jews; and, living in their neighbourhood, they might have some knowledge of the sacred writings and inspired prophets, of which the inquiry now to be considered affords some considerable evidence.

What of the night? This question undoubtedly relates not to the natural night, wherein the sun ceases to give light, and darkness prevails; but to a metaphorical night, the state of adversity and affliction, of obscurity and darkness, in which the Idumeans were involved, through the oppressive power of Assyria. The day being often mentioned in scripture as an emblem of prosperity, liberty, and joy, the night is spoken of as a symbol of calamity and distress. In this sense, the words of God, by our prophet, speaking concerning deliverance from the captivity of Babylon, must be understood: 'I form the light, and create the darkness*.' And in the inquiry before us, the night must be considered in its figurative import, as

* Isaiah xlv. 7.

denoting a state of darkness, affliction, and sorrow. The meaning therefore of the question will be shortly this: Watchman, what information can you give respecting the state and progress of the night of calamity, distress, and darkness, in which Idumea is now enveloped? How far is it advanced? Are we arrived at that period in which we may hope our affairs will soon take a favourable turn? Do you discern any signs, or have you had any revelations from Heaven, intimating, that the afflictions we now sustain will ere long be over, and be succeeded with the joyful morning-light of deliverance and of prosperity. The question, you observe, is twice repeated, to express the anxious solicitude of the inhabitants of Seir respecting the subject of inquiry, their deep concern in this matter, and their great impatience to obtain a decisive answer.

12 The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come.

These words contain the answer to the call given from Seir.—The response seems to me involved in considerable obscurity; and therefore, I say, if ye will inquire into its import, inquire ye. I shall give you the fruit of my inquiries, which I hope in the mean time will prove acceptable and useful. As the question put in the former verse must be understood in a figurative sense, the answer must be explained in the same manner. The night there signified a state of perplexity and affliction; the morning here denotes deliverance, joy, and consolation. When the watchman said, The morning cometh, he affirmed, that the much-desired cheerful season approached, wherein deliverance was to be vouchsafed, light and comfort diffused, joy and gladness was to spring up, and dispel the darkness and sorrow which then prevailed. This happy period was fast hastening on, and ere long to make
its

its wished-for appearance.—*And also the night.* The desirable light which will soon shine forth, shall be succeeded by the darkness of new affliction, calamity, and sorrow, that shall again overspread the land. As light and darkness by turns follow each other, so, in a figurative sense, they shall alternately succeed one another in the dispensations of providence and grace. You may expect in a short time that your condition shall be changed for the better, but your prosperous state shall be again altered much to the worse.—There is a frequent interchange of good and evil, of prosperity and adversity, in the lot both of individuals and societies. God not only intermixes, with wonderful variety, some measure of the one with the other, but he so orders human affairs, that, as Solomon observed, he sets the one over against the other. Of the truth of this remark many instances occur in scripture. The apostle Paul, soon after he was favoured with abundance of revelations, had a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him. The morning-light shone upon the Israelitish nation under the reign of David and Solomon; the night drew on after Rehoboam ascended the throne. In the days of Aza and Jehoshaphat, it was light in Judah; in the time of Joram and Joash, it was darkness. The vicissitudes of day and night, in the experience and observation of particular persons and kingdoms, recur as regularly, though not so frequently, in their external condition, as they do in the natural world.

If ye will inquire, inquire ye. If ye will endeavour to discover the reasons of this dispensation, and the important purposes which are thereby accomplished, inquire ye, and ye will find, that, by this alternate succession of light and darkness, the Almighty is pleased to awaken people from their dangerous security, and to excite them to study the knowledge of his will. By the obscurity of the night, he moderates their happiness and joy; by the reviving light of the morning, he alleviates their distresses and sorrows.

He so diversifies their circumstances, that they are not always prosperous, nor always afflicted: sometimes they enjoy comforts, and sometimes they are depressed with troubles. He employs both mercies and judgments, light and darkness, that he may enliven their hope and confidence, and excite their fear and reverence. For these and similar purposes, God orders the tide of prosperity to ebb and to flow, the morning-light of comfort to shine, and afterward the night of calamity to succeed. Inquire ye, and ye shall find these, and such as these, are the designs to be answered by the variegated conditions of mankind. The practice of this duty our prophet recommends to the Idumeans, as being well suited to their present distressed circumstances.—Would ye know what the true God hath determined concerning you, and what he requires in order to your deliverance? Search into the reasons of his providential dispensations toward you, seriously investigate the causes which have contributed to afflict you with those evils whereof you complain, attentively listen to any intimations you have received of the divine will, and impartially consider if you have turned at God's reproof. If not, without delay,

Return, come. Since you seem anxious, in your present distress, to know the will of God concerning you, and to perform your duty, return from your evil ways, whereby you have incurred the awful displeasure of almighty God, and provoked him that chastizeth the Heathen severely to correct you. Return to the Lord, from whom you have widely departed, whose goodness you have abused, whose laws you have transgressed, and whose favour you shall find to be better than life. Return to the practice of that righteousness which exalteth a nation, and you shall find that the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect thereof quietness and assurance for ever. ‘Return to the Lord with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart,

‘ heart, and not your garments : turn unto the Lord
 ‘ your God ; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to
 ‘ anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of
 ‘ the evil *.’—This is the awful voice, the gracious
 call of the living God, addressed to you, my brethren.
 ‘ Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith
 ‘ the Lord of hosts †.’ This is the voice of all God’s
 works ; this is the voice of conscience ; this is the
 voice of every mercy, of every affliction, and of every
 revelation which God hath given to the children of
 men. Hearken diligently, and incline your ear to
 the gracious call of divine benevolence and tender
 compassion.—*Come* unto God without delay, and
 obey his voice, that you may be saved from the ills
 that you sustain, and those which you dread. Come
 and join yourselves to the Lord in a perpetual cove-
 nant that shall never be forgotten : forsake the foolish,
 and live, and go in the way of understanding. Then
 shall your light rise in obscurity, and your darkness
 be as the noon-day ; whereas if your thoughts are
 thoughts of iniquity, wasting and destruction are in
 your paths : ye shall wait for light, but behold obscu-
 rity ; for brightness, but ye walk in darkness ‡.

Permit me to remark, before I proceed to a new
 subject, that the answer given by the prophet to the
 inquiry made by the Idumeans, is delivered in gen-
 eral, figurative terms, and accompanied with a practi-
 cal advice respecting present, indispensable duty. In
 this manner, curious questions are commonly answered
 in scripture. Our Lord Jesus Christ being asked,
 ‘ Are there few that shall be saved ? he said unto
 ‘ them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for I say
 ‘ unto you, many will seek to enter in, and shall not
 ‘ be able ||.’ When the disciples asked of their divine
 Master, ‘ Tell us when shall these things be ? he an-
 ‘ swered and said, Take heed that no man deceive

* Joel ii. 12, 13.
 || Luke xiii. 23, 24.

† Mal. iii. 7.

‡ Isaiah lix. 7, 8, 9.

‘ you—watch therefore, for ye know not at what hour
 ‘ your Lord doth come *.’ The apostle Peter having
 inquired of his Lord concerning his fellow-disciple,
 ‘ What shall this man do?’ received for answer, If
 ‘ I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?
 ‘ follow thou me †.’ And in the oracle before us, the
 Idumeans, prompted by curiosity, inquiring of the
 prophet concerning their future fortunes, received
 the short reply which I have now been illustrating.
 As no valuable purpose could have been served by
 direct, explicit answers to these inquiries, they were
 couched in general terms, and attended with useful
 practical directions, to which we ought carefully to
 attend, deeply sensible that secret things belong unto
 God, and present duty ought to be our business.—

As to the accomplishment of this prophetic reply, I
 shall only add, that the grievous affliction in which
 the Jews and Idumeans were involved, during the Ba-
 bylonish captivity, and even prior to that event, formed
 the long night of trouble here alluded to. The hap-
 py deliverance obtained by the Jews, by means of the
 proclamation of Cyrus, made the joyful morning
 spring up, to which the prophet refers. The night
 however, according to the prophet Malachi, continued
 with the Idumeans, who were so weak and impo-
 verished, that they were unable for some time to re-
 turn and build their waste places ‡. Their pride, self-
 confidence, and cruelty toward the Jewish people; that
 hatred and envy which, on various occasions, they dis-
 covered, justly provoked God to continue their distress
 much longer than that of their neighbours. In this
 calamitous season, some of them no doubt returned
 to the Lord, and entered into his covenant and
 church, according as they were directed.

* Matth. xxiv.

† John xxi. 21.

‡ Mal. i. 2, 3.

13 ¶ THE burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim.

This oracle foretels a terrible slaughter which was to be made by the Assyrians, within the space of a year, among the people who inhabited Arabia. Whilst God revealed to our prophet the future fortunes of the nations around Canaan, he represents to him the Assyrians with their swords drawn, and their bows bent, entering the western parts of the Arabian desert, occupied by a people who travelled through that extensive wilderness with their flocks of cattle, dispersing, putting to flight, and killing, vast numbers of these wandering tribes. The prophecy seems intended to shew, that the God of Israel is the Governor of the world, the supreme Arbiter among the nations, who are entirely under the direction of his providence—that the Jewish nation were the people of the true God, from whom alone safety was to be expected—that our prophet was undoubtedly his servant, by whose authority he spake as he was commanded—and that his peculiar people ought to be encouraged to place all their hopes on his power and providence, whose predictions they saw exactly accomplished in their season.—After the inscription, follows the preamble—then the prediction—with the time and certainty of its fulfilment.

The burden upon Arabia. The country which is here especially intended, was the vast desert in which the children of Israel journeyed for the space of forty years, situated between the land of Palestine and Egypt. It was inhabited by a mixed multitude of people, who often changed their places of residence. They were chiefly composed of three different tribes: *viz.* the Cusheans, who were descended from Cush; the Hagarenes, or Ishmaelites, who were the posterity of Ishmael; and the Keturians, who were the descendants of Abraham, by Keturah. No mention being

here made of the Cufheans, the two last-named tribes were the principal subjects of this prophecy. Kedar was brother to Nebaioth, the eldest son of Ishmael; Tema was the name of another son of Ishmael; and Dedan was one of the sons of Abraham, by Keturah. These Arabians were a courageous, robust people, inured to hardships, and often exposed to many perils and dangers. Now this prophecy contains the oracle which God delivered concerning them by his servant Isaiah.

In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye travelling companies of Dedanim. These words describe an important circumstance relative to the divine judgments which God had determined to inflict upon the Arabians, as the just punishment of their crimes.—They are addressed to the travelling companies of Dedanim, the posterity of Dedan. The traders of that people were often employed in carrying various articles of merchandize from India and Persia into Phœnicia, as we learn from the prophecy of Ezekiel concerning Tyre: ‘The men of Dedan (saith he) were thy merchants—they brought thee for a present, horns of ivory and ebony. Dedan was thy merchant in precious clothes for chariots. Arabia, and all the princes of Kedar, occupied with thee in lambs, and rams, and goats: in these were they thy merchants*.’ These travelling merchants commonly journeyed from place to place in companies, for the sake of convenience and safety; some of them taking care of the camels, others of the sheep, with which they wandered over the desert to obtain pasturage and water. You read of one of these companies coming from Gilead with camels, bearing spices, and balm, and myrrh, going to carry them down to Egypt, Gen. xxxvii. 25. In the book of Job it is written, ‘That the troops of Tema, and the companies of Sheba, travelling through this howling wil-

* Ezek. xxvii. 15, 20, 21.

‘dernefs, were afhamed and confounded, becaufe they ‘looked for water and were difappointed *.’ In this manner, modern travellers inform us, the Arabians ftill continue to traverfe the vaft deferts through which they wander.—Thefe companies *fhall lodge in the foreft in Arabia.* Travellers, fo far as I know, are agreed, that no large timber grows in the defert of Arabia, and that brambles and bufhes are only to be feen in fome places. How then could the prophet foretel, that the travelling companies fhould lodge in the foreft of that wildernefs? The words may import, that the Dedanite merchants, who were accuftomed, when travelling through Arabia, to be hofpitably received into the tents of their brethren, finding them driven from their habitations by the enemy, fhould be obliged (that they might lodge unmolefted) to retire into the moft folitary and interior parts of the defert. On this account, they were to be expofed to many inconveniencies, hardfhips, and dangers.

14 The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirfty, they prevented with their bread him that fled.

This and the following verfe contains a very affecting defcription of the miserable circumftances to which the Arabians were to be reduced by their enemies.—To bring forth bread and water to thofe who are in want and diftrefs, and to afford neceffary refreshment to poor fugitives, is an inftance of humanity and kindnefs which juftly deferves commendation, efpecially when this is done in a dry and barren wildernefs, where the neceffaries of life, and particularly water, are extremely fcarce, and cannot eafily be obtained. The neglect of this office of humanity and tendernes toward the children of Ifrael, by the Moabites and Ammonites, gave rife to the prohibition whereby they

* Job vi. 19, 20.

were excluded from the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation *. If, according to our version, this verse describes the humane, benevolent conduct of the Temanites toward their brethren, in the time of indigence and distress, their liberality stands recorded to their immortal honour. If, according to the marginal translation, it contains a direction given by our prophet, it demonstrates his tender compassion toward the distressed; and presents us with one of many pleasing proofs of his truly benevolent temper, and solicitous attention to the practice of goodness. In either view, it forcibly inculcates upon us, the important lesson of relieving the necessities of our brethren by every method in our power; and who hath not in his power to give water to him that is thirsty, and bread to him that is hungry? Be ready to do this, and every good work; and prevent those who are weary and ready to faint, the trouble of asking your friendly aid, by granting them cheerful and ready assistance.

15 For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the grievousness of war.

These words suggest the important reason why the fugitives in Arabia deserted their habitations.— They endeavoured to escape, not on account of some imaginary or distant danger, but from impending, immediate destruction, the drawn swords, and bent bows of their powerful enemies. Hostilities were actually commenced, and they were threatened with all the horrors and calamities of war. They were driven from their places of abode, they were spoiled of their tents and flocks, and obliged to flee for their life through the vast desert, exposed to the scorching heat of the sun, ready to famish by hunger and thirst.—

* Deut. xxiii. 4.

How manifold are thy judgments, O Lord! Some are destined to the sword, some to flight, some to fear and dread, and others to all the calamities of war. How deplorable the condition of those who escape for their lives before a pursuing, victorious enemy, exposed to innumerable hardships and injuries! What a mercy, my friends, that we are allowed to possess our houses in peace; that we are not surpris'd by terrors of the night, and obliged to flee into the wilderness for safety from the horrors of war! Let us compassionate those who are in distress, and remember them who are in adversity, being ourselves also in the body, and so liable to the same afflictions. Let us endeavour, by relieving their necessities according to our ability, to experience the blessedness of him who giveth of his bread to the poor.

16 For thus hath the LORD said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail.

In this and the following verse, the prophet solemnly confirms the judicial sentence he had intimated, and particularly specifies the time in which it was to be executed.—In the former part of the prophecy, he had spoken rather obscurely; now he speaks clearly and decisively upon the future fortunes of the Arabians. That he might give authority to what he declared, and claim unshaken credit to his predictions, he affirms, that the Lord spake to him what he now publishes; and therefore none can doubt, that he who directs all human affairs would exactly verify what is here foretold.—*Within a year, according to the years of an hireling.* If we suppose this prophetic discourse to have been delivered at the same time with those which immediately precede it (*viz.* in the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, and fought against it, being probably the seventh year of Hezekiah's reign), the following year was marked

marked out for its accomplishment. The expression here used to denote the precise period within which it should be fulfilled, occurred chap. xvi. 14.; where I observed, that the years of an hireling are often vexatious, and reckoned with great exactness. By this similitude therefore, our prophet might intend to signify the manifold distresses to which the Arabians were to be exposed during the currency of the year, and to mark with accuracy the time wherein it should be verified. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, having occupied the fortified cities of Palestine, intending to invade Egypt, endeavoured to expel the Arabians from the desert they inhabited, that he might open the way for his more easy access into the country, whither he meditated to march his troops.

And all the glory of Kedar shall fail. The posterity of Kedar, the son of Ishmael, who were called Kedarines, were a numerous and strong people among the Arabians. It may seem a paradox at first view, to speak of the glory of a people dwelling in the desert of Arabia, who had neither temple, city, nor house, but lived in their tents, separate from all other nations. Notwithstanding, Kedar had its glory, which consisted of those brave, stout men among them, who were renowned for their birth, their opulence, their knowledge and skill, and for those things of which they made their boast and triumph, such as their tents, their flocks and herds. From scripture we learn, that they were possessed of great numbers of camels and sheep*; and that they carried on a considerable trade with other nations, whereby they acquired much wealth. In the prophecy of Ezekiel, already cited, concerning Tyre, we are informed, ‘that Arabia, and all the princes of Kedar, occupied with her merchants in lambs, and rams, and goats †.—All this glory, our prophet foretels, shall fall as the leaves fall from the trees, when agitated by a strong tempest. The

* See Isaiah lx. 7.

† Ezek. xxvii. 21.

expression imports, that whatever the Arabians most esteemed, was to be consumed, and to pass away.—The rod wherewith God smiteth the nations, hath a voice which speaketh to us as well as to them: the judgments of God are written for our instruction and admonition. We ought therefore carefully to attend to the lessons they are designed to convey, and to make a proper improvement of the afflictions with which other people have been visited.—The subject is more fully represented in verse

17 And the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the LORD God of Israel hath spoken it.

A great slaughter having been made among the Arabians, many of their illustrious heroes were cut off, and only a few of them remained, who, having been deprived of their tents, their vessels, their riches, and their flocks, were to seek for safety by flight into the inmost recesses of the desert. The number of archers, who were remarkable for their skill in handling bows and arrows, which, with long spears, were the armour which they used in war, was likewise to be greatly impaired, through the ravages made by the Assyrians. In few words, those among the Kedarines who were most renowned for dexterity and strength, were to be greatly diminished by the successful incursions of their enemies.—To give certainty to this event, these emphatical words are subjoined: *For the Lord God of Israel hath spoken it*, who stands engaged to defend his people from their enemies, and to revenge the wrongs which they have sustained from those who acted in hostility against them. All the declarations which he hath emitted by his servants the prophets, he will assuredly fulfil in their season. Though I do not recollect any thing recorded, either in sacred or profane history, that can be considered as
the

the accomplishment of the above prophecy, yet its fulfilment cannot reasonably be doubted. If the event had not exactly happened as foretold, we must suppose that the prophecy would not have been recorded; and now that it is preserved among the true and faithful sayings of God, it supplies the place of the history of the people of whom it treats.

In the review of these predictions concerning Arabia, we may adopt the words of the prophet Habakkuk, when, being informed that God would execute righteous vengeance upon the incorrigible Jews by means of the Chaldeans, and surpris'd at the affecting intimation which was given him of this event, he thus exclaimed: 'Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth those that are more righteous than he? and makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things that have no ruler over them *?' Among the animal tribes, who are destitute of understanding, and not ruled by the laws of equity, the stronger devour the weaker; but men, who are endowed with reason, and who ought to be governed by the laws of righteousness, should never act in this cruel and tyrannical manner. Notwithstanding, how often do men, in direct contrariety to all the rights of humanity, trample upon the weak, and destroy those who, among their brethren, are unable to resist their superior power? Acting in this manner, they become as the fishes of the sea, and the creeping things of the earth. The archers, and the mighty men of Kedar, were diminished by the Assyrians, not because they had any right to destroy them, but because they were more powerful, and their overthrow tended to facilitate the avaricious designs of conquest formed by that growing empire. By them God chastized the Heathen,

* Hab. i. 13, 14.

whilst, according to the law of retaliation, they, in their turn, when the measure of their iniquities was filled up, were recompensed for all the oppression, rapacity, and cruelty, of which they had been guilty. I conclude with the words of the prophet I just quoted :
' O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment ;
' and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for
' correction *.'

* Hab. i. 12.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE seventh discourse, contained in the second part of these prophecies, relates to the future calamities of Jerusalem, and the disgrace of Shebna, treasurer to king Hezekiah. The rulers and people of Jerusalem, being at this time delivered from disquieting fears, and living in ease and luxury, our prophet admonishes them of the approach of those dreadful calamities which were to overwhelm them with consternation and terror. He threatens the impenitent contemners of the divine predictions; particularly Shebna, who was invested with great authority at court, notwithstanding he was ill-affected to religion, against whom he denounces the tremendous judgments of God, assuring him, that a person of an opposite character should soon be elevated to his office. Whilst he was inveighing against the neighbouring nations, and foretelling their future fortunes, he observed the basest vices prevailing among the Jewish nation, especially among the inhabitants of the metropolis; he was therefore directed by the Holy Spirit, sharply to reprove and threaten them with impending judgments, to be executed upon them by their enemies. In performing this important service, the prophet delineates the great distress and perturbation in which the people of Judea were to be involved, on account of the invasion of their country, under the reign of Zedekiah, ver. 1.—5. He represents the enemy invading the land of Judah, and occupying great part of it, which was the latter and most grievous part of the calamity they then sustained, ver. 6.—11. He then describes the vices and crimes of the people, particularly their impenitence and carnal security, whereby they provoked God to testify his displeasure against them, ver. 12, 13, 14. After which, he foretels the fall of Shebna, who was to be turned out of his office, and driven from his native country into a foreign land, where

where he was to die, and to have a mean burial, as a just punishment of his intolerable pride and haughtiness, ver. 15.—19. The discourse concludes, by representing the elevation of Eliakim to the office of Shebna, and the honour he was to enjoy in his high station, ver. 20.—25.

CHAP. XXII.

THE burden of the valley of vision. What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the house-tops?

The first part of the verse contains the title, or inscription, of this prophetic discourse. It relates to the valley of vision, by which was doubtless intended the city Jerusalem, the metropolis of the kingdom of Judah. This seems to be certain, from what is written in ver. 4. 8, 9, and 10. where several characters peculiar to that renowned city are mentioned, and it is spoken of in unequivocal terms. According to Josephus, Jerusalem was built upon two opposite mountains, Sion and Acra, which were separated by a deep valley which lay between them*. In this valley stood great part of the principal buildings belonging to the city; and among others, the schools of the prophets, where divine revelations were communicated and explained to the people. Zechariah therefore, when prophesying in the name of the Lord, calls it, ‘The valley of my mountains†.’ The name of this highly favoured city being interpreted, signifies, ‘A vision of peace.’ There the prophets were honoured with visions of the Almighty, and with those revelations which they communicated to the people, and

* Bell. Jud. lib. vi. cap. vi.

† Zech. xiv. 5.

committed to writing, for the benefit of the world and the church in all ages. It was the place where the prophets of the Lord chiefly resided; who were also called Seers, on account of the visions which were exhibited from heaven to their view. Of this city our blessed Saviour affirmed, that 'it could not happen that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem*.' The visions which they contemplated, were visions of peace, not designed to intimidate or terrify, but to give intimation of the divine favour and good-will, and to convey useful instruction to the people to whom they were reported.—This beautiful city was supposed to be situated in the midst of the earth †, in latitude 31 or 32, and longitude 69, having Africa on the south, Scythia, Armenia, and Pontus on the North, Asia on the east, and Europe on the west. It stood partly in the inheritance of Judah, and partly in that of Benjamin: the line dividing the portion of these two tribes passed through the court of the temple, and the spot whereon the altar was built. The grandeur and populousness of this royal city may, in some measure, be collected from the large extent of the palace, and the buildings connected with it, in which were lodged continually twenty-four thousand of the king's life-guards ‡. Its riches and opulence were immense in the days of David and Solomon; for David declared in his trouble, he had prepared for building the temple with which it was adorned, an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver, besides precious stones and other metals §. To which must be added, three thousand talents of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, that he granted out of his own proper good §. These sums have been computed to amount to four thousand one hundred and seventeen millions sterling, reckoning by the talent of the sanc-

* Luke xiii. 33. † Psal. lxxiv. 12. ‡ 1 Chron. xxvii. 1.
 § 1 Chron. xxii. 14. § 1 Chron. xxix. 3, 4.

tuary, of double the value of the common talent, The magnificent temple of the Lord, erected at this prodigious expence, was the greatest ornament of Jerusalem, and one of the seven wonders of the world. It was planned, with all its parts and furniture, by divine wisdom; and the execution of it employed, for seven years, one hundred and fifty thousand workmen, beside three thousand three hundred who were over the work, and a great number of Tyrians: when finished, it was certainly the finest and most elegant structure that ever the world beheld. Such was the vast wealth and affluence with which the city Jerusalem abounded, that the daily provision made for the royal household, has been reckoned sufficient to maintain forty-eight thousand people.—I shall not enlarge, enough having been said at present on this fruitful topic of discourse.—The following prophecy is inscribed, the burden, or the oracle, concerning this valley of vision, in as much as it describes the invasion of Jerusalem, first by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar, and afterward by the Assyrians under Sennacherib.

What aileth thee now, that thou art wholly gone up to the house-tops. The prophet introduces this prophecy concerning the calamities which were to befall Jerusalem, by inquiring into the causes of the remarkable change which appeared to him to take place in that city. His inquiry relates not to the circumstances of her citizens at the time in which he delivered this prediction, but to the condition wherein they were to find themselves at the period the prophecy was to receive its accomplishment.—He asks, what was the reason why the inhabitants had gone up to the house-tops? I suppose you know, that the houses in eastern countries, particularly in the land of Canaan, were covered with flat roofs, like this house in which we are convened for the worship of God. These roofs, among the Jews, were enclosed with battlements, by express command from
God.

God *. Thither they went up on various occasions, as appears from several passages of scripture; sometimes for the exercises of devotion; sometimes for entertainment, that they might have opportunity of observing what passed around them; and, at other times, for the sake of safety in time of danger, or to mourn in seasons of distress. The calamities of Moab are thus described by the prophet Jeremiah, in allusion to this prospect: ‘There shall be lamentation generally upon all the house-tops of Moab, and in all the streets thereof †.’ Isaiah, having represented to him the inhabitants of Jerusalem wholly gone up to the house-tops, asks, what might be the reason of this uncommon appearance? What aileth thee now? What is the occasion of the people deserting the streets, and the public places of resort in the city, and so generally retiring to the tops of the houses? Is not this owing to the sudden and universal alarm occasioned by the approach of your enemies the Chaldeans? and have you not gone up to these advantageous situations, that from thence you may observe their motions, and deplore your dangerous condition? In this manner he upbraids the citizens of Jerusalem with their unbelief, security, and sloth, and their contempt of the warnings and admonitions of approaching calamities, which had been often given them by the prophets of the Lord: and now that the day of distress and anguish was come, wherein divine judgments were to be executed, where could they look for support and deliverance?

2 Thou that art full of stirs, a tumultuous city, a joyous city: thy slain *men are* not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle.

In the first part of this verse, the prophet contrasts the present state of Jerusalem with what he foresaw would be its future condition.—In the time of pro-

* Deut. xxii. 8.

† Jer. xlviii. 38.

sperity, it was full of stir, like other large and populous cities. Much stir and bustle would arise from great numbers of the inhabitants following their various active employments, the different amusements in which many were engaged, and especially from the prodigious resort of vast multitudes of strangers, from all corners of the land of Judea, to the sacred feasts which were there celebrated.—*A tumultuous city.* There was no doubt frequent uproar and confusion in Jerusalem, particularly at the three seasons in the year when all the males in Israel came thither, to present themselves before the Lord, and to attend the sanctuary-service. Among such a great concourse of people, there could not fail to be some disorderly persons, who would endeavour to excite riot and sedition. Besides, we may suppose, that in this, as in other flourishing and much frequented cities, there would be tumults from time to time, proceeding from various causes, unnecessary to be mentioned.—*A joyous city.* The prosperity, affluence, and happiness, enjoyed by the inhabitants, and the celebration of the solemn festivals by the males of the land, in which they were expressly commanded to rejoice before the Lord their God *; for this good reason, ‘Because the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice.’ All this stir, tumult, and joy, our prophet observed, was entirely subsided; and in their room was substituted profound silence and surprise, whilst the inhabitants had gone up to the house-tops.

Thy slain men are not slain with the sword, nor dead in battle. These words plainly intimate, that before the city was to be vanquished by its enemies, great numbers of the citizens were to perish by dread and terror, by famine, and the diseases which commonly follow upon the want of provision. During the siege,

* Deut. xvi. 14, 15.

which continued about three years, whilst the city was invested by the enemy, the inhabitants were fore distressed by a terrible famine, wherein many of them miserably perished through want of the means of subsistence. Of this mournful event the prophet Jeremiah gives a very pathetic description: ‘The
 ‘ tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of
 ‘ his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread,
 ‘ and no man breaketh it unto them. They that did
 ‘ feed delicately, are desolate in the streets: they that
 ‘ were brought up in scarlet, embrace dunghils*.’
 The history recorded 2 Kings xxv. bears testimony to the truth of the fact; for, at the third verse, it is thus written: ‘The famine prevailed in the city, and
 ‘ there was no bread for the people of the land.’

3 All thy rulers are fled together, they are bound by the archers: all *that are* found in thee are bound together, *which* have fled from far.

The description of the distressed condition to which Jerusalem was to be reduced is here continued.—By the rulers spoken of, are meant the king of Judah, the princes, and the principal officers, who were to betake themselves to flight, that, if possible, they might escape the sword of the enemy.—*They are bound by the archers.* The Chaldean archers pursued and apprehended them, and bound them in chains, that they might afterward be put to death, or carried away in miserable captivity into Chaldea.—*All they that are found in thee, &c.* All those who were prevented from fleeing for safety, even they who had resorted from distant parts of the country to Jerusalem, were to be bound together, and treated as captives.—Such was to be the fate of the inhabitants of the once highly favoured city of Jerusalem. By their wickedness, they provoked God to abandon them, and to

* Lam. iv. 4, 5.

send against them the Chaldeans, who besieged and burnt their city, who led captive their king and their great men, and made prisoners of all the people. You may read the fulfilment of this part of the prophecy in 2 Kings xxv. 4. and following verses.—Neither the greatness nor the meanness of persons can screen them from the judgments of God: neither secrecy, nor flight, nor fortresses, can afford safety from those who are employed to execute his righteous vengeance. The only hiding-place, the secure refuge, to which you ought to resort in every danger, is the shadow of the wings of the Almighty. Like prudent men, who foresee the evil, and hide themselves, do you have immediate recourse to God, that he may preserve you from trouble, and compass you about with songs of deliverance.

4 Therefore said I, Look away from me, I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me; because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people.

Our prophet, having beheld in vision the future calamities which were coming upon his countrymen, expresses, in a very affecting manner, the strong emotions of grief which he felt, from viewing the distressing prospect. His language resembles that of the weeping prophet, where he thus speaks: ‘ Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water, for the destruction of the daughter of my people. Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission *.’ His sorrow was so pungent, that he wished freely to indulge in it, without being interrupted or disturbed. Grief, when excessive, always wishes to be in solitude. There is a kind of magnificence in great sorrow, which is offended by being familiarly dealt with, or observed. Trouble, perplexity, and vexation, when

* Lam. iii. 48, 49.

they become intense and vehement, are exceedingly averse to meet with any obstruction, even from friends and consolations. Extreme anguish of mind must have vent before it be assuaged; and the more strongly that it operates, the sooner it is likely to abate. Nothing therefore can be more offensive to a sorrowful person than society; and there is hardly any thing that more increases his uneasiness than being noticed and looked upon. These remarks were verified in Isaiah, who, when he was disposed to weep bitterly, requested, that those who were inclined to view him with attention and sympathy, would look away from him; and that those who wished to comfort him, would refrain from their purpose, and permit him to weep bitterly.

Because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people. The prophet wept not for himself, but for the terrible calamities which were coming upon his country.—The daughter of his people is intended to signify, the weak, effeminate posterity of renowned ancestors, who were celebrated for their strength and courage; those who are elsewhere called the daughter of Israel, the daughter of Judah, of Zion, and Jerusalem. Though the citizens of the metropolis may be chiefly intended by this expression, yet all those who dwelt in the land of Judea might be comprehended.—These were to be spoiled by their enemies, of their riches, their strength, their liberty, beauty, and glory; and to be deprived of their families, friends, and possessions, and, above all, of the distinguishing prerogatives that they enjoyed as the peculiar people of God. Great numbers were to be cruelly slain by the sword of the fierce enemy. On these and similar accounts, our tender-hearted prophet wept bitterly. Even a Heathen writer observed, that it is inhuman not to grieve for the calamities of others. The servants of God fail not to compassionate the distresses and sorrows of those who are in affliction. David, Isaiah, and many others, discovered this becoming

coming temper on all proper occasions. Jesus Christ wept over Jerufalem, for the diftreffes that he forefaw were coming upon it; and requires his followers to weep with them that weep. A godly man must be grieved not only to fee men transgressing God's law, but to behold them, on that account, sustaining the awful judgments of heaven. Let us then remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and those who suffer adversity, as being ourselves also in the body*.

5 For *it is* a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord GOD of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains.

Isaiah proceeds to enumerate some more causes of the grief and sorrow which he now felt.—*It is a day of trouble, and of treading down*, wherein disturbance, distress, and tumult, were universally to prevail among the citizens of Jerufalem. Things civil and sacred were to be trampled under foot. Their holy things, their palaces, their houses, their fields and vineyards, with all that they esteemed valuable, were to be destroyed, and treated contemptuously, by the enemy.—*And of perplexity*: people in the utmost distress, and full of anxiety, not knowing what to do, or which way to take, in order to escape impending ruin. To render this description the more awful and affecting, all this trouble is said to proceed *from the Lord God of hosts*, who hath all the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth, entirely at his command, and employs them as the instruments of executing his righteous vengeance upon a perfidious, stubborn, and disobedient people. Surely trouble and perplexity that cometh from him, and demonstrates his power and righteousness, must be terrible

* Heb. xiii. 3.

indeed.—*Breaking down the walls* of the city, the temple, the palaces, and houses of Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah, speaking of this event, declares, that the Chaldeans burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of the city, and broke down all the walls round about.—*And of crying to the mountains*, for assistance and safety, in the time of their extremity. Such terrible calamities were to befall the inhabitants of the metropolis of Judea, that their lives were to become more bitter than death: they would rather have been crushed under the mountains, than exposed to these dreadful judgments which threatened the most inexpressible miseries.

This prophecy was literally fulfilled by the Chaldeans, when they laid siege to Jerusalem, and took the city. That was indeed a time of trouble, and treading down; for besides the distresses mentioned in the second and third verses of this chapter, the pillars, the ornaments, and furniture of the house of the Lord, in gold and silver, were broken in pieces, and carried away to Babylon*. The hearts of the people were distressed with perplexity and fear; in consequence of which, they were to cry and howl, as we read, Ezek. xxi. 12.—Thus were the tremendous judgments of God executed upon a treacherous and perfidious people that resided in the valley of vision, as an awful testimony of his just displeasure against their transgressions.—Brethren, a far more terrible day of trouble and perplexity is fast approaching, when men shall bitterly cry to the hills and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb, and him that sitteth upon the throne †. If the prospect of that day of distress, which is already past, made our prophet, who was a man of fortitude, when the occasion called for it, to weep and mourn, do not ye think that we ought to

* 2 Kings xxv. 13.

† Rev. vi. 16, 17.

be deeply affected with the prospect of final retribution and general judgment? Perhaps some of you conceal your vices, others triumph in their wickedness, and contemn admonition. Know that a day of trouble and perplexity lies before you, when ‘our God will come, and not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about*.’ In the language of the New Testament, ‘Jesus Christ shall come, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them who know not God, and obey not the gospel†.’ May the prospect of this day of recompense rouse every sinner among you to flee from the wrath to come, and animate every true Christian to be diligent and faithful in the service of his Master, that, at the coming of the Lord, he may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless!

6 And Elam bare the quiver with chariots of men *and* horsemen, and Kir uncovered the shield.

Our prophet having foretold the more distant, future fortune of the wicked inhabitants of Jerusalem, in this and the following verses, he proceeds to predict those distresses which they were to suffer from the Assyrians, long before the above event was to happen. Having placed fully in the view of the carnal, secure contemners of the word of God, the judgments which the Almighty was to inflict upon them, and their posterity, at a more remote period, it was highly proper that he should acquaint them of those lesser ones which were nearer at hand. Several circumstances, relative to this subject, are here mentioned.—*And Elam bare the quiver.* In the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, the Elamites, or Persians, were either subject to the Assyrians, or their

* Psa. l. 3.

† 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

auxiliaries in war. The Elamites were a martial people, who, in the words of the prophet Ezekiel, caused terror in the land. They made great use of the bow, and of the quiver, in which they carried their arrows; and in the management of them they were exceeding expert. At the approaching siege of Jerusalem, they were to be employed with the Assyrians in this service.—Nor were a few of their foot-soldiers only to be engaged in this enterprise; they were to have *chariots of men and horsemen*. The army, which was to strike terror into the inhabitants of Judea, should be composed not only of foot-soldiers, but of chariots and horsemen, furnished with all the implements of war. The chariots anciently used in war by the eastern nations, were drawn by horses; and in each chariot were two men, one of whom took the direction of the chariot, whilst the other was employed in fighting against the enemy. At each end of the axle, scythes were fastened, that they might cut in pieces the men and horses which came within their reach. Such were the forces who should march into Judea, and attack the city Jerusalem.—*And Kir uncovered the shield*. The men of Kir, which was probably a city belonging to the Medes, were at this time subject to the Assyrians, or their auxiliaries in war, were renowned for their bravery, and their skill in the management of the shield. These warriors were likewise to form part of the troops destined to march into the valley of vision.

7 And it shall come to pass *that* thy choicest valleys shall be full of chariots, and the horsemen shall set themselves in array at the gate.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem were informed, that prodigious numbers of forces were to occupy the richest and most fruitful fields in Judea, and to advance even to the gates of the metropolis.—Canaan, being a mountainous country, abounded with well-watered,

watered, fruitful valleys, which produced the most luxuriant crops. Such was the valley of Rephaim, and others which were situated in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and were remarkable for their superlative excellence and fertility. These choice valleys, which were wont to be clad with the best vines and finest corns, were to be covered with chariots and horsemen, at the period to which this prophecy looked forward. What a contrast did their condition at that time form, when compared to their former flourishing state! That city, which had been renowned for beauty, faithfulness, holiness, and righteousness, became infamous for almost every species of wickedness; and therefore God, after having exercised much long-suffering patience toward a provoking people, sent against them the Assyrians, Medes, and Persians, who carried their arms into the very heart of the country, and spread desolation and ruin wherever they went. Their calamities and sorrows were greatly multiplied by their atrocious transgressions.— In the contemplation of the awful judgments of God, by whomsoever executed, let us ascribe righteousness to our Maker, who punishes less than mens iniquities deserve. Of the truth of this remark, you may be satisfied by reading the words of the Lord to his servant Ezekiel, when he was ordered to shew the inhabitants of Jerusalem all their abominations. They are charged with having been guilty of blood, with having defiled themselves with idols, with setting light by father and mother, with distressing the stranger, vexing the fatherless and the widow, despising God's holy things, and profaning his Sabbaths, with greedily gaining by extortion, and forgetting the Lord their God*. Let us carefully avoid those iniquities, which never fail to accelerate divine judgments. This lesson, which I have often inculcated in various forms, requires to be frequently repeated, that we may learn

* Ezek. xxii. 3.

it well, and be effectually taught the important practical instruction which it is suited to convey.—This prediction was accomplished, when Rabshakeh, the general of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, with a vast army, laid siege to Jerusalem; and the rich valleys, in the vicinity of that city, were occupied not only by foot-soldiers, but by chariots and horsemen, under the command of that officer.

8 ¶ And he discovered the covering of Judah, and thou didst look in that day to the armour of the house of the forest.

Another circumstance is here mentioned, relating to the Assyrian expedition against Judah and Jerusalem.—A learned writer * is of opinion, that the covering of Judah was the mask of hypocrisy, which they had assumed to conceal their wickedness, and under cover of which, they perpetrated the most enormous crimes. In this view, the blessed God is the Agent who removed this covering; and who informs the men of Judah, that he suffered their enemies to invade their land and city, that he might lay open their hypocrisy and carnal security, and cure them of their corruption and depravity. I suppose the person to whom our prophet ascribes the action of which he speaks, was Sennacherib, whose horsemen and chariots were mentioned in the preceding verse. By the covering may be meant, the fortified cities in Judea, which preserved and defended the frontiers of the country from the hostile invasion of enemies. The Hebrew words may be thus translated impersonally, ‘And the covering of Judah is discovered.’ The fenced cities of Judah were removed and destroyed by the Assyrians, in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah’s reign, when Sennacherib came up against all the fortified cities in Judea, and took

* Dr. Lightfoot.

them, as you read in the thirty-sixth chapter of this prophecy.

And thou didst look in that day to the armour of the house of the forest. Isaiah, speaking under the immediate influence of the spirit of prophecy, specifies various circumstances which were then future, with equal precision as if he had been describing what he had seen. The king and people of Judah, alarmed at the report of the Assyrian invasion, and terrified at the approach of the enemy, were to consult for the safety of Jerusalem and of the kingdom. The first step to be taken, in order to elude the impending danger, was to examine the armour contained in the house of the forest. This was a very elegant and sumptuous building, erected by king Solomon; one hundred cubits in length, and fifty cubits in breadth, and the height thereof was thirty cubits. It was supported by four rows of cedar-pillars, with cedar-beams upon the pillars*. This magnificent structure stood upon that part of mount Sion which was called Ophel, nigh to the south-east corner of the city-wall. It was probably called the house of the forest of Lebanon, because the materials of which it was built, were brought chiefly from that noble forest. In this armory, king Solomon laid up two hundred targets of beaten gold, and three hundred shields of beaten gold †. The prince and people in Jerusalem, on hearing the report of the Assyrian expedition, carefully inspected this arsenal, to see if it contained the implements of war which were necessary, on the present alarming occasion, for the defence of the capital.— In every attack made upon you, Christians, in the spiritual warfare, take unto you the whole armour of God; and, as you may be unexpectedly assaulted, learn, from the precaution here mentioned, to be always prepared, that, on every emergency, you may resist your many powerful enemies.

* 1 Kings vii. 2.

† 1 Kings x. 16, 17.

9 Ye have seen also the breaches of the city of David, that they are many: and ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool.

Our prophet particularly describes the several steps to be taken by the prince and people in Jerusalem, at the critical juncture to which he refers, as if he had been an actual spectator of the whole affair; and, by this delineation of circumstances, he gave early notice of the timidity and consternation which were to prevail at the period to which he looked forward. Properly speaking, the city of David was the fort or strong hold of Zion, which that renowned prince took from the Jebusites; and around which he built a wall, wherein some breaches had been made by the ravages of time, or the assaults of enemies. These were to be carefully inspected, that they might be immediately repaired, and put into a proper state of defence. Having been too long neglected, they endangered the safety of the city, and therefore no time was to be lost in getting them made up.—*And ye gathered together the waters of the lower pool.* From the fountain of Siloam, anciently called Gihon, the waters were conveyed, by two conduits, into two pools, or reservoirs; one of which was called the Upper, or Pool of Solomon, and the other the Lower, or Pool of Siloam. In the prospect of the city being besieged by the Assyrians, the waters of the pool last-mentioned, were to be directed into another course, or conveyed into a new reservoir. This expedient might be intended to serve a double purpose; namely, to deprive the besiegers of a large supply of water, which was converted to the benefit of the besieged.—This prudent measure, adopted by the king of Judah, and the citizens of Jerusalem, in time of imminent danger, ought to excite us to take every wise precaution in our power, that we may escape the perils to which we are exposed. Let us however do more than they did: let us trust in God, to accompany the
means

means that we use with his blessing, and to render them effectual for our deliverance.

10 And ye have numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall.

More preventive measures were to be employed by the inhabitants of the city beside those already mentioned, for the purposes of defence and safety.—Ye will carefully reckon the number of houses in Jerusalem, and diligently inspect their condition, that ye may be able to determine which, and how many of them must be demolished with the least hurt to the city, for repairing the walls and the towers, and so fortifying them, that they may sustain the assaults of the enemy. Perhaps they were also desirous to know the number of people which lived within the walls, that from thence a judgment might be formed of the quantity of provisions necessary for their support, and of the length of time they might be able to stand out against the besiegers.—In times of imminent danger, private property must be sacrificed to the public safety: all must contribute according to their ability, and the urgent necessity of the case, when called upon toward the support of the state. Every individual ought to unite his endeavours for promoting the general good, particularly in seasons that are critical.

11 Ye made also a ditch between the two walls, for the water of the old pool: but ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago.

Another precaution is here mentioned, which, at the time referred to in this prophecy, was to be taken for the safety of the city. A ditch should be formed between the inner and outer walls, for conveying water unto those parts of the city which most
needed

needed it. The water of the old pool was to be disposed of in such a manner as might most effectually promote the benefit of the citizens, and prevent the enemy deriving any advantage from it. To assist you in understanding this prediction, you may compare it with the history of its accomplishment, recorded 2 Chron. xxxii. 2. *et seq.* From that passage of scripture we learn, that, after the news of the Assyrian expedition reached Jerusalem, by the attention and care of Hezekiah and the citizens, the walls of the city were repaired, the fountains were stopped, and prevented from giving assistance to those who were employed in carrying on the siege.

But ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago. God himself was the Maker of Jerusalem, who fashioned it long ago. He formed the plan of it in his counsel and purpose, wherein were fixed all the various conditions of mankind, and all the events which happen in every place and period of time. Chance and accident are terms expressive of human ignorance, and are applied to those circumstances and events which are unthought of and unexpected by men. He, whose kingdom ruleth over all, hath determined the times, and, I may add, the places before appointed, and the bounds of our habitations. This plan had been long since punctually executed, by those whom divine wisdom employed for this purpose.—To this great Builder of Jerusalem, the inhabitants neither looked, nor had respect. They did not contemplate and adore God with faith and reverence, with penitence and confidence; nor did they diligently attend to the operations of his providence and grace. They did not suitably acknowledge the divine goodness, in which they had largely participated; nor did they set a proper value upon the important advantages that they had enjoyed. They did not earnestly implore his kind protection; nor did they depend upon the divine blessing, to prosper the
means

means which they used for their preservation and defence: neither did they act with a single regard to his approbation and glory; but relied more on their own exertions than upon God, from whom alone cometh salvation.—In all our enterprizes, let us look to the Lord, whose providence extends to all his creatures, and all their actions, for direction; assistance, and blessing. Let us place unlimited confidence in that infinitely great and benevolent Being, who is so powerful, that he can do whatever he pleaseth; so wise, that he always doth what is best for those who, in the way of duty, and use of means, intrust themselves to his care.

12 And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth.

The sensuality and carnal security which were to prevail, at the period wherein this prophecy was to receive its accomplishment, is here strongly represented. I suppose, that the day spoken of by our prophet, includes the time wherein the servants of God were faithfully employed in denouncing awful judgments against the wicked and profane among the Jews, and foretelling the terrible evils that awaited them. These salutary counsels and admonitions they foolishly rejected, and obstinately persisted in contemning the judgments of God; nay, the nearer that they approached, the more they set them at nought. To such a height in wickedness did they arrive, that to many the word of the Lord was a reproach, and predicted calamities were heard of with the greatest indifference. The crimes which are here mentioned, were not chargeable upon the whole of that people; for there were among them not a few upright, good men, who formed the holy seed, that were the substance thereof, the remnant who returned to the mighty God. The persons chiefly intended,
were

were the rulers, and great men of the nation, concerned in the administration of public affairs, who, despising divine predictions, and instructive warnings, indulged in profanity, sensuality, and other sins. Persons of this character, are the bane and ruin of every society with which they are connected, and often bring upon themselves swift destruction; of which a remarkable instance occurs in the latter part of this chapter.

The Lord God of hosts did call to weeping, &c. Through divine mercy, the Jewish nation enjoyed the important advantage of being warned, by the servants of the Most High, respecting approaching calamities, and of being invited to repentance, that they might prevent the threatened evils from being executed.—Weeping is one effect of true penitence, when the heart is penetrated with an affecting sense of sin and guilt; and therefore repentance is sometimes expressed in scripture by this external sign, as in Joel i. 5. where the prophet thus speaks, ‘Awake, ye drunkards, weep and howl, &c.’ A renowned ancient philosopher pronounced weeping to be unworthy of a man; and affirmed, that it was only for women and children*. Though weeping, in many cases, proceeds from weakness and effeminacy, in other instances, it is perfectly consistent with true fortitude and magnanimity. To weep for fear of sufferings, or when sustaining them from the hand of man, is the effect of feebleness and timidity; but to weep before God, when we have sinned greatly, or suffer much from him, is the evidence of a tender heart, and a noble spirit. David, king of Israel, who feared neither a lion nor a bear, and who declared, that he would not be afraid though an host should encamp against him, acknowledged, that the Lord heard the voice of his weeping †. Jesus Christ himself wept over Jerusalem, on account of the miseries which were coming upon that city. When

* Plat. de Repub. Dial. iii.

† Psal. vi. 8.

therefore the Lord of hosts calls to weeping, he invites men not to a mean, unworthy employment, but to a suitable and proper exercise, which is further described in the following words :

And to mourning. The word denotes such pungent grief, arising from the prospect or experience of the greatest distresses, as is accompanied with those significant gestures that express inward sorrow of heart. As great mercies call for great joy, great afflictions call for great mourning. Mens affections and conduct ought always to correspond with divine dispensations, whether they are comfortable or calamitous. The people of Judah and Jerusalem were often called to sigh and mourn over those abominations whereby they exposed themselves to the righteous vengeance of the Almighty, and to deplore the awful, threatened judgments which would certainly overtake them, unless divine mercy and speedy repentance interposed. In every view then, whether they looked back to what they had done, or forward to what they had just reason to expect, they were called to mourning, and to the exercise of true penitence.—*And to baldness.* Shaving off the hair, or making bald the head, was anciently considered as a symbol of intense grief, as I had occasion to remark from chap. xv. 2. Hence the prophet Jeremiah, when he informed the generation of God's wrath, that he had rejected and forsaken them, immediately adds, 'Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation: mourn bitterly for thy deplorable condition.' Baldness being here joined with weeping and mourning, intimates the extreme sorrow with which the inhabitants of Jerusalem ought at this time to have been afflicted.—*And to girding with sackcloth.* I have formerly observed, that this practice was anciently adopted in times of great distress; many instances of which are recorded in scripture: a remarkable one occurs, 2 Kings xx. 31. In seasons of profound humiliation, and professed repentance for sin,
people

people likewise girded themselves with sackcloth, as is plainly intimated in the words of Jesus Christ, respecting Sodom and Gomorrah *. To this expression of humiliation and repentance, the men of Judah and Jerusalem were often called, by the dispensations of providence, and by the discourses of the prophets; and to these calls they ought to have diligently hearkened, and to have yielded a prompt obedience.

True wisdom, my brethren, will direct to a suitable behaviour under afflictive dispensations; and will teach to avoid both the extremes into which we are apt to run in times of trouble, of despising the chastening of the Lord, and fainting when we are rebuked of him. We ought not to make light of divine chastisements, by neglecting to cultivate the temper and conduct which they inculcate, and to comply with the design which they are manifestly intended to promote: nor may we faint under his afflicting hand, by laying aside the exercise of patience and fortitude, and giving way to sullenness, despondency, or dejection. Insensibility to divine rebukes formed an article in the heavy charge brought against the inhabitants of Jerusalem by the prophet Jeremiah: ‘Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction †.’ Let us then hearken to the calls of God, and carefully avoid security and indifference in seasons of distress, with every thing unbecoming that condition.

13 And behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.

These words, taken in connection with the preceding verse, clearly point out the crime with which the

* Matth. xi. 21.

† Jer. v. 3.

citizens of Jerufalem were charged. Instead of weeping and mourning, in obedience to the call of God, they indulged in mirth and feftivity, in criminal indifference to futurity, and a profane contempt of divine warnings and divine judgments. This finful opposition to the call of God, they discovered in their temper, in their practice, and in their language.— In their temper, they were glad and joyful. The Jewish people were not only allowed, but required, to rejoice in the valuable benefits wherewith they were favoured by the bounty of providence. This joy however, in earthly things, ought always to be moderate, and qualified by a conviction of their mutability and uncertainty, and appropriated to seasons that are most suited to this exercise. Joy and gladness are undoubtedly lawful, useful, and expedient, at proper seasons. ‘A merry heart, saith Solomon, is a continual feast, and doth good like a medicine.’ This affection however becomes highly criminal, when it transgresses due bounds, or is indulged when persons ought to be otherwise employed. There is a time to rejoice, and a time to mourn. That rejoicing then must be evil, which occupies the season wherein men ought to be employed in humiliation and prayer, in fasting, and deprecating deserved, threatened calamities. Our prophet therefore, surpris’d at the insensibility of the people whom he reprov’d, introduces the subject with a note of admiration: *Behold, joy and gladness.* What a strange and uncomely sight is presented to my view, people grossly mistaking, yea, wilfully counteracting the call of divine providence, rejoicing when they ought to be mourning and weeping!

Slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine. In their practice, they joined feasting to their mirth. Slaying cattle, eating flesh, and drinking wine, are doubtless lawful and expedient on proper occasions. That the great Lord of all hath given power to men over the inferior creatures, and liberty

to use them, both for supplying their necessities, and for their agreeable entertainment, seems to be abundantly evident, not only from the divine grant, but from the vast number and variety of animals, which almost every where abound, notwithstanding the great numbers that are killed for use. Every season, however, is not adapted for feasting and conviviality. To be employed in festivity in the time of trouble and perplexity, to be engaged in feasting when we ought to be fasting, to rejoice when loudly called by the word and providence of God to mourning, discovers a criminal contempt of divine authority, and the most perverse inconsistency of temper and conduct. Is it a time for feasting, when the wrath of the Almighty is breaking forth against a people, when the kingdom abounds with fears and troubles, the walls of defence are broken down, and dreadful calamities are fast approaching? Surely, if people, in such times of public distress, rejoice in worldly things, it should be as if they rejoiced not; if they feast, it ought to be so managed, as if they feasted not. Indeed such seasons are here plainly intimated, to be quite improper for slaughter and entertainment.

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die. Luxury and indulgence in sensual pleasures, frequently accompanies carnal security, and a proud contempt of God. When Ephraim was filled, his heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me, saith the Lord*. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem, having laid aside fear of divine judgments, and all concern about another and better life, regardless of the remonstrances of conscience, and the admonitions of the prophets, encouraged one another in the practice of luxury and voluptuousness. Let us assiduously employ ourselves (said they) in gratifying our sensual appetites, and in grasping the pleasures of the present day, while we have opportunity, being assured, that

* Hosea xiii. 6.

death will soon come, and put an end to our enjoyments. The prospect of the impending ills which our prophet had foretold, instead of restraining from unlawful pleasures, was converted into an argument to excite each other to sensual gratifications.—*For to-morrow we shall die.* The prophet declares, that the Assyrians and Chaldeans will in a short time invade the kingdom, and lay siege to the metropolis, so that multitudes shall perish: at all events, life is uncertain, and we know not what a day may bring forth; let us then pass the remainder of our time in fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.—In this manner, the profane, among the Jewish nation, expressed their insolent contempt of the divine authority, their odious sensuality, their gross stupidity, and shocking infidelity. They made provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof, when they ought to have been laying up a good foundation for the time to come.—Let us guard with attention against the wicked abuse of the divine goodness and patience. Beware of those false reasonings whereby sinners derive encouragement to do evil, from those very considerations which ought to produce the contrary effects. There is something so perverse, so monstrous in this conduct, that we might be apt to suspect that the Jews were unjustly accused, were we not more or less convicted of this horrid baseness by our own consciences. Carefully avoid this foolish disingenuous course, whereby we sin against God, and wrong our own souls.

14 And it was revealed in mine ears by the LORD of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you, till ye die, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.

Our prophet here declares, that God had made known to him that he would certainly punish those who were guilty of the crimes above mentioned, and
acquaints

acquaints us in what manner he received this information. *And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts.* A voice from God gently whispered it in his ear. In this manner God was pleased to communicate his mind to the prophet Samuel*, and to Isaiah upon another occasion, chap. v. 9. This mode of conveying instruction intimates, that this matter was revealed to him in a secret and familiar manner, as a man imparts somewhat that is concealed to a friend—that, at the same time, it was clearly and distinctly communicated to him, so that he could not mistake what he heard.—That which was thus revealed to our prophet, is expressed in the words which follow: *Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you, till ye die.* The declaration is extremely awful, and certainly true. This iniquity, committed by the inhabitants of Judea and Jerusalem, of walking contrary to God, of counteracting the calls of his providence and of his servants, and contemning his authority, was attended with peculiar aggravations, and an enormous load of guilt. Such was the atrocity of their offence, that the Lord of hosts solemnly declares, that it shall not be purged, till they die. He would not permit the sin above described to pass unpunished, by temporal judgments in this world, and eternal judgments in the future state. In the words of Jesus Christ, they shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come †. There are some transgressions which God doth not recompense in this present world, which he will punish in the future state; others he avengeth in this life, but remits the punishment to which they expose in the eternal world. There are some sins, comprehending in them virulent opposition to his word and grace, and profane blasphemy against his dispensations and authority, which he punishes both here and hereafter. ‘The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his

* See 1 Sam. ix. 15.

† Matth. xii. 32.

‘ name

' name in vain *.' Of this sort was the wickedness of Judah and Jerusalem, spoken of in the preceding verses. The sin that is not pardoned until men die, is never forgiven †: in this present life only is transgression taken away. The import then of the expression before us will be, this iniquity which you have committed, by contemning divine admonitions and divine judgments, shall never be cleansed away, until ye die a miserable death, as the just desert of your crimes, and enter into that state wherein ye shall suffer inexpressible anguish and despair, and be exposed to the wrath of God, without any ray of hope, or mixture of consolation. To give the utmost certainty and solemnity to this affirmation, our prophet assures us, that it was uttered by the Lord of hosts.—From this alarming declaration we learn, that to reject the word of God's grace, to refuse his calls to repentance, to insult his servants, and obstinately to persist in contemning the means of salvation which he hath appointed, is one of the greatest crimes that men can commit, and exposes to the most dreadful punishment. Beware, my friends, of this aggravated iniquity: entreat that God may keep you back from this presumptuous sin, and let it not have dominion over you. When you are called to weeping and mourning, on account of past provocations and threatened calamities, be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up ‡.

15 ¶ Thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, Go, get thee unto this treasurer, *even* unto Shebna, which is over the house, *and say.*

We now enter upon the other part of this prophecy, which relates to Shebna; and was probably

* Exod. xx. 7. † See 1 Sam. xv. 35. ‡ James iv. 9, 10.

delivered,

delivered, with the former part, some time before the invasion of Judea by Sennacherib. The person to whom our prophet was sent, seems to have been the principal leader in that luxury and profanity, which was severely reprehended in the preceding verses. Shebna, the scribe, mentioned by Isaiah, in the history of Hezekiah, seems to have been a different person from Shebna, the treasurer or steward of the king's household, to whom this prophecy relates. This person, who was one of the chief officers of state, by a remarkable concurrence of circumstances, seems to have been elevated from a mean, obscure condition, to the high station which he now occupied, where, by his example and influence, during his administration, he became a leader in those transgressions which our prophet had been reproving.—To this man Isaiah received a message from the Lord God of hosts:

Go, get thee unto this treasurer, unto Shebna, who is over the house. He was not induced to take this measure by his own inclination, nor was he instigated to it by some of his fellow-citizens: the orders he received were from the Lord of hosts, who doth according to his pleasure in heaven and in earth. The commission runs in terms that required immediate execution: *Go, get thee unto this treasurer.* Decline not to perform in person this service which is now assigned thee: be not reluctant, or afraid, to deliver the message with which thou art intrusted. *Go, and plainly tell this man what I say unto thee: fear him not, however high the station that he holds, however great the power with which he is invested. 'Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to whomsoever I send thee; and whatsoever I command, that shalt thou speak. Be not afraid of his face: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord*.'*—When God is pleased to employ us in any service,

* Jer. i. 7, 8.

let us remember by whose authority we act, and whose work we are executing; and let us endeavour to perform it with alacrity and fidelity, humbly depending upon him, who sends none a warfare upon their own charges, for direction, strength, and comfort, for courage, liberty of speech, and every assistance that circumstances may require. Whilst a conviction of our own insufficiency should render us modest and humble, a just sense that we act in obedience to the divine command, and that the divine power is engaged for our protection, ought to render us easy and intrepid, even in the midst of danger and difficulties.

16 What hast thou here? and whom hast thou here, that thou hast hewed thee out a sepulchre here, *as* he that heweth him out a sepulchre on high, *and* that graveth an habitation for himself in a rock?

Our prophet introduces the message with which the Lord God sent him to Shebna, by reproving his pride and haughtiness. This treasurer of the exchequer was so confident of the stability of his present elevated station, that he seems to have entertained little suspicion of being dismissed from his office, and turned out of his country. Arrogant and vain, conceited and elated with the dignity to which he was raised, he determined to prepare for himself, in a conspicuous place, a superb sepulchral monument, like those which belonged to the royal family of Judah. By the execution of this foolish project, he no doubt intended to give a public proof of his scepticism and infidelity, and his contempt of our prophet and the other servants of God, who predicted the approaching calamities which threatened the destruction of Jerusalem. When Isaiah went to him with the message he carried from God, he met him in the place where he determined to build a magnificent

cent sepulchre, near to those of the kings of the house of David, to the south of Jerusalem. With peculiar propriety, therefore, doth he propose this inquiry to Shebna,

What hast thou here? and whom hast thou here? What business is this in which thou art employed in this place, appropriated to the royal family for burying-ground? Dost thou arrogantly presume to build a sepulchral monument for thyself beside the sepulchres of the kings?—Whom hast thou here, of thy fathers, or friends, that can entitle thee to lay claim to the honour of erecting, on this conspicuous spot, a tomb for thyself? In this manner was Shebna upbraided with his intolerable pride and vanity, in raising such a splendid monument for himself, which, in respect of situation and elegance, far exceeded any thing to which he could have just pretensions. Our prophet intimates, that it was hewn out of a rock; and therefore must have been a work of great labour and expence, intended to transmit the memory of its proprietor to subsequent generations. He observes its elevated situation, by which it claimed attention, and rendered the person by whom it was erected more renowned. He likewise notices, that the work was beautifully executed, and rather resembled a sumptuous habitation for the living than a receptacle for the dead.—The best of men have been careful to provide decent burial-places for themselves and families. Abraham, for this end, bought a cave in the field of Machpelah; king Aſa made a sepulchre for himself in the city of David; and Joseph, of Arimathea, had a new tomb, hewn out of a rock, wherein our blessed Saviour's body was interred. We do not then suppose, that Shebna was reproved for providing to himself a sepulchre, but on account of his pride, vain-glory, and infidelity, which required to be sharply reprimanded. Recollect what you have heard from the preceding part of this prophecy, and you may be convinced of the folly and arrogance

arrogance of attempting to erect such a fine tomb, at the very time he was informed of approaching calamities.—Happy they, who, when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, have an house not made with hands, eternal with God in the heavens; who, when absent from the body, are present with the Lord; and whose flesh doth rest in hope of a glorious resurrection, when soul and body being reunited, they shall be received, to be ever with the Lord!

17 Behold, the LORD will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, and will surely cover thee.

In this and the two following verses, is denounced the just judgment which God had determined to execute upon this treasurer of king Hezekiah's household, with which our prophet was ordered to acquaint him on this occasion.—Though thou, O mighty man! hast said, in the height of thy prosperity, I shall never be moved, I shall never see adversity; and, in proof that such are thy sentiments, thou hast built for thyself a magnificent sepulchre, yet, ere long, thou shalt be convinced of thy fatal mistake. The Lord assumes the prerogative of punishing thee according to thy wickedness, whatever part men may perform in the matter. The righteous Lord declares, that he will carry thee away with a mighty captivity, which thou shalt not be able to resist, and which thou shalt find impossible to escape.—*And will surely cover thee*, with shame and reproach, so that thy name, which thou art endeavouring to perpetuate by this splendid monument, shall be buried in obscurity and contempt, and thou shalt be neglected and forgotten.—When the wrath of the Almighty goeth forth against a man, human power cannot retain him in his place. Though he may seem to be firmly established in his present condition, yet he shall be driven as chaff or dust before the wind, from the possession of the riches, the ho-

nours, and pleasures, upon which he greatly doted, and on account of which he was much admired. There is nothing in this world but may quickly leave us; and, though our present enjoyments may be continued, we may suddenly be dismissed from the station that we occupy, and our circumstances be entirely reversed.

18 He will surely violently turn and toss thee, *like* a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there the chariots of thy glory *shall be* the shame of thy lord's house.

Our prophet proceeds to describe the deplorable condition to which this proud profane man should be reduced, and the irresistible judgments wherewith he was to be seized.—So expressive and forcible are the Hebrew words here used, that our language hardly admits of their being literally translated. Word for word they may be rendered, In tossing he will toss thee with a tossing. Shebna was not simply told, that he was to be tossed; but he was informed, that this event would surely and inevitably happen, and that he should be violently driven from place to place, by such a mighty force as he could not withstand.—This is illustrated by a striking comparison: *Like a ball into a large country.* Almighty God would drive him from his place with as great violence as a man doth a ball which he strikes, not in a narrow confined place, where he hath not room to exert himself, and where the ball, by hitting some object, may soon be stopt in its progress—but as a ball in a large country, where there is plentiful scope for it in every direction it can receive, and where, being tossed from hand to hand, it is not suffered to be at rest. In this manner the Most High was to toss the treasurer of king Hezekiah's household, and to drive him from his office, his house, and his country.—Neither power nor dignity can screen wicked men from the
wrath

wrath of the Lord. Thou carriest them away, saith Moses, as an overflowing flood. God sendeth upon them violent overwhelming judgments, which, like a great inundation, carry all before them. Of this a remarkable instance lies now before us.

There shalt thou die; viz. in the country where he was to be in exile, probably in circumstances of meanness and poverty, forming a contrast to those which he once enjoyed, despised and contemned as much as ever he had been honoured when in office at court. In him might be verified the words of upright Job, ‘Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place*’; insulting over this haughty vain-glorious man, and his downfall, and treating him with marks of disgrace. All men triumph at the ruin of proud, wicked, great men: even the righteous rejoice when they see vengeance executed upon them, because one great obstruction to their peace and prosperity is removed, the righteousness of God is manifested in his judgments, his veracity is confirmed in executing his threatenings, and fulfilling the desires of his people, whilst they are admonished to avoid those dangerous paths wherein others have fallen and perished. Unless our rejoicing at the fall of the wicked, is improved for promoting our own steadfastness, our rejoicing is evil.—Another circumstance is added relative to this event, which is also worthy of attention:

The chariots of thy glory shall be the shame of thy lord's house. The chariots here intended, were the splendid carriages in which this haughty treasurer was accustomed to ride with great pomp and magnificence, and by which he discovered his excessive pride and vanity. These chariots were to become the shame of his master's house. Hezekiah, who now sat upon the throne of Judah, was a man of excellent dispositions, well affected to the worship of God, and therefore he

* Job xxvii. 23.

would doubtless encourage those who were religious. Shebna, with some others of a different description, who probably were the servants of his father Ahaz, continued in office for a considerable time after this good prince commenced his reign. By the treasurer's expulsion from his elevated station, and his disgraceful exile in a foreign country, some reproach, or odium, was to be brought on his master's house. Men might say, on hearing or seeing his disgrace and infamy, Is this the man who was treasurer to king Hezekiah, who used to ride in his chariot with a great retinue? his wicked conduct, and reversed condition, are a shame to that prince.—How miserable are those who, instead of being lamented and sympathized with in the day of their calamity, die unregretted, and are as it were jeered out of the world into the presence of that God, who hath said, 'He will mock when their fear cometh as desolation, and their destruction as a whirlwind!' As we would avoid ignominy, and becoming a reproach to our Lord's house, let us beware of degrading ourselves by acting unworthy of our profession. He alone who truly honoureth God, is worthy of being honoured by men; and he only aright sustains reproach, who views it as the consequence of his neglecting to honour God as he requires.

19 And I will drive thee from thy station, and from thy state shall he pull thee down.

In these words, the punishment to be inflicted upon Shebna is more particularly described.—To make way for the advancement of Eliakim, our prophet declares in the name of the Lord of hosts, that this treasurer was to be deprived of the honourable post which he now held, and that he should be divested of his character of prime minister of state. In this exalted station he had probably been confirmed by means of the riches he had acquired, and the connections

nections he had formed; and from this respectable office, it seems, he could not easily be dismissed. A great effort was requisite to drive him from his station; an event which the Almighty informed him he would certainly accomplish.—In the latter part of the verse, the form of expression is elegantly changed, from the first to the third person; many instances of which occur in the prophetic writings*.—By this prediction we are taught, that God will not only inflict divine judgments upon nations, but upon individuals, however high their rank, who act perfidiously in their office, and employ their influence to injure the interests of his people: and, by the speedy accomplishment of what is here foretold, God verified the word which he spake by Isaiah, and gave a new and striking proof of the divine authority whereby he acted.

20 ¶ And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah.

At the time when Shebna was to fall into disgrace, he is here informed, that Eliakim was to be elevated to his dignity, and to be invested in his office.—No piece of intelligence could have been more shocking to this proud and arrogant man, than that which was now communicated to him. Language cannot describe the condition in which he now felt himself, when told, that he was to be deprived of his high station, to be banished into a foreign country, and to die in misery—and that Eliakim, a man of a very different description from him, was to fill his place. Disappointment, vexation, envy, indignation, with other uneasy passions, must have alternately operated in his mind, and made him feel more than can be expressed.—Though Eliakim, which signifies, My

* See Isaiah xxxiv. 16.

God will advance me, or establish me in a sure place, was a name frequent among the Jews, it was with peculiar propriety given to the son of Hilkiah, who was raised, by divine providence, to a post of great eminence. Nothing certain can now be said concerning this illustrious person, unless what is learned from this passage of scripture, and the history of Hezekiah's reign. In chap. xxxvi. 3. of this book, he is mentioned as a man of distinguished rank, who, with Shebna the scribe, and Joab the recorder, was delegated by the king of Judah to confer with Rabshakeh, and the other Assyrian generals, as to the hard and iniquitous demands made upon Hezekiah and his people. About the same time, in the precarious state of public affairs, he was sent by that upright prince to consult with Isaiah, to request his prayers, and to get from him what information, respecting the will of God, he was at liberty to communicate. From these circumstances, Eliakim seems to have been a very respectable man, of a good family, one who had got good education, and was possessed of considerable learning, for he understood the Syrian as well as the Jewish language. He appears also to have been a prudent man, of amiable dispositions and manners, and a devout godly person, who feared the Lord above many; an eminent servant of God, who worshipped him, and obeyed his will. His humility, benevolence, and public spirit, were conspicuous at the time of the Assyrian invasion. When he brought from Rabshakeh the haughty message which he carried to king Hezekiah, he appeared with his clothes rent; and, on that occasion, after the example of his sovereign, he put on sackcloth. In every respect he formed a perfect contrast to Shebna, his immediate predecessor, in the office of treasurer of the king's household; and, from his whole character, we conclude, that he must have proved a substantial blessing to the prince, the court, and the people of Judah.—

Such was the illustrious person, whom God declared by

by Ifaiah, that he would call to fill up the important office occupied by Shebna. By the fecret powerful operation of his providence, he would qualify this man to fill the high office for which he was defigned, and fo direct the counfels of king Hezekiah, that he fhould appear to that monarch the moft proper perfon to fupply the vacant treafurerfhip, and that, in preference to all others, he fhould be promoted to this high ftation. Thus did God qualify and appoint him to the important office affigned him by his prince.—Let us carefully attend to this circumftance, as it refpects ourfelves. Are we called of God to the feveral employments in which we are engaged? Hath God, in his providence, defigned us for the ftation that we occupy? hath he furnifhed us with abilities neceffary for the faithful performance of the duties connected with it? and hath he difpofed us not to decline the fervice he allots us, as did Jonah; nor to be weary of the difficulties with which, at particular times, it is attended, as did Jeremiah? then may we hope, that God hath called us to our work, as he did his fervant Eliakim to the office that he filled with integrity and honour.

21 And I will clothe him with thy robe, and ftrengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand, and he fhall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerufalem, and to the houfe of Judah.

Our prophet proceeds to inform Shebna, of the certain elevation of Eliakim, and his investiture in the poft of honour which he now held.—According to the custom of the Jewish nation, there was a robe which belonged to the treafurer of the houfehold, wherein, on proper occafions, he appeared, as a mark of dignity, and a badge of office. This robe, like thofe belonging to fome other offices, might probably be very rich and coltly, embroidered with gold,
and

and ornamented with precious stones. With this robe, that now belonged to Shebna as treasurer, God declared by Isaiah, that he would clothe Eliakim, plainly intimating by this expression, that he would invest him in his office and dignity.—*And strengthen him with thy girdle.* Girdles were anciently worn by priests and prophets, by military men, and the people in general, in those countries where long garments were in use. A fine girdle, made of costly materials, was, it seems, another badge of office, which, at this time, belonged to Shebna: this girdle God declares, he would transfer, along with the robe above mentioned, to his servant Eliakim, whom he was to put in possession of all the insignia belonging to that office.—*And I will commit thy government into his hand.* The great dignity and authority, with the extensive jurisdiction connected with the treasurership, were wholly to devolve upon Eliakim, and to be intrusted in his hands: and all the important advantages in which it invested him, with the influence of office, were to be employed for the benefit of the people.—*And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah.* The benevolent good man would not only assist his prince with salutary counsel, but, having the welfare of the kingdom at heart, he would exercise a paternal care over the people, and act toward them with the affection and authority of a parent. Viewing him as standing connected in this relation with the inhabitants of Jerusalem, he would take care to have all their necessities supplied, and to have them furnished with useful instruction; he would watch over their interests; he would endeavour to protect them from danger, and to assist them in prosecuting their businesses with success. He would realize, in his conduct, the beautiful character which upright Job thus describes: ‘ I put
‘ on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment
‘ was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the
‘ blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father
‘ to

‘ to the poor ; and the cause which I knew not, I
 ‘ searched out *.’——Robes and girdles are only external ornaments, the appendages of high rank, and the badges of office, which serve to attract the admiration of the multitude, to command respect, and to distinguish those who wear them from those over whom they preside. Piety, benevolence, and good conduct, paternal sollicitude, friendly offices, and strong exertions for the benefit of the people, are the best distinctions which great officers, in the service of their country, can possess. Ye great men, hearken to the still small voice that is directed to you from afar : imitate Eliakim ; and let us have the pleasure of seeing in your conduct, the amiable excellencies and virtues which adorned this illustrious character, highly worthy of your attention. Happy the treasurer who acts the part of a parent toward the people ! happy the city and nation who have such a treasurer as Eliakim over the king’s household.

22 And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder : so he shall open, and none shall shut ; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

In this verse, the prophet more fully explains in what manner Eliakim should be invested in his new office, and how he was to act in that honourable station.—At his inauguration, he was to receive all the insignia belonging to the post to which he was promoted. Beside the robe and the girdle, a key was to be laid upon his shoulder, or the image of a key was to be embroidered upon the shoulder of his coat, as another badge of his office. In this mode of investiture, there is an obvious allusion to the practice of admitting persons into families to act in the character of stewards, who receive the keys, whereby they

* Job xxix. 14, 15, 16.

are to open and shut the apartments in which the various articles of provision are deposited for the use of the household. The key was the ensign of the important trust, and extensive power, conferred upon him, by his preferment to be treasurer to the king of Judah; and his family, which is here called the house of David, in as much as he was lineally descended from that illustrious prince. The key being laid upon Eliakim's shoulder might intimate, that the trust and power wherewith he was invested was a heavy burden, which required great prudence, integrity, and fortitude, to sustain with honour to himself and his royal master. As a key serves to open and shut, to give access to the house or apartment to which it belongs, or to exclude from them, so the key of the house of David laid upon Eliakim, signified the power committed to him of administering the government, of managing the domestic and public affairs of the kingdom of Judah.

So he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. In consequence of his promotion, none shall be able to counteract what he doth: he shall abase one, and exalt another: he shall enjoy the exclusive privilege of admitting proper persons into the royal presence, and of keeping out the unworthy. All inferior officers were to be subject to the control of this faithful prudent minister, and to receive their orders from him. The treasury, with the silver and gold which were therein deposited; the arsenal, with all the military stores which it contained; the household, and all the stores which belonged to it, were to be under his direction, and entirely at his disposal. All these he was to open and shut at pleasure, as he apprehended necessity or propriety required.—In allusion to what is here said concerning Eliakim, our blessed Saviour told the apostle Peter, after having made the noble confession, that he was Christ, the Son of the living God, ‘ I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind

‘ on

‘ on earth, shall be bound in heaven ; and whatsoever
 ‘ thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven *.’

The meaning of this declaration seems to be, that, after his ascension into glory, he would give the apostle ability and commission to explain the gospel, which unfolds to view the celestial kingdom of God, the treasures of divine grace, and the glorious prerogatives belonging to those who are admitted into it. Then he, with his fellow-apostles, were to be endowed with power from on high, to open the door of faith, first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles ; to declare to the church what is lawful and unlawful, what is commanded, and what is forbidden.—As good stewards of the manifold grace of God, let us minister the same one to another. From the beneficent Lord of all, every man hath received some gift, by which he may be enabled to advance the good of others. To some he hath given riches, to others authority ; to some learning, to others eloquence ; to some wisdom, and to others strength. Every man hath received some talent : no man is entrusted with every talent. As in nature, where nothing is altogether useless, and nothing self-sufficient, so it is among mankind. This consideration ought to preserve the meanest from discontent, and the greatest from pride ; and excite us to the diligent improvement of what we have received. We are not proprietors ; we are only stewards, who ought, with prudence, fidelity, and diligence, to employ all the talents with which we are intrusted, for the good of the household, and the honour of our Master in heaven.

23 And I will fasten him *as* a nail in a sure place ; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father’s house.

The stability and glory that Eliakim was to acquire, in the enjoyment of his elevated station, are here fore-

* Matth. xvi. 19.

told.—As it is difficult to obtain a post of eminence, and to sustain the labours and cares connected with places of honour and trust, so it is no less difficult to retain them with fidelity and reputation. Shebna was informed, that Eliakim should not only succeed him in the office of treasurer which he now held, but that, after his preferment, he was not, like his predecessor, to fall into disgrace, but to be established, in his high station, with equal firmness as a nail that is driven into solid timber, where it remains immovable. Nails, you know, serve for two purposes; namely, to fasten together the several parts of which pieces of complicated workmanship are composed, and to support the different articles of household-furniture that are hung upon them. In allusion to these uses to which nails are applied, great statesmen are elegantly compared to them, because they unite and strengthen the various parts of which the empire is constituted, and give them firmness and stability. They are also the means and instruments of supporting those in lower stations, who depend upon them for aid and assistance. This metaphor was employed by Ezra the scribe, in the humble confession that he made before God, when recounting the benefits which the Lord had conferred upon his countrymen: ‘And now (said he) for a little space grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place *;’ *i. e.* a settled fixed residence. The expression here used concerning Eliakim, may import, that God would so establish him in the honourable office in which he was to be invested, that he should have a fixed permanent possession of it, like a nail that hath been driven into a sure place, from which it cannot easily be removed—that, in this high station, he was to be the instrument of uniting and

* Ezra ix. 8.

strengthening the nation, and giving support to those who depended upon him.

And he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. Though a nail fastened in a sure place, was a just emblem of the stability that Eliakim should enjoy, in the post of honour to which he was to be promoted, yet there being nothing grand or magnificent in this similitude, a beautiful description is subjoined, of the distinguished dignity, and extensive utility, of this faithful treasurer. The language is highly figurative, and exceeding emphatical, intimating, that, by his wise and upright administration, he should prove as great an honour and ornament to his father's family, as a splendid throne is to the prince who is seated upon it. In consequence of his establishment and fidelity in the important office formerly held by Shebna, the friends and connections of Eliakim were to be raised to respectable stations, and lucrative employments.—Behold, God exalteth by his power! by his invisible providence, he pulls down one, and raiseth another up; and establisheth him in the sure possession of the honour and influence to which he is advanced. We often discern not the reasons of such elevation, nor perceive the ends which are thereby to be accomplished. In such instances, let us adore the great Disposer of all persons and events, who doth in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, whatever pleaseth him. And let those who are advanced to stations of distinguished eminence remember, that it is their glory, next to promoting the public good, to provide for their connections and dependents, who need and deserve their assistance.

24 And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity: from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons.

The subject introduced in the preceding verse, is here amplified and illustrated.—In allusion to the metaphor used in the 23d verse, the inspired writer more fully explains the extensive good effects which were to result from the predicted promotion. The whole family of Hilkiab were to reap benefit from Eliakim's preferment: on his power and influence their hopes were to be suspended; and their future advancement depended entirely on his elevation. By an elegant figure, the meaning of which is easy to be understood, it is declared, that he should sustain all the glory, opulence, and splendor, of his father's house. All his kinsmen and relations, who had been occupied in the lower spheres of life, were, through the favour and influence of this worthy treasurer, to be advanced to more respectable places and employments.—*The offspring and the issue*, may denote the sons and daughters, the children and grandchildren, of the family. *All vessels of small quantity*; those of lesser abilities, and meaner occupations. *From the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons*. Persons of all capacities, whether great or small, were to be employed in businesses highly beneficial to the state, and to themselves. The words clearly enough import, that Eliakim's being established in the office of treasurer, should be the means of raising his father's family, even from the greatest to the least of them, to a flourishing prosperous condition.—This benevolent man viewed preferment and power in a proper light, as only valuable on account of the opportunities which they afforded of doing good, and serving the interests of society. What a substantial blessing would he be, not only to his friends, but to the whole kingdom of Judah! He would be a father to the orphan: he would give bread to the hungry, raiment to the naked, instruction to the ignorant, and support to the destitute and infirm. Conscious integrity, extensive usefulness, and a uniform attachment to goodness and righteousness, would fill his mind with agreeable

able serenity, when, after a long successful administration, he would resign his office, with words similar to those of the venerable prophet Samuel: ‘ Behold, here I am, witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whom have I defrauded? or whom have I oppressed *.’

25 In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall the nail *that is* fastened in the sure place, be removed, and be cut down and fall; and the burden that *was* upon it shall be cut off: for the LORD hath spoken *it*.

In these words, our prophet concludes the prediction concerning Eliakim, and confirms the sentence which he delivered concerning Shebna.—*In that day*, wherein the above prophecy shall be fulfilled—*saith the Lord of hosts*, who will accomplish it in due season—*shall the nail that is fastened in a sure place*: Shebna, who hath long been firmly fixed in the office of treasurer, shall be removed from his conspicuous station—and *be cut down and fall* suddenly, like a tree that is felled.—*And the burden that was upon it shall be cut off*. The enormous weight of dependents, who had been supported by Shebna, were to be excluded from the places that they enjoyed, and the honours to which they had been advanced. The whole faction, connected with that minister, were to be deprived of the offices which they held, to make room for the friends of Eliakim.—To give certainty and stability to this prophecy, it concludes with these solemn words, *For the Lord hath spoken it*.—Though history, so far as I know, is silent as to the remarkable event foretold in the verses we have now been considering, yet the circumstances mentioned are exceeding natural, and suited to the time in which Hezekiah sat upon the throne of Judah. This pro-

* 1 Sam. xii. 3.

phcey, I fuppofe, was literally fulfilled, by the difmiffion of Shebna from the office of treafurer, and his expulfion from Judea into a foreign country, where he clofed his life in ignominy and difgrace; and the promotion of Eliakim to that important office, which he held at the time the king of Affyria fent his generals, with a great hoft, againft Jerufalem *. At that period, he enjoyed all that authority and dignity affigned him by our prophet.

The fcheme of fcriptural prophecy extends through all ages; and is fo admirably contrived, as to adumbrate future and more illuftrious events, by preceding and lefs important tranfactions. This circumftance, which fhews the harmony and connection of the whole plan, could only be fignified in a mode of language that contracted and enlarged itfelf as the occafion required. Such is the fingular property of the fymbolic ftyle ufed by the prophets, that, whilft it adapts itfelf to fubjects lefs confiderable, which it ennobles, it exhibits greater fubjects, which it doth not diffigure. Methinks that I perceive fomewhat greater and more fublime in this prophecy, than the events by which it was literally accomplifhed, to which the writers of the New Teftament turn our attention. In the Epiftle which our Lord Jefus Chrift directed his fervant John to write to the church of Philadelphia, he affumes to himfelf the character attributed to Eliakim: ‘ He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man fhutteth; and fhutteth, and no man openeth †.’ In the parable he delivered concerning the unjuft fteward, recorded in the fixteenth chapter of Luke, what is written in the fecond verfe hath fome refemblance to the threatening denounced againft Shebna. From thefe and other paffages that might be mentioned, Shebna may be confidered as an emblem of the rulers and chief men of the Jewish nation, toward the conclufion of the former difpenfa-

* See 2 Kings xviii. 17, 18.

† Rev. iii. 7.

tion, many of whom were impious and profane. Like him, they discovered intolerable pride and arrogance, they contemned the awful judgments with which they were threatened, they promised themselves continuance in prosperity, and erected monuments to perpetuate their memory. Notwithstanding, they were violently removed from their high stations, they were divested of their honour and authority, and were driven from the land of Judea to wander in foreign countries, where they ignominiously perished. In the mean time, God was graciously pleased to raise up the true Eliakim, his righteous servant, whom he invested with supreme authority over the house of David, his chosen people. Being solemnly consecrated to the very important charge of managing all the concerns of his house, as a son, he was faithful in all things. He was clothed with the robe of righteousness, and girded with the girdle of faithfulness; and into his hands all power in heaven and in earth was committed, that he might be a father to his people, and grant them safety, prosperity, and consolation. On him were bestowed all the ensigns of universal government. He opens to himself the hearts of the children of men: he opens that door whereby, if any man enter in, he shall find rest to his soul. He hath the key of the invisible world, opening where no man can shut, and shutting where no man can open. He is firmly established in the government of the church and kingdom of God. He is at once its ornament, its glory, its builder, the foundation, and chief cornerstone, that communicates beauty, honour, and strength, to every individual of which it is composed. He exalts his friends to the highest dignity; and on him they all depend for the continuance of all the blessings they enjoy. Every prerogative, from the least to the greatest, flows from him to the church; every tongue confesseth him; all acceptable prayers are offered in his name; every duty is performed through his grace; and complete salvation is to be expected from the

merit of his obedience. What ample ground of devout meditation is here suggested! in which these few hints may, through the divine blessing, afford you some assistance.—Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who hast exalted Jesus Christ to be Head over all things to thy church, grant unto us, thy unworthy servants, thy holy Spirit, and enriching blessing, along with thy good word, that it may bring forth in us the fruits of holiness and righteousness, to thy honour and glory, through our only Mediator, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE eighth discourse, comprehended in the second part of Isaiah's prophecies, on which we now enter, unfolds the future fortunes of Tyre, a city which, at the time these predictions were delivered, was renowned for its strength, riches, and beauty. The citizens, enjoying a very extensive and lucrative trade, were immersed in luxury and dissipation, and elated with the many important advantages which they possessed. Whilst our prophet was employed by the holy Spirit, to announce the divine judgments with which the nations, surrounding Judea, were to be visited, we cannot be surpris'd to observe, that he did not omit the Tyrians. Looking forward by the spirit of prophecy, he beheld that proud and sportive city besieged and vanquish'd by its enemies; and the report of the conquest, having quickly reach'd the colonies which they had plant'd, and the cities connected with them by commerce, he exhorts them, as if present, to mourn and lament. He clearly foretells the heavy calamities with which the supreme Governor of the universe would punish them, by means of the Chaldeans; which should be so mitigated, at the elapse of seventy years, that the place was to be restor'd to its former power and grandeur, and the kingdom of God to be there establish'd. This is the subject of the following discourse, which is no less beautifully discuss'd than those that preceded it, and seems to have been primarily address'd to the Tyrians themselves.—From several circumstances that are here mention'd, it seems probable, that this prophecy was deliver'd about the third year of Hezekiah's reign, whilst Tyre was in a flourishing condition. Like those which we have already consider'd, it is intend'd to shew, that the God of Israel is the almighty Governor of the world, who perfectly knows all the contingent events of futurity, some of which he accurately

rately delineated by his servants the prophets long before they came to pass—to gain attention, and conciliate respect to the ministers of the word of God; and to shew, that our prophet, in particular, was divinely inspired—and to demonstrate the righteousness of Jehovah, in the dispensations of his providence, to which we ought carefully to attend. All the divine decrees are the determinations of infinite wisdom and equity; and therefore the execution of them is, in scripture, sometimes called judgment. The inhabitants of Tyre, by their pride and arrogance, their luxury and wantonness, by their envy at the people of God, the joy which they expressed at the desolation of Jerusalem, and their other crimes, brought upon themselves the calamities which are here foretold. By the promise of mercy, with which the prophecy concludes, the mystery of the calling of the Gentiles, to the participation of the privileges of the gospel, was in some measure unfolded.—After the inscription, the prophecy naturally divides itself into two parts. The first includes the judicial purpose of God concerning Tyre, the reasons on which it was founded, and the instruments by which it was to be executed, ver. 1.—14. The second gives assurance; that the divine judgments were to be greatly moderated; that the desolation of Tyre was to be confined within the space of seventy years, after which the city was again to flourish with its former splendor, and the citizens to be called to the service of the living God, to whose honour their riches were to be consecrated, ver 15. to the end.

CHAP. XXIII.

THE burden of Tyre. Howl, ye ships of Tarshish; for it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in: from the land of Chittim it is revealed to them.

The burden of Tyre: the oracle concerning Tyre, which predicted the awful judgments that God purposed to inflict on that city, as the just punishment of its transgressions.—Tyre, the subject of this prophecy, was a city of great renown through the whole world, and of no small celebrity among geographical and historical writers. It was remarkable for antiquity: some writers having been of opinion, that it was built by Tyrus, one of the sons of Japhet, soon after the flood; and others having asserted, that its foundations were laid by the Zidonians. Whoever were the builders, it was certainly one of the most ancient and most celebrated cities of Phœnicia, being famous for its extensive commerce, its wisdom, riches, and beauty, and the numerous colonies which were planted by its inhabitants. It was strongly built, and fortified upon an island, near seven hundred paces distant from the continent, about three or four hundred years before the temple of Jerusalem. It was surrounded by a strong wall, one hundred and fifty feet high, which was washed by the sea; and far surpassed, in grandeur, power, and opulence, the city of the same name, which stood at no great distance from it on the mainland. Its advantageous situation, and the industry of the people, raised it to the sovereignty of the seas; and rendered it the centre of all the trade carried on from the extreme parts of Arabia, India, and Persia, to the western coasts; and from Scythia, and the northern countries, to Egypt and Ethiopia, toward the south. All nations contributed toward the increase of its riches, magnificence, and power. It was governed by its own monarchs: and among its kings was Hiram, who loved David, king of Israel; and who furnished his son Solomon with cedars, for building the temple of Jerusalem. Of this renowned city, this prophecy foretels the future fortunes.

Howl, ye ships of Tarshish. This prophecy, as well as the others delivered by our prophet, is admirably disposed,

disposed, both with respect to its structure and language. It opens with a mournful address to the Tyrian seamen, who traded to Tarshish, a port which they much frequented, in the prosecution of their business. Different opinions have been formed by interpreters, as to the place here intended by Tarshish. Some have supposed, that it was Tartessus, in Spain, once a flourishing city, much frequented by the Phœnicians: others, that it was Carthage, anciently a powerful city, upon the coast of Barbary; and the Septuagint render Tarshish by Carthage. Some have affirmed, that Tarshish, a city in Cilicia, of which the apostle Paul was a native, and whither the prophet Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, was the place which Isaiah had in his eye. I pretend not to determine this controversy, which, to you, is of no great importance. The trading people, and seamen, who were employed in navigating ships to and from this port, wherever situated, are called to wailing and lamentation.—*For it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in.* The city of Tyre is so completely desolated, that there is not a house left remaining: it forms one huge heap of inaccessible ruins.

From the land of Chittim it is revealed to them. Kittim, or Chittim, was the name of one of the sons of Javan, among whom the isles of the Gentiles were divided*; and from him the country, here intended, might have its name. In the scriptures of the Old Testament, we read of the coast, the isles, the ships, and, in the words before us, the land of Chittim. Some have imagined, that Italy and Greece, and others, that Cyprus, Crete, and Sicily, were the isles of Chittim; whilst some writers have supposed, that Macedonia was the land which is here spoken of. Amidst the diversity of sentiments entertained with respect to the land of Chittim, it is sufficient at pre-

* Gen. x. 4, 5.

sent to say, that from this country, wherever it lay, the report of the destruction of Tyre was to be communicated by the Tyrian seamen, and from thence to be spread over the western world.—How unstable and fluctuating are all earthly things! The greatest and the strongest cities do not continue for ever, but soon decay and perish. They gradually rise to importance and magnificence, and, after a while, sink into obscurity, or are suddenly destroyed. Jerusalem, Babylon, Niniveh, and Tyre, with many other powerful fortified cities, after they had arrived at the summit of grandeur, were ere long overthrown, and buried in ruins. Learn then not to trust in human defence, or in the greatest worldly prerogatives; but endeavour to become citizens of the heavenly and better country of the Jerusalem that is above, and subjects of the kingdom of God, that cannot be moved.

2 Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle, thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished.

The prophet next calls upon those who inhabited the sea-coasts, and the islands of the Mediterranean Sea, to maintain a profound respectful silence on the melancholy occasion. We may consider him as addressing the people, who dwelt in the Lesser Asia, Peloponnesus, Epirus, Cyprus, Rhodes, and Crete; and those who lived in the countries and cities of Africa, which lay opposite to them, with whom the Tyrians carried on an extensive commerce.—To them he saith, *Be still*, or be silent, as the Hebrew word is translated in the margin of some Bibles. This expression supposes some previous great commotion, arising from disappointments, losses, and troubles, whereby their minds, like the sea in a tempest, had been violently agitated; that uneasy thoughts, and painful sensations, had disturbed, and rendered them unfit
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for action and enjoyment. In this perplexed condition, how suitable the direction, Be still! lay restraints upon your angry and impetuous passions, and endeavour to preserve a tranquil composed temper of mind, free from impatience and resentment. There is a time to keep silence; and this is the proper season for you to be still. In silent admiration, behold the wonderful work of God, and those terrible things in righteousness that he hath done, which justly claim your attention. In this manner, discover your grief and consternation at the direful event of which you are informed; and express your reverence, awe, and respect, of that almighty power that hath accomplished this astonishing desolation. Such conduct, on this emergency, is highly becoming; and will shew your prudence and discretion, and a dutiful submission to the sovereign will of Jehovah.—This salutary advice I address to you, my friends, Be still: study to maintain a calm serene temper of mind, amidst all the losses and distresses that you may sustain. In every condition, however adverse, try to say with Eli, ‘It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.’ Confide in the wisdom, goodness, power, and faithfulness of God: rely on the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the grace of the holy Spirit.

Thou whom the merchants of Zidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished. Zidon was a very ancient and famous city in Phœnicia, situated on the confines of the land of Canaan, toward the north-west. It stood about five or six miles distant from Tyre; and probably had its name from Zidon, the first-born son of Canaan*. It was a great city, probably more ancient than Tyre; and assigned to the tribe of Asher, as part of their inheritance, though its inhabitants were never expelled by the Ashurites†. It was a royal city, over which Ethbaal was king, who was the father of that wicked woman Jezebel; concerning whom it is writ-

* Gen. x. 15. 19.

† Judges i. 31.

ten, that she stirred up her husband Ahab, king of Israel, to sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord*. The inhabitants were idolaters, for we read, that Ashtoreth was the goddess of the Zidonians †.—The merchants of this city carried on an extensive commerce, by which they greatly enriched themselves, and the inhabitants of other islands and sea-ports, furnishing them with various commodities, whereby their trade and opulence were much increased. They replenished the harbours, the shops, the warehouses of Tyre, with all kinds of merchandise. By means of commerce, the merchants of one city not only enrich themselves, but likewise those with whom they are connected in other places. Towns, or cities, like Zidon, built upon the sea-coast, or large navigable rivers, commodious for trade and shipping, often flourish, and become wealthy.—Let us learn, from the children of this world, who are wise in their generation, how we may become rich toward God, in faith, and in good works. So far as we can consistently, let us choose our habitations near the waters of the sanctuary, that we may carry on a pleasing profitable intercourse with the heavenly and better country, the city of the living God.

3 And by great waters the seed of Sihor, the harvest of the river is her revenue, and she is a mart of nations.

A farther description seems to be given, in these words, of the merchants of Zidon.—Sihor was the name of a town, which stood near the mouth of the river of that name, which was sometimes called the brook of Egypt, and formed upon that quarter the boundary of the land of Israel ‡. Some commentators, with whom the Bishop of London agrees, are of

* 1 Kings xxi. 25.

† 1 Kings xi. 5.

‡ Joshua xiii. 3.

opinion, that the river Nile is here called Sihor, as in 1 Chron. xiii. 5. and Jer. ii. 18.; and that this name was given it on account of the blackness of its waters, charged with the mud which it brings down with it from Ethiopia. On this supposition, by the seed of Sihor, and the harvest of the river, may be meant, the corns and the flax which grew in the land of Egypt, rendered fertile by the overflowing of the Nile. The wheat produced in that rich country, the flax which was spun into fine yarn, and made into linen, were staple articles in the trade of the Zidonians and Tyrians, by importing of which, and conveying them to other maritime cities, the trading people derived a great revenue, and much wealth.—*And she is a mart of nations.* Mart is a contraction of the English word market, where, you know, all manner of goods are exposed to sale, and to which great numbers of people resort from all quarters, to buy and to sell, and to meet with their friends. Zidon, in which Tyre may be comprehended, was a mart of nations, to which the trading people of all the surrounding kingdoms repaired, that they might dispose of the different kinds of wares which they wished to part with, and that they might purchase the various articles which they needed. Would you see this description beautifully illustrated? read the twenty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel, from the 8th verse, where you will find, that Tyre was supplied, by the neighbouring nations, with all the most valuable articles of commerce. By means of this extensive trade, the Tyrian merchants acquired prodigious opulence, in consequence of which, they became proud and haughty: they attributed their affluence to their own wisdom, industry, and connections; and thus, by excluding God from their thoughts, they exposed themselves to his righteous judgments.—Let us then beware of this criminal and dangerous conduct, which brought them to desolation. Sacrifice not unto your net, nor burn incense unto

unto your drag : because by them your portion is fat, and your meat plenteous *.

4 Be thou ashamed, O Zidon ; for the sea hath spoken, *even* the strength of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, *nor* bring up virgins.

Our prophet, turning to the Zidonians, directs them in what manner they ought to be affected on this mournful occasion.—Be ashamed of the dishonourable and unlawful steps that you have taken to acquire riches, of the wicked and pernicious ways by which you have increased your wealth. Be confounded at the recollection of your covetousness and oppression, your fraud and deceit, your lying and falsehood, your injustice and iniquitous practices, ye who, like Balaam, have loved the wages of unrighteousness. Remember your evil ways, and loathe yourselves in your own sight, for all the iniquities that you have committed. Be ashamed of your foolish expectations from Tyre, which are now wholly frustrated, and the disappointment which you feel, in consequence of your hopes from that quarter being entirely cut off. In vain shall you look for opportunities of renewing your former commerce with that once flourishing city, and of receiving returns for the merchandize that you conveyed thither. All your schemes of aggrandizement, by means of your connection with Tyre, are disconcerted, so that you cannot fail to experience the most uneasy sensations, on account of your disappointments and losses. For these and similar reasons, we suppose that the men of Zidon were called upon to be ashamed.—Trading people, in mercantile cities, often bring home foreign vices with the riches which they import, insomuch that it

* Hab. i. 16.

hath been questioned, whether the former are not more hurtful than the latter are useful. If so, there is just cause for shame indeed.—The grounds on which this advice was founded, are subjoined in the following words :

For the sea hath spoken, even the strength of the sea, saying, &c. Zidon being a more ancient city than Tyre, might be considered as her mother, by whom she had been nourished and cherished from her beginning. The Zidonians had planted many colonies in various parts of the world : among them all, Tyre was justly the most celebrated, and most opulent ; and, being intimately connected with the parent-city, she might be viewed as part of herself. Tyre having been overthrown, which is here called the sea, as it stood in the sea—and the strength of the sea, because the Tyrians claimed the empire of the ocean, Zidon was left to deplore, with tears and lamentations, the desolation of her neighbours, and her own solitude. She is represented pouring out bitter complaints, that she did not, as formerly, bring forth and train up a numerous offspring. After being deprived of her most celebrated and fruitful daughter, who was her chief ornament, glory, and support, she mourns over her solitude, and the prodigious change that had happened to her.—*I travail not, nor bring forth children, &c.* In prophetic language, the inhabitants and dependents of a city are called her children, as in chap. lxvi. 8. where our prophet saith of Zion, that ‘ she travailed and brought forth children ;’ *i. e.* her citizens were multiplied. In this sense the expression must be understood here. The people of Tyre, having been afflicted by famine and war, were not to increase as they had done in times past : their young men and virgins were to be greatly diminished. This affecting circumstance afforded just ground of shame to Zidon, who had boasted of the riches, the trade, and strength of Tyre, with which she was intimately connected.—Trust ye not in a friend, nor put

put confidence in a brother. Trust him, so as not to suspect his fidelity: but trust him not so, as to rely upon him with unbounded confidence; for then shall he prove a broken reed, that will rather wound than support you.

5 As at the report concerning Egypt, so shall they be sorely pained at the report of Tyre.

The Zidonians were to be as much afflicted at the destruction of Tyre as they had been by the devastation of Egypt.—Being descended from Ham, the father of the Egyptians, they considered themselves as nearly connected with that people. This connection was greatly strengthened by frequent commerce, carried on between them to their mutual advantage. Zidon was supplied with some necessary and useful articles from Egypt, and Egypt was enriched by her trade with Zidon. When, therefore, the Zidonians heard the report of the terrible judgments which God had inflicted upon that people, and of their overthrow in the Red Sea, they were greatly distressed; and, in after-times, when they were informed of the conquest of that country by Nebuchadnezzar, they were deeply afflicted. The uneasiness felt by the Zidonians, at the desolation of Tyre, was to be like that which they experienced on one or other of these occasions. Their vicinity to Tyre, the riches, the trade, the support which they derived from that city, would unite in aggravating their distress, on account of its desolation.—The awful calamities which the Almighty sends upon great cities and empires strike terror into their neighbours. The report of divine judgments startles and troubles those who hear of them, and fills with consternation those of similar character, and in like circumstances. ‘The sword (saith God, by the prophet Ezekiel) shall come upon Egypt (mark what follows), and great pain

‘ pain shall be in Ethiopia *. On receiving this information, the Ethiopians were to be alarmed, and seized with dread and uneasiness. The overthrow of the Egyptians in the Red Sea caused the nations to fear †. The slaughter of Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, with their people, by Joshua and the Israelites, made Balak, and the Moabites, sore afraid. In like manner, the destruction of Tyre was to affright the inhabitants of the islands, and to give pain to the Zidonians.

6 Pass ye over to Tarshish, howl, ye inhabitants of the isle.

Our prophet now turns to the remaining inhabitants of Tyre, or of the isle, and calls upon them to change their place of residence, and to remove to Tarshish, that they might there bewail the fate of their city, and the loss they sustained of all their worldly good things. Viewing the sad reverse of their former prosperous condition, which they had long enjoyed, and the deplorable circumstances to which they were now reduced, they are directed to express the pungent sorrow which they felt in the strongest and most affecting manner.

7 *Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days? her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.*

The people of Tyre are here reminded of the peculiar advantages which their city formerly possessed.—*Is this your joyous city*, every where celebrated on account of its mirth and festivity, in which you enjoyed the greatest affluence, luxury, and security, with all the good things of a present life, wherein ye greatly rejoiced?—*Whose antiquity is of ancient days.* The

* Ezek. xxx. 4.

† Exod. xv. 14.

Tyrians boasted much of the antiquity of their city, which was indeed very ancient: for in the days of Joshua, it was a strong city; and in the reign of Solomon, Hiram, king of Tyre, seems to have been a rich and powerful monarch.—*Her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.* The city being laid waste by its enemies, the remaining inhabitants were obliged to resort to distant regions, in order to obtain some commodious place of residence. The import of what is here said is shortly this, Ye men of Tyre, who boast of your mirth and jollity, who glory in the antiquity of your city, and the numerous flourishing colonies you have planted in different parts of the world, learn, from the desolation of your city, the vanity of your pride and glory, and the instability of the most powerful cities and states who are not under the protection of the Almighty. Though ye are a wise and strong people, inhabiting a well-fortified, and, to human view, an impregnable city, there is no counsel or might against the Lord, who hath purposed to stain the pride of all human glory. By strength shall no man prevail. Wise counsels, strong fortresses, rich treasures, and powerful armies, God will bring to nothing, that no flesh may glory in his presence.

8 Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, the crowning *city*, whose merchants *are* princes, whose traffickers *are* the honourable of the earth?

Our prophet next proceeds to specify the principal causes which contributed toward the desolation of Tyre.—The blessed God, the Governor among the nations, the King of kings, the righteous Judge of all the earth, was the supreme and principal cause from which this event proceeded: according to his wise counsel, the city of Tyre, was destined to destruction. To place this matter in the most striking light, a
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band of men is introduced, struck with astonishment at the very surprising fate of this renowned city, inquiring as to the author, and reasons of this calamity.—*Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre?* this strongly fortified city, founded upon a rock, and surrounded by the sea. Who could form the bold design of executing such a daring arduous enterprise, as destroying this ancient commercial city, possessing immense wealth, and sitting as a queen among the nations? It is a work of such vast magnitude, that he must be a mighty one indeed, who is equal to the execution of this grand project.—*The crowning city*, which had been accustomed to nominate those who should govern other cities and countries, and whose mandates had been obeyed: the crowning city, renowned for its royalty, authority, beauty, and glory, whose inhabitants were distinguished above those in other cities, by their wealth, magnificence, and ornaments.—*Whose merchants are princes, &c.* The opulence and power of the trading people in Tyre entitled them to this high character. They vied with princes in pomp and splendor, and in the respect which they claimed; and equalled them in extensive influence. Read the beautiful description, given by the prophet Ezekiel, of the Tyrian merchants, in the twenty-seventh chapter of his prophecy, and you may be satisfied of the propriety of what is said concerning them by Isaiah. They are described, importing the most valuable and costly articles from neighbouring cities and distant kingdoms, which the most splendid elegance, the most expensive and refined luxury, could demand. What words could more strongly set forth the grandeur and affluence of the Tyrian merchants than these which are written, Ezek. xxviii. 15. ? ‘Thou wast perfect in thy ways
‘from the day thou wast created, till iniquity was
‘found in thee.’ The men of Tyre were not perfect in a moral, but in a political or mercantile sense: their military, naval, and commercial interests flourished
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from the early period wherein the city assumed importance and royalty, until the wickedness of her princes, the pride, the injustice, and other crimes of her merchants, consumed their prosperity, and brought upon them that desolation, as to the author of which, inquiry is here made.—The sins of Tyre provoked the Most High to take counsel against it. ‘ Shall he prosper, shall he escape, that doth such things * ?’ No: he shall neither prosper nor escape. Jotham, king of Judah, prospered greatly, ‘ because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God †.’ Because he would not commit iniquity, but diligently attended to his temper and conduct, he grew mighty, and reigned over a flourishing kingdom; whereas after his son Ahaz, who did wickedly, ascended the throne, Israelites, Syrians, Edomites, and Assyrians, laid waste the nation. Righteousness exalteth a city or kingdom, but sin is the reproach and ruin of a people.

9 The LORD of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, *and* to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.

These words contain the short reply of our prophet to the inquiry made in the preceding verse, in which he shews, that the arduous enterprize of desolating Tyre did not exceed his power who formed the design.—The Person who had determined to overthrow that great city, is the only living and true God, the Lord of nature, the Ruler of heaven and earth, the Lord of hosts; the everlasting God, who, in mercy, revealed himself to Abraham and his posterity, and who spake by our prophet, declaring things to come. If you hesitate as to the rectitude and equity of his counsel, respecting the destination of Tyre, our prophet teacheth, that what was highly admired in that city moved God to purpose its destruction. The

* Ezek. xvii. 15.

† 2 Chron. xxvii. 6.

prosperity which the Tyrian merchants had for a long time enjoyed, puffed them up with pride, and gave rise to criminal indulgence in luxury, sensual pleasures, and vain pomp. They foolishly attributed to their own industry and good fortune, the benefits which they ought to have ascribed to God; and thus deprived him of the glory due to his name. Such conduct is exceedingly offensive to God; and though, with much long-suffering, he often bears with it, he seldom fails to punish it severely. He abaseth those that exalt themselves; and, in the most convincing manner, demonstrates the truth delivered by Jesus Christ, who hath said, ‘That which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God.’

To stain the pride of all glory. Beside other important reasons, which it was unnecessary to mention, these words suggest one design that God had in view to accomplish, by his determination respecting Tyre. It seems chiefly intended to check the surprise of those who were astonished at the fate of that city, and did not perceive the propriety and equity of the divine procedure in this instance. To obviate any difficulty that might occur as to this matter, the prophet declares, that the most high God was greatly displeased with the Tyrians, on account of their voluptuousness and pride, displayed in their temples, in their houses, in their dress, entertainments, and manners.—To stain this pride of human glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth, God purposed to reverse their prosperous condition, and to reduce them to a very humiliating state. Hardly any thing appears more dreadful to the honourable of the earth than contempt: they are more afraid of being despised than of meeting any other sort of treatment. In order to humble and abase those who had walked in pride, and to shew to the world the contempt that they who refuse to honour God may expect, though for a season they may be respected among men, the strong city Tyre was demolished, and its haughty inhabitants

habitants were exposed to scorn and derision.—Of all sins, pride is one of the most odious to God. He opposeth and punisheth every sin; but he acts in open hostility against the proud. A philosopher being asked, how God was employed, gave for answer, “In exalting the humble, and abasing the proud.” The reply was good, and agreeable to scripture; where it is written, ‘A man’s pride shall bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit*.’ This remark is often verified in the course of divine providence, of which Pharaoh, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, with many others, are instructive instances. So detestable is pride in the sight of God, that he hath often punished it in his peculiar people. The pride and vanity which David discovered in numbering the Israelites, was punished with the loss of seventy thousand of his subjects. When Hezekiah’s heart was lifted up, it is written, ‘There was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem †.’ Other sins, which are accompanied with greater turpitude and disgrace, are more hateful to men; whereas pride, by assuming the appearance of importance and dignity, doth not seem so odious. Other sins are violations of the law of God; this acteth in direct opposition to his very existence and sovereignty: it not only despiseth his commandment, but it arraigneth the dispensations of his providence and grace, and proves the fruitful source of all other transgressions. No wonder then that God should have stained the pride of all glory, and brought into contempt all the honourable of the earth, by the overthrow of Tyre. I conclude this article in the words of the prophet Jeremiah: ‘Hear ye, and give ear, be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God.—But if ye will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride ‡.’

* Prov. xxix. 23. † 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. ‡ Jer. xiii. 15, 16, 17.

10 Pass through thy land as a river, O daughter of Tarshish: *there is* no more strength.

The prophet having affirmed, that the Lord of hosts was the supreme Author of the calamities wherewith Tyre was to be visited, and shewn the design which he had thereby in view to accomplish, he addresses the inhabitants of Tyre under the name of the daughter of Tarshish.—To them, he saith, Pass through thy land, in a large body, with great rapidity, like a river, whose waters run toward the sea with considerable velocity. In like manner, do you, Tyrians, haste away to a place of safety from approaching calamities.—Tyre might be called the daughter of Tarshish, because of the close connection and constant intercourse that subsisted between them, and because Tyre had derived much trade and opulence from Tarshish.—*There is no more strength*, to oppose the assaults of a powerful foe: your officers and soldiers, your ships and fortifications, shall prove wholly ineffectual to withstand the hostile designs of your enemies.—How great the compassions of God, who, by his servants, calls upon men to escape the calamities to which, by sin, they have exposed themselves, and to flee from the wrath to come! ‘Gather yourselves (said he, to the people of Judah and Benjamin), to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem; for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction * :’ and his warning voice now cries to you, my friends, Escape for your life, lest you be consumed by his just displeasure †.

11 He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms: the LORD hath given a commandment against the merchant-city, to destroy the strong holds thereof.

* Jer. vi. 1.

† Gen. xix. 17.

In this and the verse which immediately follows, the great work of divine providence, in the government of human affairs, is elegantly described. The movements of the nations are exceedingly diversified, insomuch that, at first view, they seem to be involved in inexplicable confusion. The natural causes which unite in acting upon them, are oft-times extremely difficult to be investigated; and more frequently to be sought for in the turbulent passions, than in the sound reason of mankind. To the enlightened mind, that contemplates God sitting at the helm, managing all the public and private affairs in the world, there appears a certain order in all the changes and revolutions that take place among the inhabitants of this earth, not unlike the regular succession of the waves of the sea. This doctrine, which is often inculcated by our prophet, he would have us to observe exemplified in the destruction of Tyre; and of that surprising event, he shews that the God of Israel was the principal cause.—The Lord of hosts, mentioned in the 9th verse, is the Person of whom it is here said, *He stretched out his hand over the sea, he shook the kingdoms.* How sublime, how awful, are these words, corresponding to many similar passages of scripture, which convey the most elevated apprehensions of the divine majesty and grandeur! The sea, of which our prophet speaks, may denote, not only the city of Tyre, but the other neighbouring cities and states, which were situated on the sea-coast. Over these, Jehovah stretched out his hand, to execute upon them righteous vengeance, on account of their many atrocious crimes. He shook the kingdoms, which lay in that part of the world, to their very foundations; and overthrew them, first by Nebuchadnezzar, and afterward by Alexander.

The Lord hath given commandment against the merchant-city, to destroy the strong holds thereof. These words express the purpose of almighty God respecting the destruction of Tyre, which is emphatically called,

called, the merchant or trading city, on account of its extensive commerce and great opulence. By divine appointment, its strong holds and fortifications, with every thing that contributed to its strength and safety, were entirely destroyed:—No human defence, however powerful, can protect from the judgments of heaven. Tyre was justly celebrated for its immense riches: it was one of the best fortified cities in the world, being surrounded with the sea, and with very high walls; and its inhabitants were renowned for wisdom and strength. None of these advantages could prevent the desolation of its strong holds: its walls and ships, its treasures and soldiers, could not impede the execution of the divine commandment. What terrible things in righteousness, O Lord, hast thou done, which people looked not for!

12 And he said, Thou shalt no more rejoice, O thou oppressed virgin, daughter of Zidon: arise, pass over to Chittim, there also shalt thou have no rest,

The subject introduced in the foregoing verse is here explained and illustrated. The judgment of God against Tyre is significantly expressed.—The Person of whom the prophet speaks, was the Lord God of Israel, from whom proceeded the destruction of that famous city. The sentence he pronounced was this, *Thou shalt no more rejoice*. The words must be understood with some restriction, to render them consistent with what is said in verses 15th and 16th; where it is foretold, that Tyre, after her restoration, shall sing as an harlot, make sweet melody, and sing many songs. They import, that the Tyrians should not, for a long period of time, rejoice in circumstances similar to their former state of splendor and affluence, and on the same accounts that, in times past, they had expressed much joy and gladness.—*O thou oppressed*

pressed virgin, who hast been renowned for thy beauty, and the unfulled excellence of thy charms; deprived of thy comeliness, liberty, and riches, thou shalt be reduced to a state of disgrace and subjection.—

Daughter of Zidon. This name might be given to Tyre, because of the close connection, and perpetual intercourse, that subsisted between these two cities; the Hebrews using the words son and daughter, to express any sort of conjunction or dependence whatever.—*Arise, pass over to Chittim.* The sentence is concise, and rather abrupt, as would be the flight to which it directs. The people of Tyre, threatened with impending danger, are required to flee from their native city, and to seek for safety in foreign countries, in Italy, Sardinia, Sicily, and the other states with whom they had been accustomed to trade.—*There also shalt thou have no rest.* By escaping the hands of your enemies, you shall not find a secure and comfortable retreat in those places whither you may resort: disappointment, uneasiness, and vexation, shall attend you wherever you go.

13 Behold, the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not *till* the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof, *and* he brought it to ruin.

In this verse, our prophet calls attention to the instruments which the God of Israel was to employ, in executing his commands relating to Tyre. It might have been expected, that the Assyrians, whose empire was at this time in a very flourishing condition, and to whom the Chaldeans were then subject, should have been the people whom God would employ in this service. But Isaiah, by the spirit of prophecy, foresaw the approaching fall of the Assyrian empire, and that out of its ruins was to arise the kingdom of Chaldea, by whom the Almighty would inflict his threatened

threatened judgments upon this celebrated city. With this object fully in his view, he exclaims, *Behold, the land of the Chaldeans, &c.* who are supposed, saith the learned Dr. Lowth, to have had their origin, and to have taken their name, from Chesed, the son of Nahor, the brother of Abraham. They were known by that name in the time of Moses, who speaks of Ur in Mesopotamia, to distinguish it from Ur of the Chaldeans; and the Prophet Jeremiah calls them, an ancient nation.—This character is not inconsistent with what is here said concerning them: *This people was not till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness.* Until the period here mentioned, the people of Chaldea were not a people of any account: they were not reckoned among the great and potent nations of the earth. They were a rude and barbarous people, destitute of settled habitations, without laws, without government, wandering in a wide desert country, addicted to rapine, like the wild Arabians. Such seems to have been their condition in the days of Job; and such probably they continued to be, till some powerful king of Assyria collected them together, from their dispersions in the wilderness, and fixed their residence in Babylon, and the neighbouring country.

They set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof, and he brought it to ruin. The Assyrians, after having gathered together the Chaldeans, erected the towers whereby Babylon was fortified, and the magnificent palaces with which it was adorned. Some obscurity arises in this verse, from the ambiguity of the agents, and the change of the number in the verbs. The people mentioned in the middle clause, beautified and strengthened the kingdom of the Chaldeans; and almighty God, the supreme Author of the destruction of Tyre, brought it to ruin by means of the Chaldees, who were the instruments employed by him to execute this arduous enterprise.—When
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God will work, who shall let it? The citizens of Tyre, though deemed an impregnable city, were slain; her walls and towers were thrown to the ground, her stones and timber were cast into the sea, and her riches became a prey to her enemies. After sustaining a siege of thirteen years, the city was taken, and levelled with the rock; and thus the Lord brought it to ruin, according to this prediction.—Let us contemplate this instance of God's righteous judgment, as giving us an instructive admonition to beware of those sins which brought Tyre to desolation. Let us improve it to strengthen our faith in divine predictions, however improbable their accomplishment may seem; and consider it as a powerful motive to induce us to return to God from our evil ways, in the exercise of true repentance.

14 Howl, ye ships of Tarshish: for your strength is laid waste.

Having pointed out the instruments which were to be employed in the destruction of Tyre, our prophet concludes this part of his subject, by calling upon the sea-faring people, who were employed in navigating trading-vessels to and from that city, to bewail its desolation. He began this prophecy with a similar invitation, which, at the sixth verse, he again addressed to the merchants and other inhabitants; and now he repeats it to the seamen, who were employed by them. The calamity which he had now foretold, called for the most intense sorrow, and bitter lamentation, from those who were intimately connected with Tyre, who, being unacquainted with communion with God, and destitute of the true riches, placed their chief happiness in the possession of the good things of this present life. To them, therefore, he saith, Howl; for your strength is laid waste.

15 And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot.

The other part of this prophecy here commences, which foretels, that the judgments to be inflicted upon Tyre were to be moderated and limited within a certain period of time.—Persons, or objects, are, in scripture, as in common language, said to be forgotten, when they are neglected, or overlooked, either by God or men. God is said to have been mindful, or forgetful, of a person or people, when he communicates to them, or deprives them of the distinguishing benefits of his providence. On this account Zion complained, ‘The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me*.’ In like manner, when men neglect to attend to any affair about which they were formerly concerned, they are said to forget it. In this sense, Judah is charged with having forgotten the wickedness of their father †; and such seems to be the import of the expression here used with respect to Tyre. She was to be totally neglected by commercial people, who were not, as formerly, to bring thither those valuable articles of merchandise whereby she had been enriched and adorned. Astonished at the desolation of the mart of nations, they would shun approaching the place where the city stood: they would only behold it afar off, and turn to another shore. In this forgotten condition, Tyre was not to be celebrated as before, on account of its riches and beauty; nor were the inhabitants to rejoice in the benefits of divine providence they had long enjoyed, but to continue in a miserable condition, from which they could not be extricated for the space of

Seventy years, according to the days of one king. Our prophet not only foretold the overthrow of Tyre, and

* Isaiah xlix. 14.

† Jer. xlv. 9.

other great cities, but the time in which these most unlikely events were to happen, and how long Tyre was to remain in a desolate condition. The period during which she was to be forgotten, is ascertained to be seventy years, which was exactly the time that the Babylonish monarchy existed, reckoning from the first year of Nebuchadnezzar until the commencement of the reign of Cyrus. The expression, *according to the days of one king*, which is somewhat obscure, may be understood according to the prophetic style, in which kings sometimes denote the kingdoms over which they preside*. The meaning of the words will then be, that the desolation of Tyre was to continue just as long as the monarchy of Babylon, to which, according to the prediction of Jeremiah, the nations were to be in subjection seventy years †.— At the expiration of this period, Tyre was to emerge from obscurity and contempt; and, being in some measure restored to its former commerce and prosperity, it was again to flourish and rejoice. That city is here significantly compared to a harlot, who, having fallen into an afflicted decayed condition, hath desisted from her illicit commerce, and been consigned over to perpetual oblivion, is yet unexpectedly restored to her former condition, and again addressed by her old friends, whom she tries to please by songs, and other allurements. In like manner, at the end of the limited time, Tyre was to regain the trade, splendor, and festivity, which it once possessed; in consequence whereof, its inhabitants were to sing and make merry, as in ancient times. It is true, that the prophet Ezekiel, having foretold the destruction of this city, declared, that it should be built no more ‡. This prediction seems to assert what is inconsistent with Isaiah's prophecy, now before us. The best way that I know to reconcile and render them compatible with each other, is to suppose, that Ezekiel meant no

* See Daniel vii. 17. † Jer. xxv. 11. ‡ Ezek. xxvi. 14.

more than that the city should not be built for a very long time after its desolation, that it was no more to be the metropolis of a powerful kingdom, and that it should not again recover its ancient strength and glory.—After kingdoms and cities have been laid waste, and remained long in that condition, God is sometimes pleased to restore them to their former prosperity. Egypt was desolated, and the people thereof dispersed into remote countries, yet, after forty years, the Lord promised, that the kingdom should be restored. Judea and Jerusalem lay waste for seventy years, after which God was pleased to order the city to be again rebuilt, and the land to be inhabited. Thus also, according to this prophecy, it happened to Tyre, when the Almighty followed his righteous judgments with great mercies, that he might teach men to hope in his power and goodness.

16 Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten, make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayst be remembered.

In allusion to the similitude used in the preceding verse, our prophet foretels, that the Tyrians, after the restoration of their city, were to indulge in music, festivity, and joy.—Lewd women, when they found themselves neglected or forgotten, were anciently accustomed to go about the city, in which lived their associates in vice, playing upon musical instruments, and singing songs. By this expedient, they intended to remind their acquaintances, that they wished them to renew the intimate correspondence they had maintained with them in times past. By this artful contrivance, they hoped that at least some of those with whom they had been familiar, would return to that connection with them which had been interrupted. In reference to this practice, Tyre is here called upon, after the manner of these harlots, to renew her solicitations

tations to her old friends in commerce, and to request, by the most winning methods that could be devised, the recommencement of ancient intercourse, that she might be remembered, and frequented, as in times of old. Every allurement was to be held out by the Tyrians, to induce neighbouring nations to trade with them.

17 ¶ And it shall come to pass after the end of seventy years, that the LORD will visit Tyre, and she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth.

Tyre, which was compared to a harlot in the foregoing verses, having been long neglected by her commercial connections, at the time now mentioned, was to cultivate an intimate intercourse with all nations, and in some measure recover her ancient character.—*The Lord will visit Tyre.* Having punished that city for her wickedness, and executed upon it his righteous vengeance, he would visit it in mercy, and send deliverance from that desolate neglected state in which it had lain for seventy years.—*And she shall turn to her hire, and shall commit fornication, &c.* This figurative language must not be stretched too far; for, from what follows in the next verse, it appears, that this expression does not respect an illicit prohibited commerce, to which the people of Tyre would invite the nations. The hire, or profit, acquired by the trade they regained, was to be consecrated to the honour of God, and the benefit of his servants. No more seems to be intended by this prediction, than that their commerce with many nations was to be so greatly extended, that the treasures of other countries were to be again conveyed into Tyre. The arts which were to be employed for this purpose, in some respects, resembling those which are used by persons engaged in procuring an unlawful intercourse between the
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the sexes, their trade is spoken of under that idea. The words then may import, that the Tyrian merchants having regained a considerable portion of their ancient splendor and opulence, the nations of the earth would be allured to participate in her trade, to renew their former treaties, to recover the confidence of those who were once their correspondents, and thus to compensate for the obscurity, the humiliation, and oblivion, of threescore and ten years.

18 And her merchandise, and her hire shall be holiness to the LORD: it shall not be treasured nor laid up: for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the LORD, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing.

In this verse, is revealed God's gracious design, at some future period, of visiting the people of Tyre with the light of his glorious gospel, and of admitting them to the communion of his church, in consequence of which, they were to consecrate their gain to his honour and service.—The merchandise and hire intended in this prediction, were the profits resulting from enlarged commerce, the opulence procured from a lucrative trade, concerning which the prophet foretels, *It shall be holiness to the Lord.* This was the inscription engraven of old upon the mitre worn by the high priest of Jerusalem, which intimated, that he was a sacred person, consecrated to the solemn service of God. The expression, as applied to the riches of the Tyrians, imports, that their treasures were to be converted to the service of God, and his devout worshippers; that their property and possessions were to be employed to the honour of Jehovah; and that even their civil and common actions should be performed with a view to advance his glory.—*It shall not be treasured nor laid up.* At the time when this prophecy was to be accomplished, the Tyrians, who assumed the profession of true religion, and

and experienced the power of godliness, were to become generous and liberal; much less intent upon amassing wealth than on doing acts of beneficence, they would not avariciously hoard up the riches which they acquired, but dedicate a considerable portion of them to sacred purposes, and with alacrity and cheerfulness expend them in supporting those who ministered in holy things.

For her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the Lord, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing. The character of ‘them that dwell before the Lord,’ may be derived from the ancient practice of convening on the Sabbaths, the feast-days, and other appointed times, to be instructed by the prophets and servants of God. Several instances of this sort are mentioned in scripture. The prophet Elisha sat in his house, and the elders sat with him, to hearken to his instructions, and to propose to him their difficulties for resolution*. The people of Israel came and sat before the prophet Ezekiel, and heard his words; and unto them he was as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument †. In allusion to this custom, the persons spoken of, are here described as dwelling before the Lord; waiting with reverence upon the institutions of his worship, professing to learn of him the instructions of wisdom, and diligently attending to the words of his mouth, that they may attain the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. They dwell in the house of the Lord, and are still praising him; they behold his beauty, they inquire in his temple, and speak of his glory.—A large portion of the gain arising from the merchandise of Tyre, was to be appropriated toward making lasting provision for the maintenance of persons of the above description. Whether the Tyrians were to be obliged to the exercise of this beneficence, in consequence of their subjection to those in autho-

* 2 Kings vi. 32.

† Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

rity who were firmly attached to the service of God, or from real love to God and his people, I shall not stay to inquire. Charity inclineth to suppose, that the motive last mentioned, as it is the best, so it had the most powerful influence upon their conduct.

This prophecy, with the other predictions delivered by Isaiah, hath been remarkably verified, as history testifies, in several instances. At the time in which Tyre was threatened to be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, great numbers of women and children were transported to Carthage, that the remaining inhabitants might the more successfully defend the city from the attacks of their enemies. These strangers, however, did not long enjoy tranquillity in that city, which they had chosen for an asylum, but were disturbed by some naval expeditions, which were directed against that place. Nebuchadnezzar's conquests commenced with his reign: and, from the time that Tyre was taken by him, the city was forgotten during the continuance of the Babylonian empire; at the expiration of which, the nations, conquered by that monarch, were restored to liberty, and Tyre was delivered from the oppressive power of those who succeeded that tyrannical prince. After her destruction, first by Nebuchadnezzar, and then by Alexander, having continued for a long time in a desolate condition, she recovered in some measure her ancient trade, wealth, and grandeur. The inhabitants, with the other neighbouring countries, early embraced Christianity. The apostle Paul, in his travels, found there a number of disciples, sitting before the Lord, who endeavoured to dissuade him from executing his purpose of going up to Jerusalem*. The citizens early began to consecrate their riches to the honour of God, and to employ them in building a very splendid and magnificent church for the worship of Jehovah; to which many others, in process of time, were added.

* Acts xxi. 4.

An archbishopsrick was formed there under the patriarchate of Jerusalem, with fourteen bishopsricks under its jurisdiction. It continued in the profession of Christianity till it was taken by the Saracens in 639. It was recovered by the Christians in 1124. In 1280 it was conquered by the Mamulucs, and afterwards taken from them by the Turks in 1516. Since that time, it hath fallen into decay; and is now a mere ruin, a bare rock, a place to spread nets upon, as the prophet Ezekiel anciently foretold*.

Thus have we considered the oracles which were revealed to Isaiah concerning the nations that lay around Jerusalem, and the righteous judgments which he denounced, in the name of God, against the enemies of his people. We have seen, that one great design of his raising them to power and opulence, to glory and renown, was the trial, or deliverance of his people; and that their punishment and destruction served to display his righteous vengeance, and tender care of his servants. We have heard of God's wonderful doings among the kingdoms of the earth, and the glorious conquests that he hath obtained over the most powerful empires, states, and kingdoms, by means of which he hath preserved and established his church. We have contemplated the fall of Babylon, the overthrow of the Philistines, the desolation of Moab, the calamitous state of the Syrians, the devastation of Egypt, the defeat of the Ethiopians and Arabians, and the destruction of Tyre. Whilst we behold all these mighty inveterate enemies of the church of God buried in ruins, we see her wonderfully delivered, and immoveably established on a sure foundation, which cannot be destroyed. Let the children of Zion then be joyful in their King, and continue undaunted amidst all the difficulties which they may have to surmount in the service of God. If you are ready to be discouraged by the strong oppo-

* Ezek. xxvi. 14. See Lowth's Notes.

fition which you see formed against the Lord and his Anointed, be assured, that he, who sitteth in the heavens, shall have them in derision, and speak to them in wrath, who would break his bands, and cast away his cords. He will not only frustrate the foolish designs of deluded people formed against his church, but he will also disappoint the crafty attempts made by the wisest and strongest enemies, whom, in due season, he will punish for their iniquity and presumption. By defeating the counsels of the wise; and counteracting the power of the mighty, the Lord our God preserveth his people in safety, and obtaineth from them praise, and honour, and glory. I conclude, in the concise and energetic words of the church, declaring her trust and confidence in God: ‘The Hea-
‘ then raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered
‘ his voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is
‘ with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge*.’

* Psal. xlv. 6, 7.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

WE now enter on the consideration of the concluding discourse, contained in the second part of these prophecies, which treats of the divine judgments to be inflicted on the corrupt disobedient Jews, on the enemies of the church of God, and the distinguishing benefits to be enjoyed by his people, after the punishment of their adversaries. The prophet is employed in convincing, and reprovng the people of Judah for their many grievous defections from God, in representing the terrible calamities to which, on these accounts, they stood exposed, and in comforting the distressed and disconsolate with precious promises of the most excellent blessings. Though this discourse seems to have been primarily addressed, about the beginning of Hezekiah's reign, to the posterity of Israel, and had a direct reference to them, yet similar judgments are denounced, and similar benefits promised, to people of all nations, of the same character, and in the same circumstances with them.—The chapter begins with an affecting description of the desolation of Judea, and the dreadful confusion that prevailed among all ranks of people, a moving picture of extreme distress is delineated in strong colours, heightened by many striking circumstances, ver. 1.—12.—Then follows the assurance, that predicted judgments were to be moderated, that the godly were to be exempted from them, and that the divine righteousness and mercy, displayed in this dispensation, was to be publicly celebrated, ver. 13.—16.—After which, the fatal effects arising from the execution of threatened judgments are exhibited in strong metaphorical language, ver. 17.—20.—The prophecy concludes, by foretelling the punishments to be inflicted on the enemies of the church, the happy condition of God's people after their deliverance, and the establishment of the kingdom of God in such glory as it had not hitherto

hitherto attained, ver. 21. to the end.—Interpreters are not agreed as to the particular subject which is especially intended in this chapter. Some refer it to the desolation of the land of Judah, caused by the invasion of Shalmaneser; some, to the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar; and others, to the destruction of the city and nation of the Jews by the Romans. A celebrated commentator * applies it to the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. Perhaps it may have a view to all these great devastations of Judea. The prophet, without restraining it by particular marks to one event, chiefly employs general images, such as set forth the common ruin that was to be brought on the country by these great revolutions, involving in it all orders of men, changing the face of things, destroying their religion and civil polity.

CHAP. XXIV.

BEHOLD, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof.

After having foretold the destruction of several foreign nations, which were the enemies of Judah, the prophet declares the judgments impending over the people of God themselves, for their apostasy and wickedness.—The earth spoken of, in this prophecy, does not seem to denote the whole earth, which God hath given to the children of men for a habitation, but the land of Canaan, possessed by the posterity of Israel. In this limited sense the word is sometimes used in scripture, as in Psal. xlviii. 2. where it is said,

* Vitringa.

‘The joy of the whole earth is mount Zion.’ This is the earth of which our prophet speaks in this verse, that was inhabited, at the time referred to, by a perfidious and hypocritical people, whom God determined severely to punish for their multiplied transgressions.—The devastation, here described in strong terms, is attributed to Jehovah, who, as seemeth good in his sight, replenisheth the earth with his goodness, and desolates it by his righteous judgments. In the emphatical language of the royal prophet, ‘He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein. They are diminished, and brought low, through oppression, affliction, and sorrow*.’ In every calamity, the supreme hand of God, who worketh all in all, ought to be observed; and, therefore, men are called to—*Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste.* The former of these expressions may relate to the inhabitants, and the latter to the land itself; or the sentiment may be repeated, with some variation, to signify the certainty and importance of what men are here called to contemplate. The Lord hath various ways whereby he divests a land of its inhabitants, and renders it waste. The fire and sword, famine and pestilence, are the fatal instruments he employs to accomplish this direful event. By one or other, or by all these means, the land of Judea was to be deprived of all that was truly valuable. The riches which it contained were to be exhausted; the houses were to be demolished; the cities were to be destroyed; the corns and cattle were to be consumed, or carried away by the enemy; and the temple, wherein were visible the symbols of the divine presence, was to be overthrown.

And turneth it upside down, &c. The condition of the land of Judea was to be totally reversed. According to the translation of the Hebrew words, in the margin of some Bibles, He perverteth the face of it,

* Psal. cvii. 34. 39.

giving it a very different appearance from what it formerly wore. The state of the country was to be entirely changed in civil respects: it should be wholly altered; and the inhabitants, in their religious capacity, were to suffer a total revolution. Abundance was to be exchanged for scarcity, safety and comfort for danger and dismay, joy was to be converted into mourning, those who were in power were to be abased, and those who had been most respected should fall into contempt.—*And scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof.* The people of the land, either through choice or necessity, were to be dispersed, not only through their own cities and country, but many of them were to go into distant nations, where they should not find any fixed residence; whilst others were to be carried captive into foreign kingdoms, where they would be treated with much rigour and severity.

2 And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the taker of usury, so with the giver of usury to him.

In this verse, the universal extent of the threatened desolation is foretold: neither high nor low, rich nor poor, should escape the common calamity. The honour and respect due to the priest, was not to prevent him from sharing in the same distresses with the people: notwithstanding their superior advantages and obligations, they had been as corrupt as those among whom they ministered; and, therefore, they were to share with them in the approaching judgments. Masters and servants, mistresses and maids, buyers and sellers, lenders and borrowers, takers and
givers

givers of usury, had all corrupted their ways; and, on that account, they were all to be involved in the same miseries.—All men are subject to the common ills that distress human nature: all are liable to the same diseases of body, to the same sorrows of mind, to the same afflictions and losses almost of every sort. All men, whatever be their condition, are exposed to the irresistible judgments of God, with which he sometimes visits sinful nations. Those who fill the higher stations in society, may go first into captivity; whilst those who are in the lower ranks, may be the first who feel the smart of famine and want. Let not sinners then, of any description, promise themselves exemption from God's righteous judgments. He will assuredly meet them in one way or other: if they neglect to seek him, he will find them out. 'The
' flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong
' shall not strengthen his force, neither shall the
' mighty deliver himself*.' Neither swiftness nor strength, courage nor riches, can screen their possessors from the omnipotent arm of Jehovah. This consideration ought to make us solicitous carefully to avoid those transgressions which bring on nations and individuals his awful displeasure.

3 The land shall be utterly emptied, and utterly spoiled: for the LORD hath spoken this word.

Having foretold the extensive calamities to be inflicted on the land of Canaan, our prophet next mentions the complete desolation with which they were to be attended.—The judgments of the Almighty are dispensed in various degrees, proportioned to the number and atrocity of the crimes committed by those who have provoked him to anger. Sometimes he afflicts a land more lightly, and then it is only in part

* Amos ii. 14.

emptied and spoiled: sometimes the wickedness, on account of which he executeth vengeance, hath been so exceedingly aggravated and multiplied, that the desolation is complete and universal. By the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, to which, in some instances, have been joined the ravages of wild beasts, inundations, earthquakes, tempests, a land hath been utterly spoiled of its cities, towns, and villages, of its inhabitants, cattle, and corns. Such were to be the dreadful effects of the calamities predicted in the preceding verses.—To give the fullest assurance of the truth of what is foretold, these remarkable words are subjoined, *For the Lord hath spoken this word*; and what he hath spoken by his servants shall certainly come to pass. Possessed of infinite power and unchangeable veracity, he will unquestionably fulfil his promises, and perform his threatenings. ‘The word that goeth out of his mouth, shall not return to him void, but it shall accomplish that which he pleases, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto he sent it*.’ Delude not yourselves then, as did the house of Judah, who belied the Lord, by foolishly imagining, that the judgments God hath denounced shall not be executed; for, as the prophet Hosea hath declared, they are as the light that goeth forth †.

4 The earth mourneth *and* fadeth away, the world languisheth *and* fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish.

The mournful consequences of the predicted desolation are, in this verse, delineated in strong and glowing colours.—The earth, and the world, as I suppose, must be understood in the same limited sense as the earth mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, signifying, the land of Judea, which the prophet declared should be laid waste. The people in that

* Isaiah lv. 11.

† Hosea vi. 5.

country, according to this prophecy, were to be greatly distressed, and very sorrowful, and to pine away with grief, on account of the complicated miseries which they sustained. The cattle also, and the fruits of the field, were to decay, and wither away, through want of proper care and cultivation. The haughty inhabitants, who occupied the highest and most eminent stations in the kingdom, and distinguished themselves by pride and vanity, were to droop and languish, through anxiety, affliction, and sorrow.—The execution of divine judgments upon a land or nation, that hath greatly provoked God by their iniquities, brings about remarkable changes, which afford just ground for mourning and lamentation. When Tyre was besieged, and conquered by her enemies, the merchants and mariners wept and howled: when Judea was desolated, and Jerusalem taken, Jeremiah, and his companions, bewailed the desolation in mournful plaintive strains. The practice is natural and proper.

5 The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof: because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant,

These words point out the procuring cause of the predicted desolation.—The inhabitants of the earth pollute it by their sins: the children of Israel defiled God's land, by filling his inheritance with the carcasses of their abominable things, with their idolatries, with their wicked inventions and corrupt ways*. Sin obscures the glory of God, and sullies the beauty of the creation: it defiles not only those who commit it, but even the earth itself, where it is done, as plainly intimated in the words before us. This, then, is one cause why God sendeth his judgments on the earth,

* See Jer. xvi. 18.

the pollution that it hath contracted by the iniquities of its inhabitants.—Another reason is suggested in these words: *Because they have transgressed the laws*, of nature, of conscience, and of nations, the ceremonial, judicial, and moral laws, delivered to them by Jehovah himself. These laws, stamped by the sacred authority of the one great Lawgiver, which they ought to have religiously observed, they presumptuously transgressed, omitting to do what he had required, and committing what he had forbidden. By acting in this manner, they became guilty before God of contemning his holy commandments, and incurred his just displeasure.

They changed the ordinance. The word translated *ordinance*, denotes the institutions, the rites, or statutes, which God had appointed. These ordinances, prescribed by Jehovah, constituted a considerable part of that divine worship which he required under the former dispensation: they formed the partition-wall that separated the Israelites from the surrounding nations, and served to preserve them from idolatry and superstition: they typified the sufferings and death of the Messiah, with the good things which were then future. These ordinances the posterity of Israel changed: they ran into one or other extreme: by neglecting them, they fell into the most abominable practices; and, by observing them, they placed their confidence upon them for acceptance with God, and indulged in the omission of spiritual obedience and moral duties.—*Broken the everlasting covenant.* The people of Judah had not only abused the rites and ceremonies of divine appointment, but they had burst asunder the solemn obligations into which they entered, when God avouched them to be his people, and they avouched the Lord to be their God. In this covenant, God promised to confer upon them the most important benefits; and they, on their part, engaged to perform, through the grace of the Most High, the various duties that God required. This

was an everlasting covenant, that ought never to have been difannulled throughout all generations. Notwithstanding, God was pleased to fulfil the gracious assurances that he had given them of his favour and blessing: they hearkened not to his voice; they despised his statutes, and disobeyed his commandments; they were unfaithful, unsteadfast, and perfidious, in this covenant.—Such were the causes of the miseries that befel the inhabitants of Judea; and which never fail to bring down divine judgments upon those who, like them, transgress against the Lord.

6 Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left.

The wickedness described in the preceding verse, is affirmed to have been the cause of the desolation and consumption foretold in these words.—The curse here intended, comprehends the awful judgments of God, with their terrible effects, to which sin exposes transgressors of his laws and covenant. The maledictions of God are not feeble and impotent declarations, but solemn denunciations of the awful calamities which are therein contained. The sins of Judah brought along with them that curse, which devoured the earth, consumed the people, destroyed their cities and towns, and burnt up the fruits of the field. If you wish to know what is comprehended in this curse, you may read the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, from the fifteenth verse; and you will see how it devours the earth, and layeth desolate them that dwell therein. ‘ This is the curse (said the angel to the prophet Zechariah) that goeth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth, shall be cut off as on this side, according to it; and every one that sweareth, shall be cut off as on that side, according to it. I will bring it forth, saith the Lord

‘ Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of
 ‘ the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth
 ‘ falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the
 ‘ midst of his house, and shall consume it, with the
 ‘ timber thereof, and the stones thereof *.’——It is
 added, in the latter part of the verse,

*Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and
 few men left.*——Great troubles, and painful calamities,
 are represented, in scripture-language, as burning
 men, because they excite astonishment and terror, and
 suddenly consume them, as fire does the combustible
 materials of which it takes hold.——*And few men
 left.* Though the desolation was to be very extensive,
 yet some were happily to escape. In the midst of de-
 served wrath, God remembereth mercy: a few are
 always left, and a remnant is saved. When God de-
 stroyed the old world by the deluge, Noah, and his
 family, were preserved by means of the ark. When
 God rained fire and brimstone from heaven on Sodom
 and Gomorrah, righteous Lot, and his daughters,
 were delivered. When the curse devoured the land
 of Canaan, a few of the inhabitants were left, as here
 foretold.

7 The new wine mourneth, the vine lan-
 guisheth, all the merry-hearted do sigh.

8 The mirth of tabrets ceaseth, the noise of
 them that rejoice endeth, the joy of the harp
 ceaseth.

9 They shall not drink wine with a song,
 strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it.

Some of the mournful consequences that were to
 follow the predicted judgments on Judea are de-
 scribed in these verses, which are so plain as to re-
 quire little illustration.——To express the distressed
 and miserable state of the country, our prophet uses

* Zech. v. 3, 4.

images taken from the most striking parts of nature, and contrasts the then forlorn state of the inhabitants with their former prosperous condition. He represents every thing lamenting over the calamities that afflicted the land.—*The new wine mourneth.* Had this valuable liquor, which, in better times, cheered the hearts of the people, been capable of sensation and sympathy, it must now have been sorrowful, to observe how much it was neglected, during this period of grief and vexation, in the land of Judah.—*The vine languisheth.* The excellent vines, which produced the finest grapes, when properly cultivated and supported, were fallen into decay, had lost their strength and fruitfulness, and, in this declining state, were ready to die.—*All the merry-hearted do sigh.* The condition of the country being reversed, the disposition of the inhabitants was to be entirely changed: those who were of the most cheerful temper, and most agreeable companions, were to exchange their mirth and vivacity for sorrow and sighing.—*The mirth of tabrets ceaseth.* So great and extensive should be the desolation and ruin of this once glorious land, that there was to be no more musical entertainments, for the amusement of the rich, or for inspiring joy and gladness into the people.—*The noise of them that rejoice endeth.* The cheerfulness and festivity which attends abundance of corn, wine, and oil, is commonly accompanied with music, shouting, or some other expressions of gaiety: to all noise of this sort, an end was to be put in Judea, by the distresses that were coming upon that country.—*The joy of the harp ceaseth.* Though the sound of this sweet musical instrument was grave and melodious, it was likewise to be laid aside, and no longer used as in former times.—*They shall not drink wine with a song.* The liberal use of generous wine is often attended with a song, that promotes cheerfulness and good-humour among the company: this practice was likewise to be laid aside, as unsuitable to the mournful state of the people.

people.—*Strong drink shall be bitter to them that drink it.* It should lose the relish that it formerly had in prosperous days, and become unpalatable, through distress of body, anxiety of mind, or the heavy losses sustained by the inhabitants. Similar predictions were delivered by the prophet Jeremiah, of which the following is a specimen: ‘ Moreover, I will take
 ‘ from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of
 ‘ gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the
 ‘ voice of the bride, the sound of the mill-stones, and
 ‘ the light of the candle: and this whole land shall be
 ‘ a desolation, and an astonishment *,” &c.

10 The city of confusion is broken down: every house is shut up, that no man may come in.

11 *There is* a crying for wine in the streets, all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone.

12 In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction.

The miserable state to which Jerusalem was to be reduced, is, in these verses, emphatically described.—The metropolis of Judea is doubtless intended by the city of confusion. Though once a beautiful city, remarkable for its fine situation, the regularity of the buildings, and the good order observed by the citizens, yet now the houses were demolished, the streets were confused with rubbish, the inhabitants were perplexed and disturbed, and all manner of disorder every where prevailed. The city was broken down; the walls, the public buildings, the private houses, were in great measure destroyed. Many of the inhabitants being slain, many of them led captive, and others trying to escape by flight, the houses were shut up, all intercourse with the city was suspended, and

* Jer. xxv. 10, 11.

no person was allowed to come in from the neighbourhood.—*There is a crying for wine in the streets.* Whether this call for wine was made by those who assaulted the city, or the few remaining people who were left in it, it intimates, that the vintage was spoiled; that wine was very scarce, and could not be procured but with much difficulty, and at a high price.—*All joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone.* The joy and gladness which formerly enlightened the city, and rendered it gay and cheerful, was now obscured, by the thick gloom of distress and melancholy: the mirth that once prevailed among the citizens, and had long visited them, was fled, like a vision of the night, and was succeeded by mourning and lamentation.

In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction. The inhabitants of Jerusalem, by their profanity and wickedness, having provoked God to send very awful judgments upon them, nothing remained of that compact and beautiful city, but an immense confused heap of ruins. Nothing was to be seen of the splendid gates that once adorned the city, which were smitten to the ground, and buried in destruction, by the fury of the enemy.—God, my brethren, hath often foretold the righteous judgments which he was about to execute upon men for their sins, and given them timely warning of their approaching miserable condition, if they persisted in their transgressions. He gives previous information of the changes that happen even in the natural world. Presages are discernible of a tempest of wind, a deluge of rain, a heavy thunder-storm, and of other considerable alterations in the weather. Symptoms are frequently observable, in the human constitution, of approaching distress and dissolution. To the Jews were given signs of the times, by attending to which they might have known, that the overthrow of their nation, city, and temple, was drawing near. The dark cloud which for some time hung over their heads, prognosticated

prognosticated the storm which proved fatal to them. These warnings of natural and national revolutions clearly demonstrate the foreknowledge, the goodness, and compassion of God, who would have us always prepared to meet his dispensations, to prevent his judgments by repentance, and to receive his mercies with gratitude.

13 ¶ When thus it shall be in the midst of the land among the people, *there shall be* as the shaking of an olive-tree, *and* as the gleaning-grapes when the vintage is done.

In these words, assurance is given, that divine judgments were to be moderated, and that the godly should in some measure be exempted from them.—When thus it shall come to pass, according to the above predictions, in the midst of the land, situated between the river Euphrates and the river of Egypt, among the people inhabiting that country.—At that time, *there shall be as the shaking of an olive-tree, &c.* The number which were to escape the general calamity was to be few. When our prophet foretold the mitigation of the miseries which were to befall Ephraim and Syria, he illustrated the subject by the same similitude that is here used *. Nothing more is necessary at present than to remind you, that the comparison alludes to what happens in time of olive-gathering and vintage. When olives are shaken, or grapes gathered, a few are left on the tops of the loftiest branches, which the hand cannot reach, and some in outmost boughs, that escape the eye of the gatherer. Thus it should come to pass, when the people of Judea were to be visited by desolating judgments, only a few of the less conspicuous among them were to be left in the land, no more in proportion to them that were slain and taken captive, than the olives or grapes

* Isaiah xvii. 5, 6.

that remain, after the vintage is over, to those that were collected.—Concerning them it is foretold, in the next verse,

14 They shall lift up their voice, they shall sing for the majesty of the LORD, they shall cry aloud from the sea.

The divine righteousness and mercy, displayed in their deliverance, shall be publicly celebrated.—*They shall lift up their voice*, loudly to express their gratitude and praises to their almighty Deliverer, and to extol his name with the greatest ardour, who had rescued them from amid the dangers with which they were surrounded.—*They shall sing for the majesty of the Lord*: in this becoming manner testifying their thankfulness and joy, in contemplating his supreme excellencies, and recollecting his inestimable benefits. They shall celebrate that adorable majesty of which he is essentially possessed, and that is gloriously displayed in all his works and dispensations, especially in saving his people from the hands of their enemies. On these and similar accounts, the high praises of God were to be continually in their mouths. The remnant who were saved, ascribed all the honour of their deliverance to that God, who appears in glory and majesty when he worketh salvation for his servants.—*They shall cry aloud from the sea*. The western extremities, and the sea-coasts, of the land of Canaan, were to resound with the praises of the magnificence and grandeur of Jehovah, who had graciously interposed in their behalf.

15 Wherefore glorify ye the LORD in the fires, *even* the name of the LORD God of Israel in the isles of the sea.

The prophet now turns to the refugees, and exhorts them to give glory to God.—Those who had

escaped the calamities in which their country was involved, leaving their habitations, sought for safety in the coasts and islands of the Mediterranean Sea; and, in their new situations and places of abode, they are called to glorify God in the fires, or, as the Hebrew word is translated in the margin of some Bibles, in the valleys. These different significations do not alter the import of the duty here inculcated. Glorify God; humbly acknowledge him to be truly great and glorious amidst the fiery trials which you sustain, and the heat of persecution to which you may farther be exposed. Cordially resign yourselves to the divine disposal, heartily acquiesce in the dispensations of providence, firmly trust in the all-sufficient power and grace of Jehovah, patiently sustain whatsoever he is pleased to appoint for you, and continually depend upon him for support and deliverance. Let this be your employment in the valleys, dens, and caves of the earth, in which you may be obliged to seek for shelter. Such wise dutiful conduct will give glory to the name of the Lord God of Israel, who is a present help in time of trouble, and who redeemeth all his Israel out of all their afflictions. In this manner, the name of almighty God shall be magnified in the islands of the sea, where you may take up your residence.—Do you, my friends, in all the afflictions and trials with which you are visited, endeavour, through the grace of God, to glorify your heavenly Father; humbly confess his righteousness in all your distresses; adore his holiness in all his dispensations, his patience in bearing so long with your evil manners, his mercy in your preservation in times past, and his faithfulness, who hath promised never to leave nor forsake you.

16 ¶ From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, *even* glory to the righteous: but I said, My leanness, my leanness,

wo unto me: the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.

The remnant that escaped, having complied with the direction given in the foregoing verse, are instructed in the joyful consequences which, through the divine blessing, were to result from their good conduct.—The complicated distresses in which the land of Judea was involved, dispersed the people over all the neighbouring countries. They fled to Egypt, to the Lesser Asia, to the islands and coasts of Greece: great numbers of them were to be found in most of the principal cities of these countries; and in some of them they had synagogues. Thus scattered, they were instrumental in propagating the knowledge of the true God among the Heathen nations, and in preparing them for the reception of the gospel. Hence the uttermost parts of the earth, those places which were situated at the most remote distance from the land of Canaan, are affirmed, according to the idiom of prophetic language, in which things future are spoken of as past, to have united in songs of admiration and praise.—*We have heard songs.* The inhabitants of these distant regions, observing the strangers who had come among them singing for the majesty of the Lord, and glorifying him in the furnace of affliction, were happily disposed to join the dispersed Jews in celebrating the praises of the Lord God of Israel, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.—The chief design of these songs was, to ascribe *glory to the righteous*; to the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity, who is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works. Glory to God in the highest, who hath proclaimed peace on earth, and good-will toward men. Glory to the righteous people, who have attained the righteousness of God our Saviour, and who follow after righteousness; who are righteous before God, and walk in holiness
and.

and righteousness all their days. In all their tribulations, the Spirit of God and of glory resteth upon them: the trial of their faith shall be found unto praise, and honour, and glory; and their present afflictions shall work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

But I said, My leanness, my leanness, &c. Our prophet here speaks in the person of the inhabitants still remaining in the land, who were to suffer repeated distresses from the depredations of their enemies. Personating them, he exclaims, *My leanness, &c.* This complaint, as it respects the body, often proceeds from constitution, imbecility, or disease; as it relates to the mind, it may be owing to its distempered condition, and the misimprovement of spiritual advantages. Soul and body are intimately connected. Though the body be strong, an afflicted mind will enfeeble it; though the mind be at ease, a distressed body will give it trouble. Such was the moving scene now presented to our prophet's view, that his mind was enfeebled, his bodily strength was weakened, his moisture was dried up, his comeliness was lost, his freshness decayed, so that he appeared thin and emaciated.—*Wo unto me: I feel complicated distress, and extreme sorrow: both my body and mind are afflicted.*—*The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, &c.* The people thus described, were the enemies of Judah, the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks and Romans, who were often guilty of notorious breaches of their engagements. These hostile nations were not simply perfidious, but they were doubly and remarkably treacherous and deceitful. They dealt unfaithfully with the true God, in renouncing their allegiance to him: they dealt falsely in their most solemn and public transactions with one another, and with the Jews.

17 Fear, and the pit, and the snare *are* upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth.

The prophet next proceeds to denounce judgments which were to be inflicted upon the enemies of his people, and those among them possessed of a similar character.—The expressions here used, seem to have formed a proverbial saying, as appears from their being repeated by the prophet Jeremiah *. They allude to the different methods of taking wild beasts that were anciently in use. The fear, or terror, was a line strung with feathers of different colours, which was so constructed, as to flutter in the air, and to make a terrifying noise, that frightened the beasts into the pit, or the snare, that was prepared for them. The pit was digged deep in the ground, and covered over with boughs or turf, in order to deceive them, that they might fall into it unawares. The snare was composed of nets, enclosing a large space of ground that the wild beasts were known to haunt, which was drawn gradually narrower, until they were at last entangled and shut up. Our prophet, addressing himself to the inhabitants of the earth, declares, that calamities, corresponding to each of these ways of destroying wild beasts, were to seize upon them, and that they should be so ordered, that those who escaped one sort would be arrested by another. Fear and terror may denote, the consternation and dread whereby men would be incapacitated to avoid impending judgments: the pit may signify, the confinement, and despair of deliverance, to which they were to be reduced: and the snare may intend, those complicated means of destruction, from which they would find themselves unable to escape.

18 And it shall come to pass, *that* he who fleeth from the noise of the fear, shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit, shall be taken in the snare: for

* Jer. xlviii. 43, 44.

the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake.

Endeavouring to avoid one evil, they shall fall into another, in consequence whereof their ruin shall prove inevitable. A similar prediction, delivered by the prophet Elijah, is recorded, 1 Kings xix. 17. ‘ And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael, shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu, shall Elisha slay.’—Let not the wicked then encourage themselves with hopes of impunity: though they may elude one danger, another shall overtake them. Their condition resembleth the state of that man, who, being terrified at his enemy, by much too powerful for him, betaketh himself to flight, and, in the midst of his confusion and haste, falleth into a pit; and, when trying to get out of it, is suddenly caught in a snare, and so entangled in unavoidable destruction, that he is utterly unable to extricate himself. The workers of iniquity are fallen: they are cast down, and shall not be able to rise*.

For the windows from on high are open, &c. There seems here to be a manifest allusion to the history of the deluge; which overthrew the world of the ungodly; and the imagery is taken from that memorable event. All the fountains of the great deep were then broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened †. God hath laid up the waters in storehouses, the windows of which were thrown open, that he might pour forth upon the world of the ungodly, in large torrents, the waters which were above the earth, those treasures that he hath reserved against the time of trouble. In reference to what then happened, our prophet foretels, that, at the period to which he looked forward, the windows from on high were to be again opened, that God, according to his

* Pſal. xxxvi. 12.

† Gen. vii. 11.

word, ‘ might rain upon the wicked, snares, fire, and brimstone, and an horrible tempest : this is the portion of their cup *.—*And the foundations of the earth do shake.* I suppose the prophet alludes to the awful circumstances which accompanied the promulgation of the law from mount Sinai, when that mountain quaked greatly. Universal nature is here represented as feeling the effects of the displeasure of its almighty Sovereign : the earth shakes to its very foundations before the offended majesty of its Creator. Such is the striking view exhibited, by this prophecy, of the righteous judgments of God, which presumptuous impenitent transgressors shall not be able to escape, when God armeth against them both heaven and earth.

19 The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly.

20 The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage, and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it, and it shall fall, and not rise again.

In these verses, the prophet describes, in metaphorical language, a violent concussion, whereby the land of Judea, and other countries, was to be much afflicted. This direful calamity is set forth in strong and elegant diction, in which he excels in representing every subject of which he treats.—The earth that is here intended, seems to be the kingdoms, states, and empires, whereby its inhabitants are united, and preserved in regularity and good order. The expressions used in relation to it, must be understood, not in the literal, but in the figurative sense, which, in prophetic style, signify great public calamities, and

* Psal. xi. 6.

remarkable changes. At the time to which the prophecy refers, such terrible judgments were to befall the kingdoms of the earth, that some of them were to be utterly broken, so as to lose the form they once had; others were to be clean dissolved, and to change entirely their appearance: some were to be exceedingly moved, and violently agitated, by great commotions; others were to reel and stagger like a drunk person, who is extremely unsteady in his motions, or to be removed like a cottage, after it hath served the purposes for which it was erected. All these surprising alterations were to take place, that way might be made for the accomplishment of the purposes formed by divine providence. This is the great design that God hath in view, in all the remarkable changes that happen among the nations of the earth.

21 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the LORD shall punish the host of the high ones *that are* on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth.

At the period to which this prophecy looked forward, the Lord here declares, that he would execute terrible judgments upon the wicked haughty persecutors of his church.—By the host of the high ones that are on high, may be meant, vast numbers of persons who were elevated to high rank in the world, who were possessed of honour, authority, and opulence. Such are, ecclesiastical and political rulers, who are exalted above others in station and power, and have a mighty influence over mankind. Persons of this description, when they are enemies to the people of God, are often elated with a high opinion of their own importance, dignity, and grandeur; and therefore are justly spoken of, as an host of high ones who are on high.—*And the kings of the earth upon the earth.* As the former expression may chiefly respect ecclesiastical rulers, such as the priests, the principal

principal men and doctors of the church, so this may refer to the princes and civil governors of the nation, who were inimical to the church of God, and had abused their power to injure and oppress them. Both these classes of persons, God saith, he will punish upon the earth. This threatening doth not relate to their future punishment in the other world, but to the judgments with which they should be visited in this present state, when God will avenge the injuries they have done to his servants. This prediction is worthy of the attention not only of haughty cruel rulers who oppress their subjects, as it instructs them of their danger, but of those who have been cruelly treated by them, who may comfort themselves that the Almighty, in due time, will visit their oppressors, and render to them according to their doings.

22 And they shall be gathered together *as* prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited.

The threatening delivered in the preceding verse, is here more particularly explained and illustrated.—The host of the high ones, the princes and great men of the earth, shall be gathered together, &c. The metaphor is borrowed from what happens to captives who are taken in war, or to those dangerous banditti who perpetrate notorious crimes. Being apprehended, they are bound fast, collected together, and thrown into prisons and dungeons, where they are kept in close confinement. In allusion to this practice, the angel that came down from heaven, is said to have laid hold on Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more *, &c. In like manner, those great

* Rev. xx. 1. *et seq.*

people who are the subjects of this prophecy, were to be gathered together, and cast into prisons and dungeons, as the just punishment of the wickedness that they had committed.

And after many days shall they be visited. In sacred language, God is said to visit men, when, by the remarkable interpositions of his providence, he makes himself known, and manifests himself present, as the inspector and judge of their actions, either severely to punish them for their sins, or to deliver them from evil, and to refresh them with the blessings of his goodness. Interpreters seem divided in opinion, whether the visitation, here intended, was to be in mercy and favour, as God promised to visit Tyre*, or in righteousness and wrath, as he threatened to visit the people of Judah†. The learned Bishop of London thus writes on this passage: “The ecclesiastical and civil polity of the Jews shall be destroyed. The nation shall continue in a state of depression and dereliction for a long time. The image seems to be taken from the practice of the great monarchs of that time, who, when they had thrown their wretched captives into a dungeon, never gave themselves the trouble of inquiring about them, but let them lie a long time in that miserable condition, wholly destitute of relief and disregarded. God shall at length revisit and restore his people in the last age; and then the kingdom of God shall be established in such perfection, as wholly to obscure and eclipse the glory of the temporary, typical, preparatory kingdom now subsisting.” I apprehend, that princes and great men, who have been persecutors of the church of God, have little or no reason to expect that God will visit them in mercy, and send them deliverance; and therefore I suppose, with the celebrated Vitringa, that a judicial punishment is spoken of, which shall

* Isaiah xxiii. 17.

† Jer. vi. 15.

continue after many days are elapsed. To perceive the justice of this remark, compare the parallel prophecy of Ezekiel, who foretold, ‘ That Gog and Magog, after many days, shall be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword *.’ A long time after the delivery of the prophecy, the predicted judgments were certainly to be inflicted in the latter years, toward the conclusion of the Old-Testament dispensation. In the same manner I explain the words of Isaiah, which are now under consideration. This prediction was to receive its accomplishment, after a long time had intervened between its publication and fulfilment. The many days here mentioned, are not to be reckoned from the time in which the kings were shut up in prison, but from the time wherein the prophecy was announced. According to this interpretation, the words do not limit the continuance of the visitation, but point out the distant period wherein it should commence.—This prediction inculcates a useful lesson, both on those who are in elevated prosperous circumstances, and on those who are in a low depressed condition. Such as are invested with power and authority ought to remember, that their state may soon be reversed, and they may be exposed to that contempt and confinement to which they subjected their poor prisoners: and those who are in a depressed afflicted condition may hope, that, after many days, if not sooner, they shall be relieved and restored to liberty and tranquillity.

23 Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.

In consequence of the execution of the judgments above predicted, and the enemies of God’s people be-

* Ezek. xxxviii. 8.

ing overthrown, the kingdom of God was to attain a higher degree of glory than it had hitherto reached, and possess far more light and splendor than in former times it had assumed.—There is a beautiful analogy between the natural, the political, and the spiritual world, called the kingdom of God. From this resemblance, the figurative language of the prophets is taken, in which, things in the latter are often spoken of by names analogous to those used in the former. If the political world is the subject of prophecy, the heavens signify thrones and dignities, the sun denotes kings and princes, the moon the subordinate powers of the state. If the prediction relates to the spiritual world, the church of the living God, the heavens are those who exercise powerful benign influence over the church; the sun is the symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is emphatically called, the Sun of righteousness; the moon represents the principal person, or persons, whose office is, to dispel the ignorance and errors of the times, and to supply the lovers of truth with desirable light; and the stars, we know, from infallible authority, are the ministers of the churches*.

When therefore prophecy, which abounds with strong metaphors and glowing images, cannot be explained consistently with truth in the literal, it must be interpreted according to the figurative sense of the words. The prediction now before us, cannot be literally understood: when, and where, were the celestial luminaries, here mentioned, ashamed and confounded? The most simple and obvious meaning of the words seems to be, that, at the time to which the foregoing prophecy refers, when divine vengeance was to be executed on the enemies of God's people, his church, reformed and renewed, should shine forth with a lustre and glory far superior to the sun and the

* See Sir I. Newton on the Revelation, part i. and Lancaster's Symbolical Dictionary.

moon, infomuch that these lights were to be eclipsed by a more transcendent beauty and majesty. A more deep and recondite sense may also be given to this prediction, of which this is the sum: At the time when God would take to him his great power, and reign, some mystical sun and moon were to be darkened and confounded. Certain sacred and political rulers, in church and state, who had opposed the kingdom of God, converting their authority into cruelty and tyranny, had become violent persecutors of the church. These shall blush, be ashamed, and be sore vexed, at the foolish projects they had formed, at the rapacity and barbarity they had exercised. They shall be confounded, astonished, and troubled in mind, at the recollection of their disconcerted schemes, and disappointed expectations.—The period fixed for this event is,

When the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion and Jerusalem, &c. When the Lord of hosts, the King of glory, to whom all the creatures in heaven and earth are subject, shall reign in mount Zion and Jerusalem, places for which he was pleased to express peculiar favour, and which of old were eminent types of the church of God under the New Testament.—There he shall reign gloriously, exercising absolute supreme authority over all nations, and rendering all the revolutions among kingdoms and empires subservient to advance his glory, and the benefit of his faithful subjects. There he shall reign gloriously over his peculiar people, conquering them by his grace, governing them by his laws, protecting them by his providence, and crowning them with honour and felicity.—All this shall be *before his ancients*. The chief of the several orders belonging to his church; men remarkable for their age and experience, for wisdom, prudence, and sanctity, employed in directing and instructing the people of God, and in diligently observing the operations and dispensations of his providence and grace. These attentive spectators
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of the divine administration behold, with sacred pleasure, the admirable displays of his regal power, in vanquishing his enemies, in protecting his subjects, and enriching them with the choicest privileges. ‘ We give thee thanks (said they, when they fell on their faces, and worshipped), O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned *. Alleluiah; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth: let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him †.’ He sitteth at the helm of public affairs, and steers the vessel of his church through all the storms that arise in this tempestuous world. Contingent events are all at his disposal: the least things are not beneath his notice, nor the greatest beyond his control. He bringeth light out of darkness, order out of confusion, and maketh the wrath of man to praise him. He publisheth peace on earth, and sheweth good-will toward men: he offereth pardon to all who will renounce their sins, and submit to his government: he reigneth in the hearts of his people; and, with unbounded liberality, dispenseth his grace to them, for the most valuable purposes. Thus doth the Lord of hosts reign gloriously in mount Zion and Jerusalem.—Yield yourselves then, my brethren, to this mighty Lord, as your rightful Sovereign, that you may receive the law from his mouth, and obey whatsoever he commands you. Remember that his authority reacheth to your hearts, that it may reduce them to order, and restore them to tranquillity; that love is the sum of his laws, in the keeping of which there is great peace, and a great reward.

Some of you no doubt have observed, that the predictions recorded in this chapter, have not, like those contained in the former ones, been applied to their corresponding events. I frankly own, that the diffi-

* Rev. xi. 17.

† Rev. xix. 6, 7.

culties attending this application, and the diversity of sentiments entertained on this subject by those whom I have had opportunity to consult, have deterred me from attempting it, and determined me to conclude at present with a few, short, general remarks. The prophecies which we have now been considering, seem to have received a partial accomplishment, by the desolations made on the land of Judea, and its inhabitants, by Shalmaneser, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Romans, to all which some parts of the description are particularly suited. The learned Vitringa, with some confidence, refers their literal accomplishment to the times of the Maccabees, to which he is of opinion the predictions exactly agree. The strong expressions, and sublime images, employed in foretelling the judgments that are here denounced, lead our thoughts to still greater events than those I have mentioned. Jesus Christ, in his prophetic discourses, more than once alludes to this prophecy*. The apostle John, in the book of Revelation, uses similar language with that of our prophet in this chapter †. From these and other circumstances, I suppose that this prophecy looked toward the desolation of the land and people of Judah, the judgments to be inflicted upon their enemies, and the restoration of that kingdom; and to events relating to the church of God under the New Testament, which have come to pass in later times. ‘The Lord hath done that which he had devised: he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied ‡.’ I conclude with the emphatical words of Jesus Christ, after he delivered the predictions above referred to: ‘Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away ||.’

* See Matth. xxiv. 29, &c.

† See Rev. vi. 12.

‡ Lam. ii. 17.

|| Matth. xxiv. 34, 35.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

SALVATION from God, and songs of praise from his people, whom he hath saved, are, in scripture, uniformly connected, and placed together fully in our view. No sooner had the almighty arm of Jehovah rescued the children of Israel from the tyranny and bondage of Egypt, than a magnificent concert filled the shores of the Red Sea, and resounded the praises of their great Deliverer. After the Lord of hosts had conducted them through the howling wilderness, and crowned them with victory over their many powerful enemies, they were taught, by their illustrious Leader and Legislator, to acknowledge, in harmonious strains, the distinguishing kindnesses of God toward them. And when the ransomed of the Lord shall come to the Zion that is above, with everlasting joy upon their heads, they shall for ever unite in singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, and in magnifying that compassionate Saviour who redeemed them to God by his own blood.—Our prophet, having foretold, in the preceding chapter, the overthrow of several great cities and empires, enemies to the Jews and the land of Judah, and a happy restoration of the kingdom of God, contemplating this extensive scene of divine providence in all its parts and consequences, breaks forth into this sublime song of praise. In this beautiful composition, his mind seems to have been more possessed with the pleasing prospect of future mercies than with the recollection of past deliverances. Though he might have a primary reference to the destruction of Babylon, and the liberation of the Jews from captivity in that country, he looked forward to the far more splendid conquests of Messiah the Prince over the spiritual enemies of his people, and the divine consolations provided for them. The immense benefits conferred upon the church are highly extolled, whilst the rich grace, the almighty power,

power, and inviolable faithfulness of God, afford matter of exultation and joy to those who were delivered from the hostile powers whereby they had been afflicted and oppressed. Rescued from the hands of their enemies by their omnipotent Deliverer and Avenger, and liberally participating in the mercies of Jehovah, they celebrate, with admiration and gratitude, the praises of the Lord their God, on account of the judgments he had executed, the felicity which they enjoyed, and the glorious hopes that they entertained.—The song itself consists of two parts. In the former, contained in the first eight verses, the prophet, in name of the church, specifies some of the inestimable benefits which they already enjoyed, and cherished the agreeable expectation of attaining the more full possession. In the latter, comprised in the ninth and following verses, the chorus, formed by the redeemed of the Lord, are introduced, replying to the first part of the song, and, with joyful acclamations, praising Jehovah for his mercy and grace already exhibited, and the animating hopes in which they indulged of their continuance and increase.

CHAP. XXV.

O LORD, thou *art* my God, I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name: for thou hast done wonderful things; *thy* counsels of old *are* faithfulness *and* truth.

The inspired prophet, without any formal introduction, proceeds immediately to praise and magnify the Lord. In this delightful exercise, he personates the doctors and elders of the church, inciting them to extol the Lord their God, and to celebrate his perfections manifested in the salvation of his people.—

O Lord; thou self-existent Jehovah, the great Creator, the constant Preserver, and the sovereign Proprietor of the universe, who art faithful and true in accomplishing all thy promises and threatenings.—*Thou art my God*, who hast invited me to sacred intercourse with thee; who hast inclined me to surrender myself, and all my concerns, into thy hands, and to choose thee for my God. Thou art my Father, who hast nourished and brought me up among thy children: thou art my Friend, who hast loaded me with a rich profusion of favours: thou art the portion that I have chosen, in the possession of which I shall enjoy the most permanent felicity: thou art my God, and therefore my happiness shall be complete. I humbly claim from thy all-sufficiency, the supply of all my wants; from thy wisdom, direction and conduct; from thy power, assistance and protection; from thy love, refreshment and consolation; from thy mercy, forgiveness and blessing; from thy faithfulness, stability and support; and from thy patience, forbearance and long-suffering. I cheerfully resign myself, and all my interests, to thy direction and disposal; and, with dutiful affection, I consecrate all my powers and faculties to thy honour, whose I am, and whom I serve, that they may be employed in promoting thy glory.

I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name. To exalt the Lord our God, is to proclaim the glorious honour of his majesty, to extol the exceeding riches of his grace, to magnify his transcendent excellencies, and to celebrate, with affectionate gratitude, his wonderful loving-kindness. This sublime exercise, when rightly performed, must proceed from just and lively apprehensions of his glory, and of his grace; and should always be done with joyful lips, accompanied with acceptable obedience, which is the most effectual way of discharging this duty. Thus will I exalt and praise thy name, even all the glorious attributes of which thou hast revealed thyself possessed, in
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the works of creation, providence, and redemption; thine awful glories as a Sovereign, and thy condescending grace as a Saviour. This hath been the delightful employment of the saints in every age, especially after God hath wrought wonderful deliverances for them.—Of this, a remarkable instance occurs in David, the king of Israel, who, having obtained complete victory over his enemies, exalted and praised God; and, sensible that he could not sufficiently magnify him, warmly invited others to unite with him in blessing his holy name: ‘O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I fought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears*.’ In like manner, our prophet, contemplating the merciful interposition of the Almighty in behalf of his church, forms the laudable resolution, in which each of us ought to join, I will exalt thee, and praise thy name.

For thou hast done wonderful things, &c. That which exceeds our knowledge and imitation, and which we cannot account for on natural principles, excites our surprize and wonder. Many, O Lord our God, are thy wonderful works: thy judgments are unsearchable, and thy ways are past finding out. Though innumerable wonders are daily presented to our view, yet the frequency of their appearance often diminishes our admiration. The corn cast into the ground, which first dies, and afterward yields ten or twenty times more than was sown, is perhaps not less astonishing than the miracle of multiplying a few loaves and fishes, to be a sufficient repast for thousands of people. The birth of a living child does not seem less wonderful than the resurrection of a dead body. Is not the budding of the trees in the spring as marvellous as was the blossoming of Aaron’s rod? Indeed all the works of God, when contemplated aright, appear truly wonderful. They are, as they

* Pfal. xxxiv. 3, 4.

ought to be, in some measure within our reach, and level to our capacities, so as, in some respects, to assist in pointing out our duty; and yet, in their nature, utility, and design, they, in other respects, far surpass our comprehension. We see in them somewhat plain, that is easily understood; and somewhat obscure, that we cannot penetrate or explain. We perceive that they are worthy of God, and bear the impression of his divine hand, though we cannot fully satisfy ourselves in some particulars of lesser moment. Had they been in all respects intelligible to us, they would have wanted one evidence of their divine original of which they are possessed. The same remarks are applicable to the works of the Lord our God, in the dispensations of his providence relating to his church, which are truly wonderful, and worthy of praises. ‘O give thanks unto the Lord, who hath done great wonders*.’

Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth. The counsels of Jehovah, which are here extolled, may denote, the result of his divine wisdom and prudence, the proper provision made for carrying into execution the purposes that he hath formed. All the dispensations of providence and grace are the effects of wise counsel, the manifestations of infinite wisdom, goodness, and love. These counsels are celebrated on account of their antiquity: they are *of old*, or, as the Hebrew word signifies, from everlasting. His counsels and purposes, according to which he worketh all things, are affirmed, by the apostle Paul, to be eternal †; and, on this account, among others, God is magnified by our prophet. They are likewise praised for being *faithfulness and truth*. The Most High is inviolably faithful in executing all his purposes: none of them can possibly be frustrated: no opposition, no difficulties, however great, can prevent their execution. ‘The counsel of the Lord standeth

* Psal. cxxxvi. 4.

† Eph. ii. 11.

‘ for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations *.’ In fulfilling his promises, God is true to his word; in accomplishing his purposes, he is true to himself. A perfect conformity subsists between the mind and the word of God, between his word and his ways. He purposeth nothing but what is just and right: his word contains a plain declaration of his mind, of which his providential dispensations are a just exposition. All his divine attributes are engaged to support the immutability of his counsel, which he can never want power or instruments to execute. In few words, God is faithful and true in all the counsels that he hath formed; in all the doctrines, predictions, commands, threatenings, and promises, that he hath revealed and recorded in his word.—Let us then firmly rely on the divine veracity and fidelity; and diligently endeavour to imitate them, that, in these respects, we may resemble our Father in heaven.

2 For thou hast made of a city, an heap; of a fenced city, a ruin: a palace of strangers, to be no city; it shall never be built.

The first of God’s wonderful works for which he is here magnified, is the destruction of a certain, renowned, fortified city, inhabited by the enemies of his people.—This city is spoken of in such terms as inclines me to suppose, that great Babylon was primarily intended. It was a large, strong, and well-fortified city, as you have repeatedly heard from this prophecy, possessed by inhabitants who were inimical to the people of God, and who placed their confidence in the fortifications and strength of their city. This seems to have been the city spoken of in ver. 12. and in chap. xxvi. 5.—It was a palace of strangers, being inhabited by the Assyrians and Babylonians,

* Psal. xxxiii. 11.

who, in scripture, have this character given them. Thus saith the Lord God, by the prophet Ezekiel, concerning the house of Israel: ‘ I will deliver you ‘ into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you *.’ Of these strangers, it was their palace, the metropolis of their empire, their most magnificent, their best fortified and royal city; which afforded a remarkable type of Mystical Babylon, that is uniformly represented in scripture as hostile to the kingdom of Jesus Christ. As the overthrow of this great city was indispensably necessary to the tranquillity, safety, and happiness of the church, they begin this hymn of thanksgiving by praising the Lord for this wonderful work.

Thou hast made it an heap—a ruin—to be no city; it shall never be built. To render the sentiment more rich and beautiful, our prophet frequently, with great elegance, describes the same event by an agreeable variety of expression, in which he gradually rises higher and higher. Clear views, by the spirit of prophecy, of the approaching event, and its perfect certainty, made him speak of this predicted event as if it had been already past. This royal well-fortified city was to be reduced to a prodigious heap of ruins: its very foundations were to be demolished, its walls destroyed, and its palaces overthrown. Nor shall it again be rebuilt, and restored to its former splendor: it shall always continue what it now is, a ruinous heap.—Babylon, that flourished under the former dispensation, was an eminent type of that great city which is seated on many waters, *i. e.* supported by much people, called Mystical Babylon, to which there is a vast resort of strangers, and which, in due time, shall also be utterly destroyed. This wonderful event shall, in like-manner, prove the subject of the praises and thanksgivings of the saints, as it is written, Rev. xviii. 20. ‘ Rejoice over her, thou hea-

* Ezek. xi. 9.

‘vens, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her.’ Having seen the commencement of this deliverance of the church, in the partial accomplishment of this predicted desolation, it becomes us, with admiring gratitude, to extol the Lord, whose right hand is exalted, and doth ever valiantly.

3 Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee.

These words may have a retrospect to what is said in the preceding verse; because God hath turned the fortified city into desolation, therefore shall the strong people glorify him: or they may look forward to what is mentioned in the following verse; because the Lord hath been a strength to the poor, in his distress therefore shall he be honoured and served. In either view, they import in general, that the deliverance God had wrought for his people, was to prove a happy inducement to them, and to those powerful nations who had been their enemies, to yield him the homage that he required.—By the strong people may be intended, those who were renowned for their strength and valour among the nations; or those who, though weak in themselves, are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and are strengthened by him with all might in the inner man, for the performance of every good work. Though they contend not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, such is the spiritual strength which they have from God, that they vanquish all the combined opposition formed against them. Their strength lies not in themselves, but in God, their only Lord, who is the strength of Israel.—Concerning these strong people our prophet declares, that *they shall glorify God*, by entertaining just and elevated

elevated apprehensions of his majesty and grace, by adoring his infinite excellencies, by confiding in his kind providence, by delighting in his just commandments, and depending on his faithful promises. They shall glorify him both with their souls and bodies, humbly confessing their sins, thankfully acknowledging his mercies, and bringing forth, in their lives, the fruits of holiness and righteousness, to his glory and praise.—Improve this truth, especially when you are called to the performance of any arduous service. Engage with alacrity in the duties of obedience: decline not any work that God assigns you; and remember, that the way of the Lord is strength to the upright.

The city of the terrible nations shall fear thee. The chief city belonging to the formidable people, whom God employed to execute righteous judgment upon those kingdoms and empires, which, by their atrocious crimes, merited severe punishment, or total destruction, is doubtless here intended. I presume not absolutely to determine what particular city our prophet had in view, when he composed this triumphant song, whether Babylon or Rome.—Concerning the inhabitants of this city it is foretold, *They shall fear thee.* The fear of God frequently denotes in scripture, religion in general, the whole of practical godliness. It is that blessed temper which arises in the soul from suitable apprehensions of the divine glory, and a just sense of the infinite distance there is between God and us; of his sovereign authority, and our profound subjection; of his consummate goodness, and our unspeakable obligations to him for his benignity and kindness. It is so to stand in awe of the holiness of his nature, the justice of his government, the threatenings of his law, and the displays of his grace, as to receive the instructions of wisdom, and to depart from evil. It is such a reverence as a subject hath for his prince, a servant for his master, or a son for his father; though it ought far to surpass it

it in degree, God being infinitely greater, and more excellent than any person with whom we stand connected among our fellow-creatures. Such is the fear of God, which was to prevail among the inhabitants of the city of the terrible nations.—This prediction hath been verified in both the cities above mentioned. When Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was restored to his reason and his throne, ‘ he lift up his eyes unto heaven, and blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him that liveth for ever * ;’ and doubtless great many in his dominions would join him, so that the effects of this wonderful event might be very great and extensive. At Rome, the prophecy was more remarkably fulfilled at the first promulgation of the gospel; at which period the apostle Paul declares, that ‘ the faith of the saints in that city was spoken of through the whole world †.’—I conclude this article with the words of the angel, whom the apostle John ‘ saw flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, who said with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters ‡.’

4 For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.

These words beautifully represent the kindnesses of God conferred upon his people, on account of which they unite in celebrating his praises.—*Thou hast been a strength to the poor, &c.* Power belongeth unto God, in whom it originally resides. With him there-

* Dan. iv. 34.

† Rom. i. 8.

‡ Rev. xiv. 6, 7.

fore nothing is impossible: nothing is too hard for the Lord. In the weakness of his servants he perfecteth strength; in consequence whereof, nothing becomes too hard for them to do, or suffer, that he requires. He imparts to them all that might, whereby they become a strong people, and are enabled to glorify him; whereby they are furnished for every good work, and strengthened unto all long-suffering with joyfulness.— This strength God hath communicated to the poor and needy. In scripture-language, this character sometimes more especially relates to the outward condition, and at other times to the internal and spiritual state of the persons who are spoken of. I see no necessity of restraining it here to either of these classes of people; what is affirmed, being equally true of those who have been poor in both senses. God hath been a strength to those who were in indigent external circumstances, destitute of the comforts of life, of friends to support them, and who had no expectation of relief from human aid; to those also who have been needy of spiritual assistance, poor in spirit, feeling their necessities, and sensible of their want of deliverance and help from Heaven. ‘ For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise (saith the Lord), I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him *.’ From compassion to the afflicted under sufferings, Jehovah promiseth, that he will arise, and place them in a state of salvation. Such is his gracious promise to the church; who, by contemplating the deliverances that God hath wrought for them, are animated to proclaim his praises. Looking back on his merciful interpositions in their favour, they gratefully acknowledge, that he hath been a strength to the poor, and that this inestimable benefit was received in the season wherein it was most needed.—*In his distress*: when afflicted with poverty and want, with pain and

* Pſal. xii. 5.

sickness; when troubled with sin and guilt; when perplexed with doubts and fears, even then the Lord sent help to him from above. Say, my friends, have not you experienced this truth? hath not the Lord been your strength in the day of distress? hath not he prevented you in the time of your calamity? hath he not been your stay and deliverer? Unite then with the church, in thankfully acknowledging the God of your mercy, who hath strengthened and saved you.

A refuge from the storm, &c. A storm or tempest, when it becomes extremely fierce and violent, threatens to spread desolation wherever it comes, and exposes every creature within its reach to imminent danger. An intense burning heat is ready to distress and consume those who are exposed to its powerful influence. In allusion to these things, which often happen in the natural world, the persecution of the people of God, by their inveterate enemies, is emphatically represented in this and other passages of scripture, by a terrible storm, or consuming heat; and the inestimable favour of divine protection is pleasantly exhibited as a refuge from the fury of the raging tempest, and a refreshing shadow from the burning heat. In this comfortable privilege, David, the servant of the Lord, solaced himself amidst the dangers of his pilgrimage, in Psal. cxxi. where he thus speaks: ‘The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right-hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.’ It is unnecessary to enlarge on this subject, having treated it at considerable length, when lecturing from chap. iv. 6. of this prophecy. I only add, that the particular season wherein this precious privilege was enjoyed, greatly enhanced its value, and excited the more ardent praises from the church.—

When the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall. The Hebrew word translated *blast*, signifies also rage and indignation. By the terrible ones,
are

are doubtless intended, the powerful furious enemies of the servants of God, who strike dread and terror into all who oppose them. Sometimes their wrath arrives at such a dreadful pitch, that it resembles a storm, which beats with great noise and violence upon a wall standing in its way. By this beautiful similitude, our prophet, in name of the church, illustrates the tender care and compassions of God, which they had experienced in seasons of the greatest distress and danger.—Be thou, O Lord, our strength, our refuge, our shadow. Suffer not our goodness to be injured by the storms of adversity, as the bowing wall by the tempest: suffer it not to pass away by the scorching heat of prosperity, like the morning-cloud before the sun. Continue at all times to be our defence, that we may ever have fresh ground to celebrate thy praise in a triumphant song, and by a well-ordered conversation.

5 Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; *even* the heat with the shadow of a cloud: the branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.

The prophet, in name of the church, extols the Lord God, on account of the awful rebukes which, in future times, he would administer to their enemies.—The strangers primarily intended, were, I suppose, the Babylonians, to whom this description is given in scripture, as I observed from ver. 2.; and who are often mentioned in the prophetic writings, as representing all the adversaries of the people of God. The noise which was to be brought down, proceeded from the clamours of the people, and their prodigious armies, composed of great numbers of soldiers, of horses and chariots, which are frequently accompanied with shouts of triumph. All this loud noise, according to this prediction, was to be made to cease, and to come to an end.—The subject

ject is illustrated by a beautiful similitude, in the following words: *As the heat in a dry place; the heat with the shadow of a cloud.* As the intense heat of the sun, when threatening to consume every thing in a place already dry and parched, is allayed by the intervention of a thick cloud, so the Lord, in mercy, will restrain the violent heat of persecution; he will screen his people from danger, and afford them agreeable protection and refreshment. In this manner, he will frustrate the hostile designs of their enemies, and put a period to their noisy triumphs.—*The branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.* The power, influence, and glory, of the mighty tyrannical enemies of the church, which had grown to an exorbitant height, and become very formidable to all around them, shall be deprived of the distinguished eminence that they had attained, and be reduced to a mean and contemptible state.—On these accounts, the people of God exalt and praise his name; and thus the proverb is verified, which saith, ‘When the wicked perish, there is shouting *.’ May we then rejoice at the destruction of our enemies? Did not Moses, and the children of Israel, triumph at the overthrow of Pharaoh and the Egyptians? Did not David bless God, for the death of Nabal? Did not the Jews rejoice and feast, when their enemies were defeated? Doth not the saints of the Most High here extol the Lord, because he brought low the branch of the terrible ones? I reply, that we ought not to be elated by the depression or destruction of our personal adversaries, which would discover a spirit of revenge, inconsistent with the forgiveness and benevolence inculcated in the gospel. He that is glad at the fall of an enemy, doth fall himself, in the worst sense of the word. Remember what the Lord said, by the prophet Obadiah, to the Edomites: ‘Thou shouldst not have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day

* Prov. xi. 10.

‘ of their calamity. For thy violence against thy
 ‘ brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee. I do not
 learn from the prophecy, that the Edomites actually
 did violence to the Jews: but, it seems, they were
 well pleased that strangers entered into their gates,
 and carried them away captive; and therefore they
 were to be confounded, and cut off for ever*. Re-
 collect the salutary advice of the wise man: ‘ Rejoice
 ‘ not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine
 ‘ heart be glad when he stumbleth: lest the Lord see
 ‘ it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath
 ‘ from him †.’ Though we ought not to rejoice at
 the destruction of our personal adversaries, yet, from
 this song, and other passages of scripture, we learn,
 that the church may triumph on account of the over-
 throw of their incorrigible enemies; not because they
 are involved in misery, and brought to ruin, but be-
 cause, by their fall, the people of God are delivered
 from oppression and persecution, and a way is thereby
 opened for the more comfortable enjoyment of the
 most invaluable blessings: God gives visible demon-
 stration that he is the Governor of the world, and
 awful warning of the danger of injuring good men.
 For these reasons, the righteous are glad when they
 see the vengeance, and praise him who bringeth low
 the branch of the terrible one.

6 ¶ And in this mountain shall the LORD of
 hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things,
 a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of
 marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

Every part of this beautiful song is so admirably
 adjusted, as plainly to intimate, that God would cer-
 tainly afford his church the more full possession of
 what they had only enjoyed by anticipation. Whilst
 the words before us, commemorate the inestimable

* Obad. 10. *et seq.*

† Prov. xxiv. 17, 18.

benefit which was in some measure conferred upon the people of God, they contain a prophecy of the riches of divine grace, to be exhibited in the gospel, and consummated in the Zion that is above. Our prophet, who had hitherto addressed himself to God in the second person, now changes the form of expression, and in this and the two following verses, speaks of him in the third person. In the former part of this hymn of gratitude, he spake to God in name of the church; here he speaks to them in the name of the Lord.

In this mountain. Mount Zion, mentioned in the last verse of the preceding chapter, wherein the Lord of hosts shall reign before his ancients gloriously, was unquestionably the place intended primarily in this prediction, though our prophet's views were doubtless extended to the church of God under the New Testament, in which it was to receive its accomplishment. The remarkable events whereby the Israelites were, in the course of providence, introduced into the possession of this mountain, and those which occurred to them after they possessed it, with the rites and ceremonies that they there observed, were typical of the spiritual blessings, and glorious privileges, enjoyed by the people of God under the gospel. The resemblance is striking, and deserves to be carefully marked, that we may see the propriety of this figurative expression.—With a strong hand and stretched-out arm, God delivered the children of Israel from the tyranny of the Egyptians, who grievously oppressed them; and brought them forth out of their land, that he might get to himself a great name. Having overthrown their enemies, he conducted them safely through the Red Sea; and, at mount Sinai, promulgated to them, with awful solemnity, his righteous laws. He led them through the howling wilderness, supplying them with bread from heaven, and water from the rock; granting them protection from enemies, and direction by the cloud of his presence:
and,

and, having given them a safe passage through the river Jordan, he put them in possession of the promised land of Canaan, which he gave them for inheritance. In that land, he chose mount Zion for his habitation, saying, ‘ This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread *;’ &c. He appointed a magnificent temple to be built for his worship upon this holy hill, in which he promised to meet with his people, and bless them. To this splendid house, in which were the symbols of the divine presence, and the mercy-seat, from whence he conversed with them, he required them to resort with their sacrifices and gifts, to feast and rejoice before him three times in the year.—These, with other things which I stay not to mention, afforded a lively representation of the benefits which God bestows upon his church under the New Testament, to which the name of mount Zion is sometimes given in the prophetic scriptures. Under this dispensation, he rescues his people from a worse than Egyptian bondage, that they may serve him in holiness and righteousness, to the praise of his glory. Having vanquished their spiritual enemies, he puts his laws into their inward parts, and writes them upon their hearts. Whilst they are travelling through this wilderness to the heavenly and better country, he guides them by his counsel, he protects them by his providence, he gives them from heaven the bread and water of life, and attends them with his gracious presence. He hath erected the throne of grace, where he invites his people to come with their spiritual sacrifices, and from which he vouchsafes to converse with them. He hath set forth a perfect propitiation for sin, by which complete atonement is made; and now he dwells in the midst of them as in his temple, wherein he is honoured and worshipped, whilst they

* Psal. cxxxii. 14, 15.

serve him with alacrity and pleasure. In this mountain, where the ordinances of divine institution are observed, and the inestimable benefits of God's salvation are exhibited and communicated, they convene and rejoice before him.

Shall the Lord of hosts. The Master of this feast is the Lord of hosts, the Father of the great family in heaven and earth, who giveth food unto all flesh, and maketh ample provision for all the members of his household. Indeed none but he, to whom belongeth the heavens, with all their hosts, the earth, with all its fulness, the sea, with all that therein are, can make a feast for all people. In this act of royal munificence, he appears glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength, mighty to save: having in righteousness made war, and conquered the enemies of his people, he entertains them with a feast of triumph. He acts as the King of glory, the Lord strong and mighty in battle, who, having vanquished every adverse power, invites his friends to sup with him; and assures them, that he will sup with them. Think not that a less awful title than that which is here given him, expressive of his clemency and benignity, would have better suited this occasion. There is a peculiar beauty and propriety in the character which God here assumes, when he promiseth to provide spiritual entertainment for his people.—By this designation, they are reminded of his glorious conquest over his and their enemies, and of their certain victory over them. He hath spoiled principalities and powers; he hath finished transgression; he hath overcome the world; he hath swallowed up death in victory; and he will go on conquering, until he hath removed every opposition that might intimidate, or prevent them from the cheerful use of the excellent provision that he sets before them.—It likewise suggests, that he entertains chiefly with the spoils of enemies, whom he hath entirely subdued. He presents to view, the guilt of sin removed by his atoning sacrifice,

sacrifice, its pollution washed away in the fountain opened for impurity, and its power destroyed by his Spirit of might. He shews this world divested of its dangerous charms, the old serpent with his head bruised, death unstinged, and converted into a useful friend.—This title serves also to remind them of their character and condition. By profession, they are soldiers of the Lord of hosts, who have enlisted themselves to fight under his banner, and to follow him whithersoever he leads them: they are bound by the most solemn engagements to fidelity and diligence in his service. The table prepared for the entertainment, is covered in the presence of enemies, who look on with a malicious eye, anxious to interrupt their festivity and joy, and to mingle their blood with their sacrifice. We ought not then to feed without fear, as those who have obtained complete victory, who have laid aside their armour, and finished their warfare. At the same time, we ought to remember, that our security and felicity proceedeth from the Lord of hosts, who on all the glory is a defence, and who upon all the assemblies of mount Zion will create a cloud.—How admirable the condescension of the Lord of hosts, displayed in accomplishing this promise! He formed the generous design in his infinite wisdom; he hath provided the whole of this noble entertainment at the expence of his unbounded liberality; he directs every thing relating to it in the most proper manner; he graciously invites the children of men to come and share in it, and kindly receives those who accept of his invitation. Let us then, with humble gratitude, have immediate recourse to him, that he may relieve all our necessities, abundantly satisfy us with the goodness of his house, and make us drink of the river of his pleasures.—To this we are encouraged by the assurance, that he maketh a feast.

For all people: for people of all kindreds, nations, and languages, scattered abroad under the four winds
of

of heaven ; for people of all ranks, high and low, rich and poor ; for people of every condition, learned and unlearned, bond and free. In this extensive sense, the expression is used by the angel of the Lord, who said to the shepherds, at our Saviour's nativity, ' Behold, ' I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall ' be unto all people *.' The blessings enjoyed by the church of God under the former dispensation, were, in great measure, confined to the posterity of Abraham, the friend of God ; whereas the feast, of which our prophet speaks, is prepared for men of every nation, whether Jews or Greeks, Barbarians or Scythians, circumcised or uncircumcised. The wall of partition, that formerly divided the Jews from the Gentiles, is now broken down ; the boundaries of the church are greatly enlarged ; and every difference, arising from external circumstances, is overlooked. The gospel is commanded to be preached to every creature under heaven.—The Lord of hosts hath especially provided suitable entertainment for those whose necessities are most urgent, and who most need relief. The poor, the miserable, the blind, the naked, may receive from him, gold tried in the fire, that they may be rich ; white raiment, that they may be clothed ; and eye-salve, that they may see. Sinners may have repentance and remission of sins. Captives may obtain redemption and liberty. Those who are spiritually diseased may have a sovereign remedy to cure their distempers. The weary and heavy-laden may get rest to their souls. The contrite in spirit may be revived by the condescending regard of the high and lofty One. The dead in trespasses and sins may hear the voice of the Son of God, and live. The ignorant may be instructed in the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness may be filled, and those who are weak may get strength

* Luke ii. 10.

to their souls. None are excluded from participating of this spiritual feast, prepared by the Lord of hosts, but those who exclude themselves.—How generous and extensive are his invitations to all people! ‘Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not*. Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine that I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding †.’—The provision made by the Lord of hosts, is called,

A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, &c. This feast consists of the precious blessings exhibited in the gospel of the Son of God, in which all the faithful subjects of his kingdom participate, though numerous as the dew of the morning, and scattered over the face of the whole earth. They are sometimes represented in scripture under the agreeable image of a sumptuous entertainment ‡, to which persons of all descriptions are invited. In this sense, the feast here mentioned is to be understood, as appears from the concomitants specified in the following verses; the removal of the vail from the face of the nations, and the abolition of death by the great Redeemer. To intimate the excellency of this banquet, and the delicious provision of which it is composed, it is expressed by fat things, full of marrow, and wines on the lees well refined, the very best things that can be presented. The prophet David, in prospect of the benefit and pleasure that he expected to enjoy, in waiting upon God in the duties of his worship, thus speaks, ‘My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness ||.’ The marrow and the fat are the choicest pieces of the meat, which have in them the most strength, sweetness, and nourishment; and

* Prov. viii. 4. 32, 33. † Prov. ix. 5, 6. ‡ See Luke xiv. 16.
|| Psal. lxxiii. 5.

therefore are here mentioned, to signify the strength, the pleasure, and consolation, that are derived from the spiritual blessings offered in the gospel. Wines are said to increase in strength and flavour, by remaining long on the lees or dregs, and after having been well refined, are esteemed the very best; and therefore afford a just representation of the precious blessings that constitute this spiritual repast.

In this sacred feast, predicted by our prophet, there is vast *abundance*, and rich *variety*, of the most *excellent* provision, joined with great *festivity and joy* among those who partake of it. I say, in this divine entertainment, there is exhibited vast abundance; the unsearchable riches, and all the fulness, that it hath pleased the Father should dwell in Jesus Christ. Though the saints, in every age, have received of his fulness, grace for grace, with abundance of the gift of righteousness, and have had all their wants supplied, still it remains unimpaired. Here God displays the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus; he makes known the riches of his glory, and reveals a plenteous redemption to his Israel from all their iniquities. Here they receive large measures of knowledge, in which they shall progressively advance until they know as they are known; such degrees of holiness, as shall gradually carry them forward to be perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect; and such plentiful consolations, as shall fill them with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.—In this feast, there is also rich variety, which it would be endless to recount: pardon of sin, reconciliation to God, adoption into his family, communion with him; the Holy Spirit to renew, sanctify, comfort, and seal unto the day of redemption; assurance of God's loving-kindness, which is better than life; strength for the performance of duty, support under affliction, victory over enemies, peace of conscience, and the earnest of eternal life. Here is the rational milk of the word for babes, strong meat for them
whose

whose senses are exercised to discern both good and evil, the water of life for such as are thirsty, the bread of life for those that are hungry, and the choicest fruits for them that are weak and languishing.— Besides, in this feast, made by the Lord of hosts, the provision is most excellent, as is plainly intimated by the expressions, *fat things, full of marrow, and wines on the lees well refined.* It is written, that the fathers of the Israelitish church, who did eat manna in the wilderness, ate angels food, or the food of the strong, as the words signify, intimating the superior excellency of the bread which God sent them from heaven. The entertainment provided for his true Israel is infinitely more noble. Those who were sustained for a time by means of manna are long since dead; whereas those who feed upon the bread of life shall never die: it immortalizes them. They shall not hunger or thirst any more; nor shall they be destitute of spiritual strength, refreshment, and consolation, in their progress toward heaven. Lord, evermore give us this bread; and with it, the water of life; of which, whosoever drinketh, shall never thirst: but it shall be in him a well of living water, springing up to everlasting life. Whosoever receives it by faith, and the benefit it is suited to convey, shall never feel vehement uneasy desires after sinful enjoyments and worldly vanities: he shall never want real refreshment and satisfaction. The truths of the gospel, and the comforts of the holy Spirit, shall, by their powerful efficacy, and permanent influence, render him active, vigorous, and fruitful, in the duties of the spiritual life.

This spiritual feast is intended, not merely to supply the necessities of the church, but to promote amity and friendship, festivity and joy, among the people of God, who, divested of care, and placed in a state of tranquillity and ease, solace themselves with a comfortable sense of the divine favour and benefits. The wise man observes, that ‘ a feast is made
‘ for

‘ for laughter.’ Accordingly we read, that, after the hostile designs of Haman against the Jews were frustrated, ‘ they observed the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the month Adar, as days of feasting and gladness*.’ The feasts appointed to be kept by the children of Israel, were instituted, among other purposes, that the tribes and families belonging to the congregation, assembled from the several districts of the land, might cultivate an intimate correspondence with each other, and rejoice before the Lord. In the plentiful entertainment provided in the gospel, and the exceeding riches of divine grace therein exhibited, God, who is love, hath given the most astonishing displays of his good-will toward men; and presented the most powerful incentives to engage them to love him, and to love one another. He appears in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, admitting them to delightful communion with him, making peace among those who were at variance, and establishing a pleasing intercourse among them. Having adopted them into his family, and united them together in the most endearing relation; and in the same hope of their calling, they are fed at the same table, as children of the same Father. Hence these emphatical words of the apostle Paul, when speaking of the Lord’s supper, ‘ The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? and the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread †.’ If it be pleasant to behold brethren dwelling together in unity, how much more pleasant to feast with them in love, and peace, and joy, *on the same divine provision?*— Thus have I considered the import of the beautiful figurative language, in which is foretold, the inestimable blessings wherewith the Lord of hosts enriches

* Esther ix. 17.

† 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

and comforts his church under the gospel. Let us thankfully acknowledge the immense goodness, of which we liberally participate; and fervently implore, that the blessing of God may accompany our spiritual provision, that, by means of the nourishment it affords, we may grow in grace, and be enabled to pursue our journey toward the heavenly and better country with increasing vigour and alacrity, until we reach mount Zion that is above, and there feast with eternal delight in the presence of God and the Lamb.

7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail *that is* spread over all nations.

Our prophet foretels, in this verse, another important blessing, which the Lord of hosts would confer upon his church. The conjecture of the Bishop of London is not improbable. He supposes, that the Hebrew word rendered *face*, hath been removed from its right place; and therefore he thus translates the words: "He will destroy the covering that covered the face of all people."—Prior to the commencement of the New-Testament dispensation, and the appearance of the Sun of righteousness, the Jews were immersed in error and superstition, and the god of this world seemed to have established a universal empire over mankind. The remains of the Mosaic institutions were buried in ignorance and will-worship: the meaning of the law of God was obscured and perplexed by false glosses, and blended with vain traditions. The hypocrisy of Pharisees, the ambition of priests, the delusions of Sadducees, the avarice of Publicans, and the debaucheries of Herodians, covered the posterity of Israel with infamy and disgrace. The Gentile nations were involved in the grossest darkness, addicted to the most absurd superstitions, whilst they indulged in the most abominable practices, insomuch that they justly merited the description given by our prophet,

prophet, 'Darkness covered the earth, and thick darkness the people.' The refreshing beams of divine light, which occasionally darted upon them, could not dispel the thick gloom in which they were bewildered. They saw not the way wherein they should have walked, neither did they perceive the work which they ought to have done, but with forwardness of heart went on from evil to worse.—This covering, that was cast over the face of all people, is, by another metaphor, employed in the following words, called, *the veil which is spread over all nations*; that prevented them from seeing the glory of God displayed in his works, and from understanding the scriptures of the Old Testament when put into their hands.—This covering, this veil, Isaiah declares, that the Lord of hosts will destroy in the mountain of his church. This is his glorious prerogative, his peculiar work, by whatever means and instruments it be accomplished. Until this day, as the apostle Paul remarks, the veil remaineth upon the hearts of the Jews, in reading the sacred writings; which veil, he saith, shall be taken away, when they shall turn to the Lord*. This covering was in part removed, by means of those eminent men whom God raised up from among the posterity of Israel, and from among other nations, who were furnished with distinguished abilities for giving a partial fulfilment to this prediction. It was entirely destroyed, when Jesus Christ came into this world, to be a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel. 'Then, through the tender mercy of our God, the day spring from on high did visit us, to give light to them that sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace †.' And, in the progress of time, when this covering, through the corruptions of Christianity, again covered the nations, the Lord of hosts was

* See 2 Cor. iii. 14. *et seq.*

† Luke i. 78, 79.

pleased to remove this veil of error and superstition, by clearly revealing his glory, and opening mens eyes to behold it shining in the face of Jesus Christ.— Turn then to the Lord, my friends, in the exercise of true penitence, and the veil shall be taken away: he will graciously remove your blindness, unbelief, and error, and give you to discern the wondrous things that are in his law and gospel. Thus shall you with open face behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.

8 He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces, and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken *it*.

These words describe several excellent benefits which God promiseth to bestow upon his peculiar people.—*He will swallow up death in victory.* As there are various kinds of death, it may be necessary, in order to understand aright the import of this prediction, to ascertain the particular kind of death that is here intended. That the prophet does not speak of every kind of death, must be evident to an impartial intelligent reader. There is a death which, in scripture, is called the second death, that shall never be abolished, with respect to those who fall under its power. It is therefore represented, as a fire that shall never be quenched, as a worm that never dieth, as an eternal reproach, and an everlasting punishment, to which hypocrites, unbelievers, and the disobedient, shall be consigned by the Judge of the world. Over the church of God, on which the precious blessings now mentioned shall be conferred, it hath no power, neither shall they be ever hurt by it *; so that I cannot

* Rev. xx. 6.

think that this is the death here meant. Nor do I suppose, that the death which is called spiritual, consisting in alienation from the life of God, and in the service of sin, is intended in this prophecy. The chosen, called, and faithful, are doubtless, by nature, children of wrath, as well as other men, until they pass from death to life, and are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son: but, by the quickening Spirit of God, they are rescued from this death, and made alive unto God, through Jesus Christ, so that it hath no more dominion over them. The death whereof our prophet speaks, is the first death, that passeth upon all men, for that all have sinned; which separates soul and body from each other, and exerciseth its power over the whole church of God. This king of terrors often appears to the saints as a very formidable enemy that greatly distresses them. From the overwhelming fears of this death, which, for the sake of religion, is sometimes inflicted on them by their cruel persecutors, they ought to be freed, by the firm persuasion, that it shall not separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He will swallow it up in victory. The expression is metaphorical, and taken from things cast into the sea, or the fire, or into some marshy place, which are immediately absorbed, and disappear. Thus shall death be abolished by the Lord of hosts, and swallowed up in the glorious triumphs he shall obtain over this powerful foe of his church. For this purpose, the Son of God, the Prince of life, was manifested in the flesh, that he might destroy death, and him that had the power of death, and bring life and immortality to light by the gospel. Though, to outward appearance, death seemed to get the victory over him, yet he actually vanquished the conqueror in his own dominions: he swallowed him up in victory. The apostle Paul, treating of the resurrection of Christians from the dead, to a blessed and glorious life, affirms, that then shall be brought to pass that which is here written,

written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' He doth not say, that this prediction had never been in any measure fulfilled until that period; but he asserts, that it should receive a perfect accomplishment, when the bodies of the faithful, being delivered from the power of death, shall be raised to a joyful immortality.—This prediction opens a glorious prospect to the upright servants of God, who may now adopt, in the day of distress, the triumphant exclamation of the apostle, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ*.' Happy world, into which death shall never enter! Here he exercises universal dominion over mankind: he enters into every family, and spares not people of any age, sex, or condition. The time is fast approaching, when we shall be removed from our families, our friends, our habitations, and the means of spiritual improvement that we enjoy. In this view, the consolation provided for the people of God is truly refreshing: the Lord of hosts will swallow up death in victory: he hath already done this in his own person, and he will render all his followers more than conquerors. And, at the resurrection of the just, he will raise our bodies from the dust: having fashioned them like unto the glorious body of Jesus Christ, and adorned our souls with the beauties of holiness, we shall be admitted into the immediate presence of God, to enjoy the brightest manifestations of his glory, and to share in the sublime joys which are at his right hand for ever more.

And the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces. In this present state, the faces of God's people are often bedewed with tears, which, on many accounts, drop from their eyes. How moving the picture given of their condition, by the servant of the Lord, in the following pathetic words! 'Thou feed-

* 1 Cor. xv. 55. 57.

‘est them with the bread of tears, and givest them
 ‘tears to drink in great measure*.’ Their own sins,
 and the transgressions of them who keep not God’s
 law, the afflictions which they sustain, the compas-
 sions which they feel, the temptations with which
 they are assaulted, the evils which they fear, and the
 righteous judgments of God, are fruitful sources of
 grief and sorrow to good men, and frequently bring
 tears from their eyes. These tears the Lord God
 shall wipe away. The expression seems to allude to
 the practice of a tender-hearted father, who gently
 wipes off the tears that fall from the eyes of his be-
 loved child, to whom he administers consolation under
 his afflictions and sorrows. With infinitely greater
 affection, the Father of mercies shall wipe away the
 tears that run down from the eyes of his children.
 He will not only administer consolation to them under
 all their present tribulations and sorrows, but, in due
 time, he will remove every occasion of grief which
 distressed them, and turn all their sorrows into joys.
 In the most endearing manner, he will not only de-
 liver their feet from falling, but likewise their eyes
 from tears. And, at the glorious period when death
 shall be swallowed up in victory, ‘the Lamb, which
 ‘is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and
 ‘shall lead them unto living fountains of waters;
 ‘and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes†.’
 And again, it is written, ‘God shall wipe away all
 ‘tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more
 ‘death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there
 ‘be any more pain: for the former things are passed
 ‘away ‡.’

*And the rebuke of his people shall he take away from
 off all the earth.* The persons to whom this privilege
 is promised, are the people of God, whom he hath
 chosen for his inheritance; who were redeemed from
 among men by the precious blood of his Son, and

* Psal. lxxx. 5.

† Rev. vii. 17.

‡ Rev. xxi. 4.

formed for himself, to shew forth his praises. They are translated into his kingdom, and purified unto himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.—The rebuke of this people may denote, the reproaches and calumnies whereby their character and conduct were misrepresented by their enemies; the afflictions and calamities whereby a righteous God rebuked them for their sins and follies, tried their faith and patience, exercised their graces, advanced his own glory and the good of his church. This rebuke he shall take away from off all the earth. The Lord God will vindicate them from the foul aspersions, the cruel treatment, and manifold distresses, which they endured: he will bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noon-day; then they shall appear to the world to have been invidiously traduced, and most unjustly despised and persecuted by their adversaries. In our prophet's beautiful nervous language, 'No weapon that is formed against them, shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against them in judgment, thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord *.'—*For the Lord hath spoken it.* These are the true and faithful sayings of God, whose word is settled in heaven, and cannot fail of receiving its full accomplishment.—Look to God, that he may confer upon you all these desirable blessings which he hath promised to his church; particularly, that he may enable you to derive real benefit from the sharp rebukes which he administers, that even when you walk in the midst of trouble, he may revive you, and deliver you in, as well as from your distresses. God is faithful, saith the apostle to the Gentiles, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able to bear. Temptations and trials you shall have; but the Lord will make a way for you to escape from the

* Isaiah liv. 17.

evils attending them, that you may have deliverance through his mercy and power, and live to his glory.

9 ¶ And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD, we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation,

The chorus formed by the redeemed of the Lord, are introduced, celebrating the praises of Jehovah, for the deliverances they had already received, and the hopes they entertained of the continuance and increase of his kindness toward them.—*In that day*; in the remarkable period to which our prophet looked forward, wherein God shall have accomplished the wonderful events for the salvation of his people, mentioned in the preceding part of this beautiful hymn.—Having vanquished their formidable enemies, and administered suitable relief to their necessities; having furnished them with the best provisions, and presented them with the most reviving prospects; it shall be said by the people of God, and every where published with gratulation and triumph, *Lo, this is our God*. In humble dependence on the Father of lights, for direction, assistance, and blessing, let us attentively consider the import of the spirited language adopted by the church.

1. Contemplate the glorious object we are here invited to behold: *Lo, this is our God*. The words express strong emotions of pleasure, admiration, and joy, arising from the merciful interpositions made in behalf of his people, whereby Jehovah manifested himself present among them. Though God is invisible to our bodily eyes, we behold him, when we sensibly discern those visible effects which cannot be produced by any other than his omnipotent arm. Wherever these effects are seen and felt, there is God, there the brightness of his glory shines, and there he demonstrates

strates his power and presence. The church therefore, having experienced his gracious appearance in their favour, point him out as their God, with whom they are intimately connected; as Jehovah, from whom alone their help doth come. The surprising grand events recited in this chapter, they ascribe unto the Lord their God. If you inquire, in the words of Job, ‘Where, and who is he,’ that maketh a feast for all people, and hath swallowed up death in victory? We reply, This is our God, the Lord of hosts.— This is our God, who hath entered into covenant with us, who hath avouched us to be his peculiar people; and whom we have avouched to be our God, and to walk in his ways. There subsists between him and us, a reciprocal endearing relation, a mutual tender affection, a continued delightful intercourse, a most agreeable concord, and an intimate union of interest and design. He is our God, and we are his people; he is our Creator, and we are his creatures; he is our Father, and we are his children; he is our Preserver, and we are maintained by him; he is our Deliverer, and we are his redeemed people. His perfections, providence, and promises, are all united to promote the felicity and salvation of those with whom he is thus nearly related, whilst all their faculties are consecrated to his service, all their possessions and influence are devoted to his honour.

This is Jehovah; the true and living God, who is for ever distinguished from the dead idols worshipped among the Heathen nations, by the works which he hath done, and the deliverances that he hath wrought. This is the Lord; to whom there is none that can be compared in heaven above, or in the earth beneath. ‘To whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal, saith the holy One? Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? who hath meted out the heaven with a span? who hath comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure? who hath weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance; and

‘ and taketh up the isles as a very little thing? He
 ‘ sitteth on the circle of the earth, and the inha-
 ‘ bitants thereof are as grasshoppers. All nations
 ‘ are before him as nothing; and they are counted by
 ‘ him less than nothing, and vanity*. What lofti-
 nesses of expression! Our prophet’s imagination rises
 superior to every thing earthly, and mounts to the
 most inaccessible regions of the universe.—This is
 the Lord, who is the boundless ocean of existence,
 from whom all created beings proceed, with the noble
 qualities they possess: the heavens, with all their lu-
 minaries; the earth, with its fertility; the sea, with
 its fulness; the philosopher, with his penetration;
 the soldier, with his courage; the artist, with his in-
 genuity; the upright, with his consolation. When
 we behold these desirable objects, we ought to say,
 Lo, this is the Lord, who doth great things, unsearch-
 able, marvellous, and without number; our God, by
 whom we are animated, whose air we breathe, by
 whose power we are preserved, and in whose salvation
 we rejoice.

This is the Lord, whose mercy and compassions are
 equal to his grandeur and power. God is love. God
 so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten
 Son, that whosoever believeth in him, might not
 perish, but have everlasting life. What an unpa-
 ralleled display of love is this! What infinite affec-
 tion is manifested toward us, by this unspeakable
 gift! Think on the essential glory of the Son of God,
 his profound humiliation, his astonishing sufferings,
 his painful ignominious death; and, in all these, be-
 hold the most wonderful demonstrations of the divine
 love toward mankind. What majesty, compassion,
 and beauty, are conspicuous in the character of the
 Redeemer! what an amiable interesting picture doth
 it present to our view! What but infinite wisdom
 could have formed such a grand design as he hath

* Isaiah xl. 12. *et seq.*

executed! what but divine love could have accomplished such a wonderful extensive plan! God manifest, God manifest in the flesh, in the likeness of sinful flesh, in the form of a servant, obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. This astonishing grace of our Lord, who, though once humbled, is now exalted; though once obedient, is now clothed with authority; though once dead, is now alive; is for ever extolled, with seraphic joy, by all the celestial inhabitants, and ought to be the frequent theme of our most ardent praises.—Meditate also upon the other pleasing manifestations he hath given of his mercy and grace, in forgiving you all trespasses; in pardoning the sins of all his people, committed through ignorance, infirmity, and even through obstinacy—in renewing you after his image, in quickening you together with Christ, and translating you into his kingdom—in admitting you into his favour and family, that you may enjoy the inestimable prerogatives of his beloved children—in conferring upon you his promised Spirit, and thereby forming such a wonderful connection between him and you, as hath for its model, the union subsisting between the Father and the Son. This high honour Jesus Christ requested for you in his intercessory prayer: ‘I pray that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee*.’ Such knowledge is too high for us at present: our faculties are too limited and feeble, in this imperfect state, to understand this sublime subject: but the time cometh, when they shall be enlarged and invigorated; and we shall know, by happy experience, what it is, to be one with God, and with Jesus Christ. In the mean time, we say, Lo, this is our God, who, by a multiplicity of ways, is preparing us afore unto this glory, which is to be revealed.

2. Consider the becoming exercise in which the church was employed, *We have waited for him*; and

* John xvii. 21.

again, they repeat the expression, *We have waited for him.* The repetition of the words plainly intimates, the great earnestness, and persevering diligence, with which the saints had waited upon the Lord their God. The Hebrew word whereby their employment is expressed, signifies, to hope, to expect, to look around with solicitude and desire, and to depend upon the wished-for person or object. It doth not properly denote any bodily labour, but the humble patient exercises of the heart, animated by faith in the providence and promises of God. In this employment, the royal prophet declared his unremitting continuance, notwithstanding every discouragement and opposition: ‘ I wait for the Lord (said he), my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning*.’ In these words, there is a beautiful allusion to watchmen, who earnestly look for the dawning of the morning, that, being relieved from the watch, they may retire to rest and sleep, of which they had been deprived during the darkness, solitude, and cold of the night.—More particularly, this duty includes—Earnest desire—Lively expectation, joined with—Holy serenity of mind. I say,

Waiting for God comprehends, Earnest desire. As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as a hireling looketh for the reward of his work, so, O Lord! saith the church, in the following chapter, we have waited for thee: the desire of our soul is to thee, and the remembrance of thee. Thus employed, they thirst for God, the living God, as the hart panteth for the water-brooks, that they may come and appear before him. Their souls long for God, with more ardent affection than did David for his favourite son Absalom: they look more wishfully for his appearance in their favour, than the mother of Sifera, when she looked out at the window, expecting the arrival of

* Psal. cxxx. 5, 6.

her son; and cried, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot? Such fervent desires, terminating upon God, are agreeable proofs, that those who feel them, are sensible of their necessities; that their hopes of obtaining relief, are fixed upon him, who they trust will soon send them deliverance.—It includes, Lively expectation. This is essential to the employment of waiting for God, and inspires it with life and beauty. The devout psalmist, therefore, thus encouraged himself: ‘ My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him *.’ In this exercise, we entertain the pleasing hope, that the Lord our God will seasonably manifest himself to us; that he will assuredly accomplish his gracious purposes, and the promises of his word, notwithstanding every intervening obstacle. In all our straits and necessities, we look, with humble confidence, to receive from him supplies suited to our circumstances, firmly persuaded, like Mordecai, that enlargement and deliverance shall arise. In this manner, the all-sufficiency and grace of Jehovah are glorified, whose compassion is equal to his power, and from whom his servants may promise themselves more than they can desire. ‘ He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.’ Such large expectations bring him, on whom they are founded, under strong obligations to gratify them, that so he may demonstrate his real goodness and beneficence to be equal to the high opinion formed of his liberality. The Lord our God therefore hath often more than fulfilled, by extraordinary mercies and deliverances, the expectations of his people, who have waited for him.—With desire and hope, are united Holy serenity of mind. The church, in the book of Lamentations, acknowledges, that ‘ it is good both to hope, and quietly to wait, for the salvation of the

* Psal. lxii. 5.

‘ Lord *.’ In this consisteth the very essence and vigour of this spiritual exercise, as it is written, chap. xxx. 15. of this prophecy: ‘ In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.’ This sacred tranquillity of soul represses those uneasy disquietudes, and tumultuous thoughts, which disturb the mind, and unfit for the right performance of this, or any other duty. It composes the soul attentively to observe every symptom of the divine approach, every appearance from which may be deduced favourable consequences, and every opportunity that ought to be diligently improved. It gives a seasonable check to that precipitation and haste which springs from uneasiness at our present condition, and from hurtful anxiety about immediate deliverance. ‘ He that believeth, will not make haste;’ or, as the apostle of the Gentiles interprets our prophet’s words, ‘ he shall not be ashamed †.’

In this manner, let us wait for God, even though he may tarry long, attentive lest we fall into despondency, rise up in discontent, or rashly adopt unwarrantable methods by which we think sooner to reach our end. ‘ The Lord is good unto them that wait for him ‡;’ so good, that it is sometimes better to wait for mercies than to enjoy them. David seems to have enjoyed as much of the divine favour, when he waited upon God for a kingdom, as he did after he was elevated to the throne of Israel. Thus employed, our best interests shall be happily promoted. We shall be kept humble in every condition; our thoughts shall be directed toward God: we shall maintain close dependence upon him; the graces of faith and hope, patience and fortitude, shall be improved: we shall renew our spiritual strength, and lack no good thing. Wait then upon the Lord, who waits to be gracious; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you.

* Lam. iii. 26.

† Rom. x. 11.

‡ Lam. iii. 25.

3. Attend to the assured confidence in God, which the church expressed in these words, *He will save us*. In every age, they have viewed the Lord as their Saviour: to him they have ascribed the praise of all the manifold salvations they have enjoyed, and to him they have looked for deliverance in seasons of danger and distress. It is their glory and felicity, that they are a people saved by the Lord, who is the shield of their help, and the sword of their excellency*. Through all the temporal deliverances wrought for them, they have looked forward to eternal salvation; and beyond all the favours whom God hath raised up to them, they have lifted up their eyes to God their Saviour, whose praises and glory they delightfully celebrated. Salvation from the hands of their enemies, which was doubtless primarily intended in the words before us, is employed as an image, to shadow out a salvation of an infinitely higher and more important nature. These events are intimately connected together: indeed, the former is hardly ever mentioned in this prophecy, without some intimation being given of the latter. In this they triumph, that, though surrounded with dangers, and assaulted by enemies, he, who is the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in time of trouble, will be their salvation. ‘Had not the Lord been on our side, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth †. We will not trust in our own bow, neither shall our sword save us: but thou hast saved us—thy right hand, thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto us. In God we boast all the day long; and praise thy name for ever and ever ‡. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains ||.

* Deut. xxxiii. 29. † Psal. cxxiv. 2, 3. 8. ‡ Psal. xlv. 3.—8.
 || Jer. iii. 23.

In the words under consideration, the people of God express their firm confidence, that the Lord will save them, not only with a temporal, but with a spiritual and eternal salvation. They expected, not only a deliverance like that which was wrought for their fathers, by Gideon or Samson, but the eternal salvation of the Son of God. They entertained the assured hope, that he would not only rescue them from the evils of this present life, and confer upon them mercies suited to relieve their necessities, but that he would deliver them from spiritual and eternal evils, and exalt them to the everlasting enjoyment of consummate felicity and glory. All the manifold salvations wrought for them in the earth, they considered as flowing from him: but what they chiefly wished to enjoy, and on which their hearts were fixed, was that salvation which is peculiarly from God, every way, and only his. Striking instances of the truth of this remark occur both in the Old and New Testaments. After all the wonderful interpositions which David, the servant of the Lord, experienced, he declared, that his soul fainted for God's salvation. And the apostle Paul, after the many extraordinary deliverances he received, comforted himself, that the Lord would deliver him from all evil, and preserve him to his heavenly kingdom. Under the leaves of temporal mercies, they looked for the fruit of the tree of life: they felt for a more excellent salvation. This was the great object upon which all their hopes and desires terminated, without which nothing else could satisfy.—Of this great salvation, the church here expresses their confident and joyful expectation. The experience which they had, in times past, of divine mercy, opened to them a bright prospect of future deliverance. They trusted, that he who had enlarged them in distress, would have mercy upon them; that he who had delivered, would yet deliver. The conclusion was just, and well-founded, deduced from the immutability of God: whose hand is not shortened,

ened, that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy, that it cannot hear. With the Father of lights, there is no variableness; in the spring of consolation, there is no change: the more favours that we have received from God, the greater hopes we may cherish. His affection and compassion toward his people are unchangeably the same. His mercies are ever new, and his compassions fail not. His love is not like ours, a sudden flash of affection, that is soon over: it is everlasting, and changeth not. Indeed, the grounds on which faith and hope are founded, admit not of any alteration. The nature, the name, the covenant, and the promises of God, are always the same, and endure for ever; and, by these, the strongest assurance is given, that he is as able to save in time to come, as in times past. Besides, the perfect mediation of the Son of God, his infinite grace and ability, encourage his friends, at all times, to expect, that the Lord will save them.

4. Examine the consequent resolution adopted by the church, *We will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation.* Of all the objects which are suited to excite joy and gladness, the salvation of the Lord is the most excellent, and affords the best ground of exultation and triumph.—The peculiar people of God are thereby delivered from the enormous load of guilt which they have contracted. By transgression, we have forfeited all claim to the divine friendship: we have exposed ourselves to the wrath of God, that cometh upon the children of disobedience; to death and destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. To rescue us from this accumulated guilt, and obnoxiousness to this awful punishment, the Lord God sent his only begotten Son into the world, to be the propitiation for our sins. He laid upon him the iniquity of us all: in consequence of which, he bare our sins on his own body on the tree; he made his soul an offering for sin; and died for our sins, according to the scriptures. By this gracious interposition, he expiated the guilt incurred

incurred by all who receive his atonement, and humbly rely on his mediation. Thus he taketh away the sins of the world; and ‘we obtain redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*.’—By this salvation, we are freed from the corruption and depravity of our nature. ‘The carnal mind (saith the apostle Paul) is enmity against God.’ It rises in opposition to the divine excellencies; it refuses subjection to the holy law of God; it withholds submission to the dispensations of his providence and grace; it regards not his favour as the chief good, nor his glory as the ultimate end. From the dominion of this strong corruption, we are rescued by the rod of God’s strength, accompanied with his Spirit, whereby he rules in the midst of his enemies, and makes them his willing people in the day of his power. By his victorious grace, he delivers us from vicious passions, sensual inclinations, and criminal practices, which are the effects of depravity of heart. Being renewed in the spirit of our minds, we are formed for the practice of all goodness, and prepared for the eternal enjoyment of God in heaven.—By this salvation, we are likewise delivered from the misery and destruction which sin hath entailed upon transgressors. Sin hath scattered misery and wo over the face of the earth. Avarice and ambition, malice and discord, have diffused their baneful influence into every nation, city, and society. Cares, disappointments, and diseases, with the fears of death, are experienced by persons of every rank, in every age, and often embitter the happiest hours of life. Every habitual sinner hath in his breast, the certain sources of misery, and frequent forebodings of future anguish. From this wretched condition, we are extricated, when, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; and, being regenerated by the Holy Ghost, our irregular de-

* Eph. i. 7.

fires are restrained, our minds are enlightened, our hearts are purified, and our conduct regulated by the laws of God. By this happy change in our state and temper, we are restored to the divine favour and resemblance: we receive an indefeasible right to eternal glory; and commence our journey to the land of uprightness, where are fulness of joy, and rivers of pleasures for ever more.

In this salvation, which is admirably suited to our character and circumstances, we ought, with the church, to be glad and rejoice. Our joy should far exceed the joy of harvest, when the precious fruits of the earth are collected, and brought home in safety; and the joy in war, when the conquerors divide the spoils, and return in triumph to their country and friends; yea, all the joy that can arise from temporal possessions. This joy should be unspeakable, and full of glory. There is something so transporting in the view of this salvation, that we ought to rejoice and exult in the glorious prospect which it exhibits.—

Are there any of you in this assembly, whose consciences are wounded by an affecting sense of your sins, and the danger to which you stand exposed; and who are deeply convinced of your infinite need of redemption? How delightful the tidings contained in the gospel, of recovery from the punishment and dominion of sin, and restoration to the friendship, the image, and enjoyment of God! The thoughts of this salvation ought to make your hearts leap with gladness. How seasonable, how refreshing, the relief and consolation which it administers to those who are broken in heart! Every ingredient in the salvation of the Lord, opens the sources of the purest, the most sublime and permanent joy. Let us then hearken to the voice that cometh out from the throne of God; which saith, ‘Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ‘ye that fear him, both small and great.’ Let us unite our voice with that ‘of the great multitude, ‘which was like the voice of many waters, and as the
‘ voice

‘ voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia; for
 ‘ the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be
 ‘ glad and rejoice, and give honour to him *.’

10 For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghil.

The continuance of the divine favour with the church, and the agreeable prospect of the entire conquest of their implacable enemies, are here mentioned, as grounds of the joy and triumph expressed in the preceding verse.—God is a Spirit; and therefore, properly speaking, he hath neither hands, nor any of the parts which belong to human nature. Notwithstanding, in allusion to the hand of man, which is the chief instrument of action, whereby he exerts his strength, the hand of God is often mentioned, to denote his almighty power, employed in behalf of his church, to defend them from evil, to vindicate them from oppression, to punish their enemies, to cherish and protect them, and liberally to confer upon them the most substantial blessings. In this mountain, whereof glorious things are predicted in the foregoing verses, *shall the hand of the Lord rest*, as the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, rested over the camp of Israel; or as the emblem of the divine presence rested on the mercy-seat. Or the expression may allude to the conduct of a traveller, who, after having been long abroad, returns home, and there takes up his fixed residence. The kind protecting hand of God, which had for a long time been withdrawn from his people, was to be again restored, to bless, defend, and enrich them, and to give them peace and tranquillity.—Let thy hand, O gracious God! be ever with us, to deliver us out of

* Rev. xix. 5. *et seq.*

all our troubles, to prosper and perfect us in our Christian course, until, having conquered all our spiritual enemies, we arrive at the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.

And Moab shall be trodden down under him, &c. Moab was the name of the posterity of Lot, by his eldest daughter, who possessed the land situated in the neighbourhood of Israel, whom they continually endeavoured to vex and harass. They were gross idolaters, worshippers of Chemosh, their abomination; and were expressly prohibited from entering into the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation. Under this designation, agreeable to the prophetic style, may be comprehended, all the inveterate enemies of the true Israel of God, who disturb and annoy them, and serve lying vanities. Concerning them it is foretold, *They shall be trodden down.* This expression, with the simple comparison by which it is illustrated, plainly intimates, the unprofitableness of the people spoken of, the great contempt with which they were to be treated, the irresistible power whereby they were to be subdued, and the entire subjection to which they should be reduced. Trampling upon enemies denotes, their entire conquest by those who, in this manner, triumph over them. Victorious princes were anciently accustomed to order the kings, and great men, whom they had taken captive, to be laid prostrate upon the ground, and to tread upon their bodies, in token of the total conquest which they had obtained. In reference to this practice, our prophet foretels, that the adversaries of God's people shall be completely vanquished, and entirely routed: in proof of which, they shall be trodden upon; not accidentally, as a man trampleth upon a serpent that is lying in the way, but as he treadeth on the straw, of which he hath the disposal.—As the love of God triumphs over the unworthiness of his people, so his justice shall triumph over all the opposition of their enemies, who, according to his purpose, he will make his

his footstool. However powerful and numerous their foes, though they are seated upon thrones, and have nations under their command, they shall certainly be reduced to a very mean and deplorable condition.

II And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth *his hands* to swim: and he shall bring down their pride, together with the spoils of their hands.

There is much obscurity in this verse. The following short remarks will, I hope, throw some light upon it. Different opinions are entertained respecting the agent here spoken of; some supposing that God, and others that Moab, is intended. I have chosen the former sense, as the Lord is the person of whom the prophet speaks in the preceding verse, and in the latter clause of the one now before us; though, I acknowledge, I do not well perceive the propriety of the similitude by which the action is illustrated. *As he that swimmeth spreadeth forth his hands to swim*: extending his arms to their full length, and keeping them in constant motion, he cuts the waters with his out-stretched hands, and renders the resistance he meets with conducive to advance him toward the object he hath in view. Thus the Lord God was to stretch forth his hands upon the country of Moab, so as to reach to the most remote corners, that he might inflict upon them those desolating judgments whereby their pride should be humbled. All the opposition they were to make to these divine judgments, was to prove ineffectual for preventing their execution.

And he shall bring down their pride, &c. ‘ We have heard of the pride of Moab, of his haughtiness, and his pride *.’ They were exceeding proud, even to a proverb; and extremely ill-disposed toward

* Isaiah xvi. 6.

the people of Judah. The prophet Jeremiah declares, that such was their intolerable arrogance, that ‘they magnified themselves against the Lord*.’ They were puffed up with a vain conceit of their abilities, their riches, their strength, and the other advantages which they possessed. Indeed, it often happens, that people who have little whereof to be vain, are the most proud and insolent. This pride our prophet foretels, the Lord God would bring down, and effectually humble, *with the spoils of their hands*; the riches and fortresses of their country, and the prosperity of their kingdom.—Those who walk in pride, he is able to abase. The pride of Moab was a sure preface of their future downfall. God resisteth the proud; and, therefore, as saith the proverb, ‘The house of the proud shall be destroyed †.’ All the efforts made by persons of this description, to aggrandize themselves, shall be counteracted; and, ere long, they shall be clothed with shame. The truth before us hath been verified with respect to Moab, and in a thousand other instances. The prophecy was literally fulfilled by the overthrow of the Moabites, and it shall certainly be accomplished in all those who are included in this designation.

12 And the fortrefs of the high fort of thy walls shall he bring down, lay low, *and* bring to the ground, *even* to the dust.

Another ground of the church’s triumphant joy is expressed in these words.—It is difficult to determine, whether our prophet here speaks of Heshbon, a strong fortified city, that belonged to the Moabites; or of Babylon, whose destruction he had foretold in verse second. After adducing a striking instance of the divine righteousness, to be displayed in the overthrow of Moab, it seems not improbable, that he again re-

* Jer. xlviii. 26.

† Prov. xv. 25.

verts to the subject with which this sublime ode commenced; and in this view I consider the prediction. In elegant poetical compositions, the subject that is treated is not always expressly mentioned, but is often described by those attributes, qualities, or circumstances, from which it may be known what is intended. Thus the royal poet begins his eighty-seventh psalm: 'His foundation is in the holy mountains.' Having meditated on the strength, the beauty, and glory of Jerusalem, and imagining the thoughts of those whom he addressed to have been employed on the same theme, he breaks forth in this abrupt manner. Another instance occurs in the first verse of the following chapter.—*And the fortrefs of the high fort of thy wall.* The ramparts and the walls of Babylon were of such great celebrity, at the time this prophecy was delivered, that Isaiah might suppose, that the language which he employs, would point out, with sufficient certainty, the place he intended. The inhabitants of Babylon, therefore, he accosts in the words before us, wherein he assures them, of the approaching desolation of all their fortifications.—This prophecy God hath long since fulfilled, by Darius, the son of Hystaspis, who divested that renowned city of its defence and glory. And the destruction of literal Babylon encourages us to hope, that God, in due time, will completely abolish mystical Babylon, which, in all ages, hath been hostile to the interests of the church. The expressions, which are here elegantly varied, and repeated, when taken together, strongly represent the entire demolition, and utter destruction, of both literal and figurative Babylon. In the overthrow of this last-mentioned power, is comprehended the total ruin of the kingdom of Satan, consisting in idolatry, superstition, pride, tyranny, and corruption of manners.

To conclude, let us joyfully celebrate the mercy and faithfulness of Jehovah toward his church, and let us earnestly pray for the accomplishment of the
 exceeding

exceeding great and precious promises contained in this book. However numerous and powerful the enemies of the people of God, and though, to human view, they may seem invincible, yet they shall surely perish from off the earth. How safe, how happy, how honourable, the society of the church of God, whom the Lord hath chosen for his inheritance; for whom he made the earth, and stretched out the heavens; for whose redemption the blood of his own Son was shed; for whose consolation the holy Spirit is continually employed; for whose benefit he overturns kingdoms and empires, and shakes heaven and earth! He hath given men for them, and people for their life; and he renders the affairs of nations subservient for promoting their safety and felicity. Blessed society! happy people! whose enemies shall be found liars; and who shall tread upon their high places: who, after all the kingdoms of this earth are extinct, shall for ever reign in life, and resound his praises, whose right-hand is become glorious in power, whose right-hand hath dashed in pieces the enemy; and, in the greatness of whose excellency, he hath overthrown them that rose up against them.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

IN the second part of this sublime song of praise, contained in the chapter now before us, the servants of God gratefully commemorate the divine mercy and grace, which they had experienced under the most grievous afflictions.—They proclaim the happiness of their condition, and excite each other to place their confidence in the God of Israel, to which they were encouraged by the important benefits they already enjoyed. Being mostly addressed to God, in the form of a public acknowledgment, the righteousness of his judgments is celebrated, and the happy effects with which they were accompanied are recounted. To all which, are subjoined several salutary advices to the godly, in which they are directed prudently to compose themselves, until the divine indignation should be over, and God would accomplish their salvation.—This beautiful hymn seems to have been sung by two choruses, composed of different persons, who alternately replied to each other. It begins with a thankful acknowledgment of the important benefits conferred upon the church, ver. 1. With gratulation and triumph, the gates of the temple of God are required to be set open to the faithful servants of Jehovah, who were come out of great tribulation, ver. 2. The redeemed from among men, next express their faith and confidence in God, and invite their brethren to place unshaken trust in his power and faithfulness, ver. 3.—6. In the confession made to God, respecting divine judgments, their causes, their equity, and their effects are delineated, both with regard to the righteous and the wicked, ver. 7.—19. The conclusion, which is practical, is written in the style of a historian, and modelled into the form of an admonition, suited to the occasion, ver. 20, 21.

CHAP. XXVI.

IN that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah, We have a strong city, salvation will *God* appoint *for* walls and bulwarks.

The time and the place in which this song should be sung, are particularly specified.—*In that day*, wherein the church of God, through the divine favour, shall have obtained deliverance from the great distresses in which they had been involved, this sublime song shall be recited in the assemblies of the saints, to express their gratitude to Jehovah for the mercies they had received. This delightful exercise was to be performed *in the land of Judah*, where the servants of God resided, who confessed and praised his name. ‘In Judah God was well known: in Salem was his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion*.’ The tribe of Judah was remarkable for adhering to the kings of the house of David, and cleaving to the worship of the true God, after the revolt of the other tribes. ‘When Ephraim compassed God with lies and deceit, Judah ruled with his God, and was faithful with his saints †.’ The church therefore, in the prophecies relating to the New Testament, are often spoken of under this description. Thus the prophet Malachi foretold, that, after the Messenger of the covenant would make his appearance, ‘then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord as in the days of old, as in ancient years ‡.’ And, in the words under our consideration, the land of Judah denotes, the country possessed by the peculiar people of God, who celebrate his praises, and rejoice in his salvation. Indeed, this sacred ode is well-suited to the circumstances of the church under the New Testament,

* Psa. lxxvi. 1, 2.

† Hosea xi. 12.

‡ Mal. iii. 4.

who, with great propriety, may adopt it into the number of those spiritual songs which they sing with grace in their hearts to the Lord.

We have a strong city. The church, joyful in the deliverances which God had wrought for them; triumph in him as their almighty Protector and Defence, and contemplate their situation under the beautiful figure of a strong fortified city, proof against the attacks of every enemy. There is a peculiar elegance in our prophet, not expressing the name of Jehovah in this period. He supposes, that the Person of whom he speaks, is well known by the figurative description which he gives of him; that the minds of other people were as much occupied with thoughts of him as his own; and that they were equally engaged in meditating on the felicity they enjoyed in his favour. In God, by whose power and protection they enjoy agreeable security and perpetual safety, they have a strong city. ‘As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever*.’ He is ‘their strong rock, for a house of defence to save them †.’ To them God is known for a refuge; and in him they glory, as their fortress and deliverer. Things are said to be strong, which have power sufficient to perform whatever is required or expected of them, and to sustain any weight or pressure that is laid upon them. Transfer this idea of strength to the Lord Jehovah, who is the dwelling-place of his saints in all generations. In him they have strength for performing every service assigned them, and for enduring every affliction laid upon them, as well as safety from every enemy and danger.—Let us then, who profess to derive all felicity and consolation from connection with this strong city, live together in unity and peace, and in profound subjection to the perfect law of liberty. In this state of complete defence,

* Psal. cxxv. 2.

† Psal. xxxi. 2.

formed by the Lord of hosts, let us triumph in his praises, and glorify his name.

Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. It is not affirmed, that the people of God shall be safe, but that salvation itself shall be appointed for walls and bulwarks. Jesus Christ, who is God's salvation to the ends of the earth, and the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey him, may be intended in this expression. He gives to his church all that safety which they enjoy: and so completely defends them from their enemies, that no weapon formed against them shall ever prosper; nor shall the gates of hell prevail against them. 'Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise*.' Of the same import is the promise made by the prophet Zechariah: 'For (saith the Lord) I will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of her †.'—We ought, as we are called upon by the king of Israel, to tell the towers of Zion, and to mark well her bulwarks. Three of them at present rise into view, which merit our attention. 1. The watchful providence of God, which is thus beautifully delineated by his servant Moses: 'The land which ye go to possess, is a land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning to the end of the year ‡.' 2. Another impregnable bulwark of the church, are the promises of God, by which he expresses his good-will toward them in the strongest and most comfortable terms: of these, the prophet Samuel gives a delightful specimen: 'The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake, because it pleased the Lord to make them his people ||.' 3. The last bulwark of the church which I now mention, is the special

* Isaiah lx. 18.

† Zech. ii. 5.

‡ Deut. xi. 12.

|| 1 Sam. xii. 22.

presence of the Almighty, which at once illuminates, comforts, and defends them; and disposes them to say with David, 'We will fear no evil; for thou art with us *.' How noble the confidence inspired by the contemplation of such a sure defence, which the most subtle and powerful enemies can neither break through, undermine, nor overleap! If then you think that you may safely confide in it, as sufficient to resist the attacks of your adversaries, come and bring all that you have within these walls, and trust in them for ever.

2 Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.

Another chorus is introduced, demanding admission to the faithful confessors of the truth, who were rescued from great tribulation, not only into the earthly, but into the celestial city and temple of God, that they might enjoy intimate communion with him.—*Open ye the gates.* The call is addressed to the persons intrusted with shutting these doors against the unworthy, and of opening them to those who have right to enter through the gates into the city: the watchmen, who are set upon the walls, and at the gates of the city; overseers, pastors, and ministers, enlightened by the Spirit of God, and possessed of spiritual discernment, who are acquainted with the characters and privileges of the saints; and the celestial spirits, who stand at the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, and minister to the heirs of salvation. To them the request is directed, of granting access to the righteous nation, into the earthly and heavenly temple of God. In Psal. cxviii. which bears some resemblance to this sacred ode, the divine poet demands admission into the courts of the Lord's house, by the gates of righteousness, that he might go in, and praise

* Psal. xxiii, 4.

the Lord. The servants of God under the former dispensation, looked beyond things earthly and typical, to those spiritual and heavenly good things which they were intended to represent. Through the gates leading to the temple of God at Jerusalem, David saw the gates of righteousness, which lead into the house of God, eternal in the heavens. It may not be improper to remark, that the Hebrew word translated *righteousness*, also signifies *truth*. The words rendered the Sun of righteousness, with equal propriety, denote the Sun of truth, or true Sun: in like manner, the gates of righteousness, are the gates of truth, or the true gates; the sacrifices of righteousness, are the sacrifices of truth, or the true sacrifices, which receive the divine approbation and acceptance. The gates which, I suppose, were chiefly intended here, were the true gates, which lead into the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God; though those which were typical might be likewise included. To open these gates, is to give admission to the citizens of Zion that is above, into the presence of God, that they may enjoy delightful communion with him, and all the inestimable privileges to which they are exalted.

That the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. The confessors of the truth, who had come out of great tribulation, are described by two characters intimately connected with one another—The righteous nation, or, as they are elsewhere called, the generation and the congregation of the righteous. They are a *nation*, in as much as they are a numerous people, who live in dutiful subjection to the Prince of the kings of the earth, who participate in the glorious prerogatives belonging to the kingdom of God, and are governed by his perfect law of liberty. They are a *righteous* nation, having received abundance of the gift of righteousness; and, having their hearts purified by faith, they are admitted into the divine favour, and bring forth the fruits of righteousness, to the glory and praise of God.—*Which keepeth*

• *eth*

eth the truth. By the truth, seems to be meant the word of God, whereby the church is sanctified; emphatically styled, the Truth, both in the Old and New Testaments. It comprehends the true and faithful sayings of God; his divine law, with all the promises and threatenings annexed to it, which are worthy of the most undoubted credit, and may be firmly relied on. An ingenious writer remarks, that “Sceptics may wrangle, and mockers may blaspheme: but the pious man knows, by evidence too sublime for their comprehension, that his affections are not misplaced, and that his hopes shall not be disappointed, by evidence which, to every sound mind, is fully satisfactory; but which, to the humble and tender-hearted, is altogether everlasting, irresistible, and divine*.”—This sacred truth they keep as a solemn charge committed to their trust; they lay it up in their hearts, they revolve it in their minds, they embrace it with their affections, they observe it as the unerring rule of their conduct, and keep it with their whole hearts, even unto the end. ‘Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus †.’—Such is the righteous nation that keepeth the truth, to whom the gates of righteousness are opened. Seriously consider, my brethren, if you belong to this happy society. Do you love righteousness, and do you follow after it? Do you know and believe, do you love and obey the truth? Do you delight in the law of the Lord, after the inner man; and keep his statutes and judgments, and do them? Inquiries of this sort, urged upon the conscience, at proper seasons, may prove useful, through the divine blessing, to bring you acquainted with your spiritual condition, and to enable you to ascertain your right of being admitted into the presence and glory of God. Summon yourselves to appear before the tribunal of your own consciences:

* Beattie on Truth, part i. chap. ii. † Rev. xiv. 12.

attend to the evidences peculiar to those who belong to the righteous nation, laid before you in scripture: carefully compare yourselves with them; and examine into your own state by the proofs which are there adduced, and from thence judge of your real character. By the right performance of this duty, you may be delivered from perplexing fears: you may become lively and active in your Master's work; and be disposed to wait, with hope and patience, for the crown of righteousness, that fadeth not away.

3 Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose* mind *is* stayed *on thee*: because he trusteth in thee.

In these words, addressed to the Lord Jehovah, the church expresseth their confidence in him, and the lively hope they entertained, of experiencing the serenity and consolation resulting from unshaken trust in his power and faithfulness.—To stay, is to wait with fixed well-supported expectation; to maintain entire constant dependence upon him on whom we rely, as fully sufficient to sustain our hopes, and gratify our desires. The mind is stayed upon God, when, after various agitations, it returns to him as its quiet rest, firmly depending upon his all-sufficiency, for every needful promised blessing. This is the happy attainment of the man that feareth the Lord, and delighteth greatly in his commandments: ‘He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid*.’ This is what the apostle Paul emphatically calls, ‘being rooted and built up in Christ, and the steadfastness of faith in Christ †.’ Of this stability, he elsewhere adduces the patriarch Abraham, as a remarkable instance: ‘He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in

* Psal. cxii. 7, 8.

† Col. ii. 5. 7.

‘faith,

‘ faith, giving glory to God: and being fully persuaded, that what he had promised, he was able also to perform *.’ The Father of the faithful well knew, that with God all things are possible: that his veracity was pledged for the accomplishment of his promises; and, therefore, he was not discouraged by the difficulties which lay in the way of their fulfilment. His mind was staid upon God.—That we may enjoy this precious blessing, this happy temper, let us frequently and carefully review the sure grounds upon which trust in God is founded, and endeavour clearly to perceive how adequate they are to support our most enlarged expectations.—He whose mind is thus staid upon God,

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace. Peace may here denote, that undisturbed tranquillity of mind, which arises from the enjoyment of the protection of divine providence, the gracious presence and enriching blessing of God, with the abundant consolations of the holy Spirit. This peace is dignified with the characteristic of perfect, to express its incomparable excellence, its happy influence, and endless perpetuity. It is the fruit of that complete righteousness, which is emphatically styled, the righteousness of God: it preserves its possessors composed and serene, amidst the greatest storms with which they may be assaulted. The tribulations of this world, the temptations of Satan, cannot deprive them of this inestimable treasure. ‘ In me,’ saith Jesus Christ to his disciples, ‘ ye shall have peace.’—In the Hebrew text, the word *peace* is twice repeated, as you see in the margin of some Bibles. Peace is a pleasant word, a desirable blessing; and, therefore, our prophet with pleasure repeated it. By this repetition, he intimates the certainty, the excellence, and abundance of this precious blessing, with which they are favoured, whose minds are staid upon God; or, he ex-

* Rom. iv. 20, 21.

presses the internal tranquillity which they should experience, in consequence of peace with God and their own consciences, the external freedom from every disturbance which they should enjoy, so far as consistent with the purpose and glory of God.—The reason is subjoined in the following words: *Because he trusteth in thee.* The love and compassion of God will not suffer those who confide in his mercy, power, and veracity, to continue in inquietude and perplexity, but will confer upon them the peace and joy of his salvation. He hath pronounced them blessed, that trust in him; and, therefore, they shall be blessed. By his faithful promise, he stands engaged to preserve them in the possession of holy serenity of mind; and he will not suffer his faithfulness to fail. ‘Peace,’ saith he, ‘I leave with you: my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you*.’ The Son of God will not deal unjustly and deceitfully with you, who are his disciples, as the world often does: nor are the rich donations he bestows upon you, held by the uncertain tenure that you hold the gifts which you receive from the men of the world. Trust in God, and love his law; and you shall have great peace: you shall have both external and internal tranquillity. ‘The peace of God that passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus †. The God of peace fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost ‡.’ Whatever may be your external circumstances, be assured, that they that trust in the Lord shall be safe.

4 Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.

Mankind, in their present state, are truly indigent and helpless. We feel innumerable wants that we

* John xiv. 27.

† Philip. iv. 7.

‡ Rom. xv. 13.

are unable to supply, which, however, must be relieved, to render our circumstances happy and comfortable. We ourselves, with every thing around us, are precarious and uncertain. All our expectations from the creatures may fail, and be disappointed; or our capacity for enjoying the blessings of providence may be suddenly lost, by a thousand accidents that we can neither foresee nor prevent. In a moral view, we are still more indigent and dependent. Being transgressors against God, we need mercy, to pardon our many aggravated iniquities; and grace, to subdue our powerful corrupt passions, to heal our diseased natures, and to furnish us for every good work. We are foolish, and void of understanding; and require instruction, to make us wise unto salvation: we are liable to death and destruction, and cannot secure ourselves from them for one day; and therefore we need deliverance from the fear of death, and the dreadful consequences of dissolution. It is evident then to a demonstration, that the gracious interposition of Jehovah is absolutely requisite, not only to defend us from evil, but to render our condition permanent and comfortable. In such circumstances, convinced of our own weakness and insufficiency, we ought to commit ourselves unto God, who encourageth us to place our confidence in his mercy, power, and faithfulness. The practice of this much-neglected duty, is frequently inculcated in the scriptures, by the most powerful motives, and animating prospects. In this sublime song, the chorus of the redeemed, when celebrating the praises of God, on account of the seasonable support they had received in time of affliction, and the happy state to which they were advanced, warmly invite all who hear their voice, to trust in Jehovah. The fathers, who had experienced the divine mercy, call upon their children, after their example, to place their confidence in the Almighty; the priests and pastors of the people persuade those of whom they have the inspection, to put
their

their trust in the Lord; whilst the faithful of every description, who had discovered the omnipotent arm of Jehovah exerted for their defence, encourage one another to place their hope in God.

Trust ye in the Lord. To trust in the Lord, is, through the influence of his Spirit, and the mediation of his Son, in the diligent use of appointed means, to repose confidence in the Almighty, for direction in the way of life, for assistance in performing duty, for protection from evil, for support under affliction, provision in time of need, and the enjoyment of eternal salvation. It is firmly to rely on him in every condition, even the most adverse, for safety in danger, for the supply of our necessities, for the removal of evil, the bestowing of what is good, and for safe conduct, through all difficulties, to his heavenly kingdom. It is to intrust all our concerns, temporal and spiritual, into his blessed hands; and to refer all our interests wholly to his disposal, who is able to keep the good thing that we commit to his care. It is to cast our burden upon the Lord, who alone can sustain it; to run to him as our strong tower, that we may be safe; to cast all our care upon him, that careth for us; to resort to him as our dwelling-place, and to abide under the shadow of his wings: saying of the Lord, He is our refuge, and our fortress; our God, in whom we will trust. Hence it appears to be composed of the combined lively exercise of faith and hope, displaying their proper influence upon the temper and conduct. This sacred confidence in God, strengthens the mind against every opposition, fortifies it against every danger, and enables it nobly to surmount every discouragement. It places a continual guard upon the heart; it fills the soul with serenity and peace; it repels the attacks of enemies; it preserves from anxious solicitude, as to futurity; it alleviates the weight of afflictions; and renders those who live under its influence, cautious and circumspect in the whole of their conduct. It is a sovereign remedy for every distress;

distress; it divests temptation of its force; it gives strength, under a conscious sense of weakness; and teaches to glory in infirmities, if so be the power of Christ may rest upon us. It renders temporal benefits sufficient to accomplish the purposes for which they were intended; and brings sufficiency from God, to those who, in themselves, are insufficient for any good thing. In few words, by trusting in God, we give him the glory due to his name, and derive from him the most substantial advantages—therefore doth he frequently inculcate upon us,

Trust ye in the Lord. Jehovah ought to be the sole object of our confidence. Better it is to trust in God than to put confidence in princes, in the greatest and best of men. Some persons there may be, the sincerity of whose friendship we have no reason to suspect: their dispositions toward us, however, may soon alter; and, though their friendship should be continued, they may not have the ability to do us good, which they fondly wish to possess: and notwithstanding they have both inclination and ability to shew us kindness, they may be snatched away at the very time we most need their assistance. Cease, therefore, from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; and trust in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy.—Nor may we confide in worldly advantages, which are all fluctuating and uncertain, and cannot afford any permanent ground whereon to rest our dependence. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; some trust in their bow, and their sword; some in their fortresses, and armies; some trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches. All these are only frail props, that are insufficient to support those who are so foolish as to rely upon them. Remember ye the name of the Lord our God: trust in his mercy for ever, and not in lying vanities.—Nor yet may we trust in ourselves; in our natural endowments, our acquired accomplishments, our moral qualifications, our church-privileges, or our religious

gious performances. Neither birth nor beauty, strength nor learning, neither prudence nor friends, nor even good conduct, are proper grounds whereon to place our confidence. Being in themselves extremely precarious, they are unworthy to be accounted the basis of hope and reliance. Beware then of trusting in any of these things.

Confide in the glorious perfections of Jehovah. Rely on his almighty power, who stretched out the heavens as a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth. He is the strong and mighty God, for whom nothing is impossible, and who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. Our necessities are many and great; our requests, however, may exceed them much: though we ask great things, yet our thoughts may be stretched beyond our prayers; but the power of God far transcends them all, and can more than gratify our most enlarged desires, and sustain infinitely greater weight than we can lay upon it. On this immoveable foundation, build all your confidence; and then, though the winds blow, and the rain descend, and the storm beat, you shall not be moved.—Depend on his consummate goodness, of which the most amiable representations are every where given in the word of God, suited to convey relief to indigent sinful creatures.

‘ The Lord is good unto all, and his tender mercies
 ‘ are over all his works. The Lord is good, and a
 ‘ strong hold in the day of trouble: he is good to
 ‘ the soul that seeketh him, and to them that hope in
 ‘ his mercy.’ Do not the solemn declarations of his mercy and grace, the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, and, above all, the mission of his only begotten Son into this world, to be the propitiation for our sins; and the gift of the holy Spirit, to be the Comforter; evince, in the strongest manner possible, the exuberant riches of that goodness on which we ought to found our hopes. It were easy to swell this article by a large induction of particulars:
 but

but I must not stay at present, to speak of the other divine excellencies of Jehovah, on which we ought to place an unshaken confidence. Those now mentioned, may suffice as a specimen of his all-sufficiency, to support and relieve those who trust in him.

Rely on his kind providence. Every thing, in this present state, is subject to uncertainty and change, and therefore cannot with safety be depended upon. Indeed, there is not a surer way to disappointment and vexation, than to form large expectations from the enjoyment of worldly possessions, and to promise ourselves their continuance with us. The best concerted schemes, the fairest prospects, are often blasted, when they were expected to give the highest satisfaction. Prosperity frequently leaves men, at the very time they entertained the most pleasing hopes of its continuance. This uncertainty of all earthly things, which renders them unworthy of confidence, is represented in scripture by a variety of strong affecting descriptions, that you would do well attentively to consider. Rely then on the providence of God, which sustains all the creatures in existence, which superintends all the affairs of mankind, and extends its peculiar inspection and care to the upright among men. His kind attention is more especially fixed upon his faithful servants, as we learn from many passages in the record of God. ‘The eyes of the Lord run to
 ‘and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them, whose heart is perfect
 ‘toward him*.’ The eyes of the Lord are upon them
 ‘that fear him: upon them that hope in his mercy †.
 ‘The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord;
 ‘and he delighteth in his way ‡.’ In every condition, then, commit yourselves, with all your concerns, to his direction and protection, who preserveth and provideth for all his creatures, and who alloweth not those that trust in him to lack any good thing.

* 2 Chron. xvi. 9. † Psal. xxxiii. 18. ‡ Psal. xxxvii. 23.

Let every enterprize in which you engage, be begun, carried on, and ended, in humble dependence on his providence and blessing.

Depend upon his faithful promises. God hath been graciously pleased, not only to give us commandments, to point out our duty; but he hath also given us promises of inestimable blessings, suited to our circumstances and necessities. To encourage us firmly to rely upon them, he hath engrossed them in his testimony, which cannot be broken. To give us the most inviolable security for their fulfilment, and to convey the strongest consolation, he hath confirmed them by his solemn oath: and because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, that, by his oath, he might put an end to all strife, in the minds of the heirs of promise. Having entered them in his everlasting covenant, which is well ordered in all things, and sure, it is impossible that they can be either altered or disannulled. ‘For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord; that hath mercy on thee.*’ Heaven and earth shall pass away; but his word shall in nowise pass away, until all be fulfilled. His people therefore, in all ages, have happily experienced his inviolable truth and faithfulness; who, according to his promise, hath given them all things pertaining to life and godliness. Trust then, with unsuspecting confidence, in the unchangeable veracity of God, pledged for the accomplishment of his promises in due season. ‘God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good †?’

Trust ye in the Lord *for ever*. There are some duties incumbent upon us at one time, which would

* Isaiah liv. 10.

† Numb. xxiii. 19.

be very improper at another. To worship God, is indispensably requisite at particular seasons, though not on all occasions; whereas trust in the Lord, is required at all times. Hence the invitation runs thus: ‘Trust in him at all times, ye people*.’ This spiritual exercise is suited to every state, though more especially necessary in some circumstances wherein we are placed. Particularly, In prosperity, when the candle of the Lord shineth upon our heads, and by his light we walk through darkness. Then ought we to trust in the Lord, that he will guard us against the temptations to which affluence may expose, that he will preserve us from placing our happiness in worldly possessions, that he will dispose us to be sober and cheerful in using the benefits he bestows, and teach us to consider them as motives to patient continuance in well-doing—that he will enable us to cherish those dispositions, and to follow that line of conduct, by which we may adorn the doctrines of God our Saviour.—In adversity, when deprived of the comforts we enjoyed, and distressed with afflictions of various kinds, we ought to trust in the Lord, that he will enable us aright to consider the sources from whence they proceed; and to sustain them with becoming humility, patience, resignation, and fortitude; and make all our present, light, and momentary afflictions to work for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory.—Amidst all our perplexities, when distracted with doubts and difficulties, let us trust in the Lord, that he will send forth his light and truth to be our guides; that he will make light to arise in darkness; that he will teach us the way that we should choose; and, by his good Spirit, conduct us to the land of uprightness.—In every stage of life, when surrounded with dangers, and even in its concluding scenes, when death approaches, let us cherish the pleasing hope, that God will be ever at our right

* Psal. lxii. 8.

hand, and that he will encompass us with his favour as with a shield; determined, with God's servant Job, that, though he slay us, yet we will trust in him. In this manner, trust in the Lord for ever.—To recommend the practice of this important duty, a very powerful argument is subjoined in the latter part of the verse, which I proceed to illustrate.

For in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength, or, according to the marginal translation, 'the rock of ages.' The prophet doth not simply write, the Lord is the rock of ages, but he prefixes a preposition to the name Jehovah, which he used in the first part of the verse. In this peculiar form, the expression resembles that used by Hosea, where God saith, 'In me is thine help *;' and not, I am thy help. A learned commentator † observes, that the names here given to the Most High, are especially applied to him, when he is spoken of as the Saviour of his people, who hath given some eminent display of his grace and power for their deliverance; in proof of which, he refers to Exod. xv. 2. and Psal. cxviii. 5. These names significantly express his dominion, power, and righteousness, united with the most amiable condescension and grace, which are always illustriously manifested in the salvation of his people. Hence we may conclude, that this glorious title justly belongs to the Son of God; the mighty One, on whom our help is laid; the true Messiah, the Messenger, in whom is the name Jehovah, the Author of all the temporal and eternal salvations enjoyed by the church of God.

He is the rock of ages; a firm, durable, and immoveable rock, not made with hands; that cannot be injured without the most imminent danger, and which affords protection and defence to those that flee to it. This figurative description reminds us of his eternity, immutability, and power, shewn in the

* Hosea xiii. 9.

† Vitringa in loc.

defence of his people; and is frequently applied to him in those beautiful odes, in which the high praises of our Redeemer is celebrated by the saints. Moses, Hannah, and David, all use this noble metaphor in their songs*.——Jehovah is the rock of ages; the dwelling-place of his people in all generations, wherein they have found agreeable protection from storms and enemies, enjoyed sacred repose and tranquillity, and been furnished with the most important blessings and reviving consolations. From his glorious all-sufficiency, they derive plentiful supplies of every thing necessary to their real felicity. This hath been the high privilege of the upright servants of God in every period. When the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, sojourned in strange countries, in Egypt, in Gerar, and Padan-aram, wandering from place to place, the Lord was their rock and habitation. In all their journeys, and in all their troubles, God provided for their safety. When their posterity was in Egypt, he gave them the land of Goshen for their residence; in the wilderness, he made ample provision for their necessities: his presence attended them, and he gave them rest. Those ancient worthies, who had no certain dwelling-place, and wandered about in deserts and mountains, had the Most High for their rock and fortress, in whom they always found refuge. Hath the Lord Jehovah been the rock of past ages, and hath this been his memorial, in the church, through every period? then may we justly conclude, that he will ever continue to be all that to his people which he hath been to them in times past. The immutability of his nature, the perpetuity of his love, his grace and mercy that faileth never, give comfortable assurance, that those who now trust in him, shall enjoy the same, and greater benefits, than those who confided in him in times past.

* Deut. xxxii. 3. 1 Sam. ii. 2.

In the Lord Jehovah *is strength*. Once and again have we heard, that power belongeth unto God: it originally, essentially, and independently belongs to him. If we speak of strength, Lo, he is strong. By the word of his power, he at first created, and still upholdeth all things: he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. What an astonishing display doth Jehovah give of his power, in governing, according to his pleasure, angels who excel in strength, men who are puffed up with pride, and devils who are possessed of a principle of resistance, invincible by any other than divine power! ‘Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places*.’ What memorable instances of irresistible strength, on some occasions, hath he exhibited, by counteracting the course of nature; drying up the waters of the Red Sea; to make a way for his people; arresting the sun in the midst of heaven, so that he halted not to go down for about a whole day, that they might have time completely to vanquish their enemies; preserving Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, from being hurt in the midst of a burning fiery furnace; shutting the mouths of the lions, into whose den the prophet Daniel was thrown! Besides these, many other instances might be mentioned. What glorious demonstrations of omnipotent strength hath he presented to view, by the redemption of the church, the success of the gospel, the conversion of the nations! and what rich manifestations of the exceeding greatness of his mighty power hath he given, in his working in them that believe †! Trust then in the Lord, who is clothed with strength. Let your confidence in his power and faithfulness be confirmed and established, by the contemplation of these, and other exertions of omnipotence. Amidst all the obstacles that discourage you, the distresses that assail you, the weaknesses, temptations,

* Psal. cxxxv. 6.

† Eph. i. 19, 20.

and dangers wherewith you may be embarrassed, confide in the almighty Saviour, who is able to subdue all things unto himself, that he will perfect strength in your weakness, and make you more than conquerors.

In the Lord Jehovah is *everlasting strength*. Human power is extremely limited, and soon decays. Men who are able to assist their friends at one time, may be totally unable to help them at another, when they stand as much, or more, in need of their aid. Man's ability to assist and relieve his fellow-creatures, is of short duration; whereas the strength of Jehovah is all-sufficient and eternal. It continues for ever invariably the same: it is not in the least impaired by exertion: 'His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear.' His power, like himself, is from everlasting to everlasting, without any variableness or shadow of turning, ever ready to be employed in behalf of them that trust in him. 'Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the eternal God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary *?' Our fears of change, in the dispositions of a friend, often prevent from placing an unsuspecting confidence in his kindness; but no such apprehensions can be entertained with respect to God. The immutability of his nature puts him infinitely above every suspicion of change, and encourages us to continual trust and dependence upon him. This divine attribute sheds a lustre on all the other perfections of Jehovah: it adds unspeakable glory to his love and veracity; and forms an immoveable stay, whereon our trust and confidence may for ever rest. He is not subject to the least decay: his nature can never change: his excellencies admit of no alteration; nor can his strength be at all diminished.—Thus

* Isaiah xl. 28.

have I explained the nature of trust in the Lord, and the argument whereby it is here enforced.

That I may proportion this discourse, not to the extent of the subject, but to the length of these exercises, I shall not enlarge. Permit me, however, solemnly to call you to trust in the Lord, who can supply all your wants, who can forgive all your sins, vanquish all your corrupt passions, and give you victory over all your enemies. He can furnish you for every good work, sustain you under the pressure of affliction, and exalt you to immortal felicity. Do not question his infinite power and goodness, as did Israel of old: think not that you would be guilty of presumption, did you expect to obtain the glorious privileges that God conferreth upon his peculiar people, if you trust in his mercy and power. Recollect what he hath done in the world, for the church, and for yourselves; and thereby be encouraged to commit your way unto the Lord. ‘Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust; and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies*.’—— To conclude, let every Christian adopt the language appropriated by Jesus Christ to himself, in the last moments of his life: ‘In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust, let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness †.’ These words, with what follows them, inform us of the thoughts that passed in the mind of our dying Saviour, during his excruciating sufferings. What a noble spectacle! what an illustrious example of filial confidence, and unshaken trust, in his heavenly Father! He sustains all his agonies with calm resignation: he closes his life with an affectionate recommendation of his soul unto the hands of Jehovah, and a joyful assurance of a glorious resurrection. This is dying, indeed, in a manner worthy of our great Redeemer. Let us endeavour to become intimately acquainted with this compas-

* Psal. xl. 4.

† Psal. xxxi. 1.

sionate Saviour, and mighty Conqueror; and look to him, who hath shewed us how to live, and how to die, for the grace of the holy Spirit, to enable us to imitate him, that, with like trust and resignation, we may pass through life, and the valley of the shadow of death, into the presence of our heavenly Father, where are fulness of joys, and rivers of pleasures, for ever more.

5 ¶ For he bringeth down them that dwell on high, the lofty city he layeth it low, he layeth it low, *even* to the ground, he bringeth it *even* to the dust.

These words contain a powerful argument, intended to excite the church to trust in the Lord: it is deduced from the certain triumph which they shall enjoy over their proud enemies. The inhabitants of Babylon seem to be the people which are described as dwelling on high. They were remarkable for their pride and haughtiness, and their detestation of the people of God, whom they vexed, led captive, and oppressed; and therefore may be justly considered as representing the enemies of the church of God in all ages, who possess the same tempers, and follow the same line of conduct. Great Babylon, spoken of by the prophet in the preceding chapter, ver. 2. and 12. which was surrounded by very high walls, was, I suppose, the lofty city, whose overthrow is here predicted. This superb city the Lord Jehovah laid low, even to the ground: he demolished its broad and high walls; he broke in pieces the gates of brass; he swept it with the besom of destruction; he converted it into pools of water, and made it a possession for the bittern.—In the desolation of this strong city, we behold an image of the complete destruction of all the implacable enemies of the church of God, who shall assuredly be brought down to the dust, to the lowest and most contemptible state. Thus doth
God,

God, by abasing them that walk in pride, demonstrate, that he is possessed of everlasting strength, which he employs in humbling them that exalt themselves, and in protecting them that confide in him.

6 The foot shall tread it down, *even* the feet of the poor, *and* the steps of the needy.

The adversaries of the people of God are often subdued by those who are esteemed the meanest and most contemptible instruments that divine vengeance could employ. The walls of the city Jericho were made to fall to the ground, by means of a few poor people, who went round them, blowing with rams horns. Three hundred men, under the command of Gideon, vanquished the numerous hosts of Midian. The gates of Babylon were opened to Cyrus, at the head of an army of Medes and Persians, who regarded not silver, nor delighted in gold; and, by this event, the prediction before us was literally fulfilled. I apprehend, however, that the poor and needy, chiefly intended in this verse, are the subjects of Messiah the Prince, to whom this character is frequently given in scripture, because they are poor in spirit, and needy of every spiritual blessing, which God seasonably confers upon them. Persons of this description, shall tread down the lofty city: they shall triumph over their haughty enemies, by whom they have been insulted and oppressed; and their possessions shall be converted to the use and benefit of the church of God.

7 The way of the just *is* uprightnes: thou most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.

The chorus of the saints begin their confession of the rectitude of divine dispensations, and the equity of God's judgments, by acknowledging his condescending regard to the uprightnes of their conduct.—

The

The character of just, or righteous, is often given to good men in scripture. Noah, Simeon, Cornelius, and many others, have this honourable testimony given to them, that they were righteous. It is written concerning the people of God in general, that ‘they shall be all righteous*.’ They are justified, not by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, through whose righteousness they are pardoned, and accepted of God †. Their hearts are also purified by faith, to obey the truth through the Spirit; and thus they are furnished for every good work. Knowing, that not the hearers, but the doers of the law, are just before God, they have a respect to all his commandments; and observe his precepts diligently with their whole hearts, even to the end. Like ‘Zacharias and Elizabeth, they are righteous before God, and walk in all his commandments and ordinances blameless ‡.’—The way of the just, comprehends their whole temper and conduct; their thoughts, words, and actions, throughout the various circumstances and relations in which they are placed by divine providence. It includes all the duties required by divine authority, by the faithful performance of which, we proceed in the path of life, that leads to the heavenly and better country. This way is extolled on account of its uprightness. The form of expression here used, is much more forcible and elegant than if it had been said, the way of the just is upright. It highly merits this description, as it is pointed out by the Lord, who is upright, and in whom there is no unrighteousness: it is a plain path, perfectly free from all perversity and crookedness; and the just walk in it with undissembled sincerity and truth. They are upright in their hearts, in their conversation, in their commerce and promises, indeed in their whole conduct, so that, with great propriety, their way is said to be uprightness. ‘They rejoice

* Isaiah lx. 21.

† Gal. ii. 16.

‡ Luke i. 6.

‘ therefore in the testimony of their consciences, that,
 ‘ in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly
 ‘ wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have their
 ‘ conversation in the world *.’—Take heed, my
 brethren, that your way, like the path of the just, be
 uprightness. Unless you are sincere and upright, all
 that you say, all that you do, all that you suffer, will
 avail you nothing, before that God, who hath pleasure
 in uprightness, and beholds the upright with a
 pleasant countenance. Suppose that you attend regularly
 on the institutions of divine worship, suppose that you
 are just in your transactions with one another, and
 careful to avoid many evils, yet if you are not upright
 in what you do, you will be rejected by him, who
 hateth the deceitful as well as the bloody man.

Thou most upright. If the way of the just is uprightness,
 how much more, O Lord, are thy ways, and thy judgments!
 In this amiable character, God is celebrated by his servant
 Moses, in that sublime song, recorded Deut. xxxii. ‘ He is the
 Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a
 God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right
 is he †.’ By this designation, Jehovah exhibits himself
 truly lovely and venerable; the fountain of all purity,
 veracity, benignity, righteousness, and fidelity, on whom
 his people may safely place all their hope and confidence.
 Contemplating him in this view, the royal prophet deduced
 a most comfortable conclusion from this truth: ‘ Good and
 upright is the Lord: therefore will he teach sinners in the
 way †.’ It represents him as unchangeable in his counsels,
 true to his promises, righteous in his dispensations toward
 the children of men, and sincere in the revelations that he
 gives them of his will. In all his communications with us,
 he acts with the utmost candour and plainness, fully
 informing us of the best and

* 2 Cor. i. 12.

† Deut. xxxii. 4.

‡ Psal. xxv. 8.

the worst of our condition, what we are by nature and practice, what we ought to be through his mercy and grace, and what we may expect to receive from his justice and righteousness. We ought therefore with pleasure to adopt the words of the king of Israel: ‘ Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright
‘ are thy judgments.’

Thou dost weigh the path of the just. This acknowledgment corresponds with the proverb, which saith, ‘ The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, ‘ and he pondereth all his goings*.’ Hannah, in her prayer, used similar language: ‘ The Lord, said ‘ she, is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are ‘ weighed †.’ All persons, and all events, fall under his immediate inspection: he hath perfect knowledge of them, and with the strictest equity determines with respect to them. He doth more: he weigheth the actions of men: he puts them into his just balance, and examines their weight. He takes exact cognizance of all the circumstances with which they are accompanied: he observes them with such a close attention as a person bestows on an important interesting subject, which he ponders in his mind; or as he looks at the balance in which he weighs some valuable article. He not only considers the state of individuals, but that of nations and kingdoms: he informed king Belshazzar, ‘ Thou art weighed in the ‘ balance, and art found wanting ‡.’ With peculiar exactness, he weigheth the path of the just. The import of this beautiful and elegant sentiment seems to be this, Thou who art righteous in all thy ways, and just and true in all thy works, actest toward thy just and upright servants, in whatsoever befalleth them, according to the strictest equity and goodness. In all the afflictions wherewith they are visited, in all the dispensations of thy providence toward them, thou orderest all things respecting them with consummate

* Prov. v. 21.

† 1 Sam. ii. 3.

‡ Dan. v. 27.

righteousness.—The ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them. Though, to the proud and contentious, they may seem perverse and unequal, yet, by the just, they are always acknowledged to be righteous and holy, even when they appear unsearchable; and, in these straight and onward paths, which they have chosen, they walk with integrity and delight. In the whole of our progress then, let us remember, that, though men neither know our hearts, nor consider our ways, yet God observeth and weigheth them. He searcheth our hearts; he trieth our reins; he pondereth our paths; he seeth not only our actions, but he observes from what principles they proceed, and to what ends they are directed; and, therefore, we ought always to act as under his immediate inspection.

8 Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.

Fully persuaded of the love, the righteousness, and faithfulness of God, in his afflictive dispensations, the church is here introduced, expressing their constant dependence upon God, and their ardent affection toward him.—I explained the import of waiting for God, when treating ver. 9. of the preceding chapter. To what was then said, I only add, that they waited for the Lord, expecting to receive the interpositions of his providence, the manifestations of his favour, the communications of his Spirit, the displays of his glory, the pledges of his presence, the accomplishment of his promises, the answer of their prayers, and his direction and countenance in duty. Convinced, that infinite wisdom would embrace the most proper season for interposing in their behalf, they patiently waited for the exertions of his power and grace for their salvation.—*Even in the way of thy judgments, O Lord.* The judgments of God sometimes denote in scripture, his

his laws, statutes, and commandments. In this sense the word seems to be used, where God thus speaketh by the prophet Malachi: ‘Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments*.’ If this is the meaning of the word here, the expression imports, that the church waited upon God in the way pointed out in his word, faithfully keeping his testimonies, and diligently performing every commanded duty. They appeal to God, that they had been thus employed, whilst they expected he would appear for their relief. They had not become remiss in love to God, and in desires to please him: on the contrary, their afflictions produced the most salutary effects on their temper and conduct.—The judgments of God sometimes signify also, the afflictions and calamities with which in righteousness God visits men, on account of their transgressions. This is the meaning of the word in several places both of the Old and New Testaments. According to this interpretation, the words import, that the holy confessors of the truth, in the time of distress and persecution, satisfied that all God’s ways are just and right (amidst the calamities which they sustained one after another, so that his way toward them became a way of judgments) looked with expectation to that desirable period, when, after having in faithfulness afflicted them, he would work their deliverance.—Let us learn humbly and patiently to wait upon God for his promised mercies, not only in the pleasant seasons of prosperity and tranquillity, but in the dark and stormy seasons of adversity. Let us beware lest, through weakness and impatience, we fall into desponding and fretfulness; lest, through pride and arrogance, we grow weary and impatient; lest self-love and self-conceit seduce us from faithful dependence upon God. To wait upon God, even when he cor-

* Mal. iv. 4.

rects, and makes his billows, in quick succession, to pass over our heads; to turn to him when he smites, as well as when he heals; gives comfortable evidence of the reality and power of divine grace.

The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. Desire is love in motion, after some object apprehended to be good, which is not presently enjoyed. It admits of different degrees; and increases in proportion to the appretiated value of the object on which it terminates, and its supposed importance to our happiness. There are some things which we are indifferent whether or not we possess: there are others that we highly esteem, and ardently wish to enjoy; and these last mentioned, excite those strong desires which may be called, the desires of our souls.—By the name of God may be here meant, those amiable titles, divine attributes, and admirable discoveries, which he hath given of himself in his word and works. It may especially denote, those glorious characters whereby God anciently revealed himself to his servant Moses, and his people Israel, under the Old Testament. Among these, may be reckoned the following august titles, which were assumed by Jehovah: I am that I am; the almighty God; the Lord God of thy fathers; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty. These sacred names of the Most High were to the church of old, as ointment poured forth, most fragrant and refreshing; and, therefore, they were earnestly desired by his servants. They intensely longed after larger communications of his mercy, the more full enjoyment of his favour, and the more complete fulfilment of his promises; of which remarkable instances occur in the forty-second and sixty-third psalms.—*And to the remembrance of thee.* Even the just, whose desires are to God's name, do not always think upon him: their

their minds are often occupied with other objects, to which it is necessary for them to attend; still, however, they remember him above all created enjoyments. With pleasure they recollect his perfections and providences, his instructions and promises, which they lay up in their hearts as a precious treasure. In some seasons they may, no doubt, remember him, and be troubled with perplexing fears and inquietudes. To dispel this uneasiness and timidity, they ought to call to mind the years of the right hand of the Most High, his works and his wonders of old, with his former loving-kindnesses. Perhaps more may be intended by this expression than I have yet suggested. The upright, remembering the name of God, and the benefit they derived from the pleasing recollection of it, were solicitous that his memorial might be transmitted with honour to future generations, and that the people might praise him for ever and ever. This delightful exercise ought to constitute a part of our daily employment, would we be like-minded with the people of God in former ages.

9 With my soul have I desired thee in the night, yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments *are* in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

How strong, how vehement, the affection for God, which our prophet, personating the church, expresses in these words. The employment described in the first part of this verse, is the same that was mentioned in the preceding. The repetition serves to intimate, the ardour and continuance with which it was performed. It was not a languid wish, or feeble emotion, that Isaiah felt, but an intense desire after God. With my soul, with all that is within me, have I ardently desired thee; the comforts of thy presence, the direction of thy counsel, the protection of thy providence,

dence, and submission to thy will.—I have desired thee *in the night*. The affectionate longings of my soul have not been confined to particular fixed seasons, in which they are more commonly experienced. Even in the darkness and solitude of the night, when no eye observed me, when great part of the creation were hushed to silence, and lay buried in deep sleep, ‘I remembered thee upon my bed, and meditated on thee in the night-watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice*.’ The night-season, when we are sequestered from society, and free from every external disturbance, is peculiarly adapted to the purposes of devotion; and hath been employed in this exercise, not only by the saints, but by our blessed Saviour himself, who was not then silent, and who spent whole nights in prayer to God. In imitation of such great examples, let us, from time to time, improve the darkness and stillness of the night, for meditation on the mercies of God, and supplication for their continuance and increase. In this way, we may receive more agreeable refreshment than sleep could have afforded, and find ourselves more effectually recruited than we could have been by the sweetest repose.

With my spirit within me will I seek thee early. This becoming resolution imports, that the prophet was determined to seek the Lord; to persevere with diligence and constancy in this pleasant, profitable, and honourable employment; and, with unwearied assiduity, to request his direction, assistance, and blessing, animated by the comfortable assurance, that they who truly seek God, shall lack no good thing. He promises to seek him with his spirit within him; with the most intense affection of mind, with his whole heart and soul, and that early—with such a sedulous diligent search, as a person commences early in the morning,

* Psal. lxxiii. 6.

and persists in through the day, until he find what he wants. To carry this pious purpose into execution, it is necessary to have a deep sense of our absolute need of God, to enrich us with every blessing suited to our circumstances; a heart-felt conviction, that the enjoyment of God should be our chief aim; that we ought to make him, not only the object, but the ultimate end of our search; and that we seek him, where alone he is to be found by guilty creatures, in Jesus Christ, in whom he appears reconciling the world unto himself. In this manner, do you seek God early, in the morning of life, which is the most proper season for this employment, your faculties being then most active and vigorous—early, in preference to all other objects which solicit your attention, seeking first, and above all things, the kingdom of God, and his righteousness—early, in every day of life, after you are refreshed with rest; before you engage in company, in business, or amusement; determined, with the man according to God's own heart, that your voice the Lord shall hear in the morning; that, in the morning, you will direct your prayer unto him, and will look up. Thus let every one of us with our spirits seek God early, convinced, that such is his infinite fulness and all-sufficiency, that, after we have obtained all that we need for the present, much more is still to be enjoyed.

For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. The judgments of God here spoken of, are those grievous calamities with which God in righteousness visiteth men, as the just punishment of their sins.—When these awful tokens of the divine displeasure against transgressors go abroad upon the earth, and publicly demonstrate the evil nature and dreadful consequences of sin, *the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.* Beholding the terrible effects of trespassing against the Lord, many striking instances of the divine vengeance, and the imminent danger to which

finners stand exposed, they will learn, that all those who are guilty of the same crimes with them, on whom divine judgments are inflicted, deserve to suffer the same punishments.—They will learn, that they ought to consider their ways, and to turn to the Lord, in the exercise of true repentance; that they ought to avoid those destructive practices which expose to the wrath of the Almighty, to betake themselves to the mercy of God revealed in the word of truth, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. The calamities with which mankind are visited, ought to teach persons of every description, these, and many other important salutary lessons. It must be acknowledged, that, from the judgments of God, the inhabitants of the world do not always learn these useful instructions; and therefore the prophet must be considered, not as predicting what would in fact actually come to pass, but merely declaring the happy effects that ought to follow, from the awful manifestations of the wrath of God, revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. The proper design and tendency of divine judgments, is to restrain men from wickedness, and to render them decent, sober, holy, and righteous. Improve them for these purposes. That heart must be depraved indeed, which the tender mercies of God doth not soften, which the dreadful judgments of God doth not awaken. Stand in awe, and sin not: return from your iniquities: abuse not the long-suffering of God: hear the voice of his rod: be afraid of incurring his displeasure, of whose wrath none knoweth the power.

10 Let favour be shewed to the wicked, *yet* will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightnes will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD.

The obstinacy and perversity of evil men, in abusing the kindnesses of God, whereby they expose themselves

selves to divine judgments, are, in this verse, represented in very strong terms.—The wicked are justly compared by our prophet, ‘to the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt*.’ By this similitude, we are instructed, that they are restless and turbulent; that they are destitute of internal peace; that, by their corrupt principles and practices, they disturb the tranquillity of society; and that thus they treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath.—To persons of this description, *let favour be shewed.* Though God give them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons; though he fill their hearts with food and gladness, and give them liberally to share in the riches of his goodness, which ought to lead them to repentance; all this profusion of kindness is neglected and despised. Notwithstanding, with wonderful patience, he beareth with their evil manners, and doth not speedily execute sentence upon their evil works, and sheweth, in a thousand instances, that he is not willing that they should perish, they make light of the riches of his forbearance. Though he favour them with the means of grace and spiritual instruction, though he lament over their folly and misery with the utmost tenderness, though he offer to become their Saviour, and call them to glory and virtue, yet they wickedly condemn the riches of his mercy and grace. The most astonishing beneficence and kindness make no impression upon their obdurate hearts, nor render them docile and teachable.

Yet will he not learn righteousness. He will not cease to do evil; and consequently he cannot learn to do well. Such is the corruption and perversity of his nature, that, with great facility, he will commit iniquity; but, after much time and instruction, he will not learn righteousness. Though wise to do evil, yet to do good, he hath no understanding; and therefore

* Isaiah lvii. 20.

he must hear and learn of the heavenly Father, that he may be acquainted with the nature, the importance, and the practice of righteousness. God alone can effectually shew him the beauty, the excellence, and necessity of that perfect righteousness, which is so highly extolled in the scriptures, and so much valued by the saints. He only can instruct him how to seek, so as to attain this inestimable benefit, not by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. He alone can give capacity and inclination to learn the practice of righteousness, which consists in giving to God the things that are God's, and to man the things that belong to him.—Pity it is, that there are any who, under the manifold advantages that we enjoy, will not learn this useful and comfortable lesson, and persist in perversely going on in their evil ways. Let us shew them compassion: let us pray for them; and recommend them to the kind attention of the great Instructor of the foolish, who can thoroughly reduce them to his obedience.

In the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly. Though, in strict propriety of speech, the heavenly and better country most justly merits this description, yet the land of Canaan seems to be here intended, in which the prophets of the Lord were employed in teaching the knowledge of the *Most Upright*, and his upright ways; in which dwelt the sincere worshippers of God, who were upright in their hearts, in their conversation, and in performing the duties which they owed to God, and to one another. The land wherein persons of this amiable character resided, is, with great propriety, called, the land of uprightness, out of respect to the generation of them who are blessed, who are mighty on the earth, to whom the Lord God is a sun and shield, and to whom he will give grace and glory, and every good thing.—Even in this land, *the wicked will deal unjustly.* They withhold from those with whom they are connected, those things to which they have just right and claim.
They

They abuse the precious blessings wherewith they are favoured; they endeavour to counteract the providence of God; they put a wrong construction upon his right ways, and pervert the scriptures to their own destruction. This perverse dealing, in the land of uprightness, where simplicity and integrity ought every where to prevail, is a great aggravation attending the injustice of the wicked. The circumstances with which transgression is accompanied, oft-times render it more heinous. To deal unjustly, in any place, is truly criminal; but to act in this manner, among the upright, increases the enormity of the offence. It is wrong, not to know our Master's will; but to be acquainted with it, and not to do it, is still more culpable. To omit the exercises of righteousness, in any place, is faulty; but to act in contempt of justice, among those who are upright, is extreme wickedness.

And will not behold the majesty of the Lord. The majesty of Jehovah consists in the infinite splendor and glory of his divine excellencies, exhibited to the view of his intelligent creatures, in the works of his hands, in the dispensations of his providence, and in his sacred oracles. From the noble displays of this ineffable grandeur, the wicked turn away their attention, and obstinately refuse to contemplate them. They will not consider the glorious honour of his majesty, manifested in his works, which ought to be admired and celebrated: they will not regard the wonderful exertions of his power, in overthrowing the enemies of his people: nor will they fix their attention to the expressions of his mercy and faithfulness, in the rich provision he hath made by his providence, for their sustenance in this world; and, by his grace, for the nourishment of their souls, in the church. What odious perversity of disposition, what criminal obstinacy of temper, appear in this opprobrious conduct toward God!—Carefully avoid this cursed disrespect of the Most High. Frequently
think

think of the divine majesty and power of Jehovah, conspicuous in the plentiful supply of your wants, from the treasures of his goodness. Behold him ripening the corns, the fruits, and the vines, for our use; preparing garments from the fleecē of the flock, and the bowels of the worm for our covering; and providing, not only medicines to cure our bodily distempers, but a sovereign remedy to heal our souls. Behold him, from his inexhaustible stores, giving forth, with the utmost liberality, myriads of promises and blessings, which convert bondage into freedom, infamy into honour, weakness into strength, and death into life.

II LORD, *when* thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: *but* they shall see, and be ashamed for *their* envy at the people, yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.

The insensibility of the wicked, with respect to divine judgments, and the dreadful effects of their stupidity, are here described in a very affecting manner. As mild and gentle means are of themselves ineffectual to reclaim them, so the most alarming dispensations are insufficient to awaken them from their security.—The hand of the Lord is often mentioned in scripture, to denote his almighty power, which is employed in assisting and protecting his people, or in afflicting and punishing their oppressors. In allusion to the posture of a person, who is about to exert his strength for the defence of his friends, or for avenging himself on his enemies, the hand of God is said to be lifted up, when it is ready stretched out, to chastize or deliver his servants, or to smite their adversaries.—In either case, the wicked *will not see*: they will not diligently consider the hand of God lifted up, for the benefit of his people, or for the punishment of evil-doers. They will not attentively behold the hand of the Lord, employed in conferring

ferring favours, or inflicting judgments: the kindnesses and the corrections which they receive, pass equally unobserved and disregarded. Their eyes are darkened, that they cannot see the refreshing light that shines around them: the creatures form the horizon, beyond which they cannot penetrate: their sight is bounded by second causes. Whatever happens, whether prosperous or adverse, they preposterously attribute to means and instruments; and entirely ascribe it to the prudence and activity, or to the malice, negligence, and infidelity of men, to chance, or ill fortune. God is not in all their thoughts.

But they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people. They would not consider the majesty of the Lord, nor his hand lifted up; and therefore they shall be obliged to contemplate, with shame and confusion of face, their envy at the people of God, which they shall view in another light than ever they had done.—Envy is a silly, malevolent, and cruel passion, that doth much more injury to the persons who feel it, than to the objects on which it terminates. The good enjoyed by another, doth you no real hurt: your portion is not diminished, though his is increased. Each hath his proper share allotted to him by infinite wisdom; and your uneasiness because other people have more and better things than you, will add nothing to your possession: whereas, divested of this tormenting passion, you might participate of the happiness and joy resulting from all the benefits, the deliverances, the affluence, the gifts and graces, of your brethren. In all the blessings which they enjoy, you might have a considerable portion. No wonder then, that the wicked, who repine at the felicity of the people of God, and the kindnesses he confers upon them, shall see, and be ashamed of their envy. Most justly shall they be seized with uneasiness and perturbation of mind, and covered with confusion, on account of their disappointed expectations, and the sin and folly that they have committed. They shall

shall be confounded, in the review of their egregious folly, in grieving at the happiness of those whom the Lord hath blessed, and at finding all their delusive hopes frustrated. ‘ They shall gnash their teeth, and melt away (as saith the psalmist): the desire of the wicked shall perish *.’—*Yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.* Those consuming judgments, which destroy the enemies of God, shall certainly devour them, who obstinately persist in refusing to behold the lifted-up hand of God, and who are invidious at the prosperity and safety of the servants of Jehovah. The desolating calamities, which spread devastation among the foes of God, shall assuredly lay hold on them, who grieve at the peace and prosperity of his church.—O that the wicked, who forget God, would lay to heart, the imminent danger to which their transgressions expose them, that they would abandon their iniquities, and return unto the Lord, that he may have mercy upon them!

12 ¶ LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.

These words express the lively hope of seasonable deliverance entertained by the upright servants of God, and lay open the foundation on which it rests.—Peace, you know, is a comprehensive word, an inestimable blessing, including freedom from outward disturbance, and the enjoyment of external tranquillity; deliverance from inward disorder, and the possession of internal serenity; with the accumulation of every thing necessary to real happiness. When the church enjoys the fruits of the divine favour, and rest from enemies; when they are not troubled with internal heresies and schisms, nor with external persecution and oppression; they possess this extensive precious benefit, which, in the words before us, they expected

* Psa. cxii. 10.

God would appoint to them, or *ordain for them*. The expression seems to allude to the action of a commander in chief in the army, who marshals his soldiers according to the plan he had formed, and assigns to each the proper station which he is to occupy, in carrying into execution his projected enterprise. It plainly intimates, the lively hope which they felt, that the supreme Disposer of all persons and events, would be graciously pleased to assign for them, both outward and inward tranquillity. God alone can give peace, either to individuals or societies. It is the rich donation which he conveys to his peculiar people, by the benign influence of the Spirit of peace, through him who made peace by the blood of his cross. By the interposition of his divine providence, he defends them from evil; he divests them of their solitudes and fears; and enables them to repose themselves, and all their concerns, upon his paternal care, and faithful promises. And, according to his sovereign pleasure, he appoints this invaluable blessing to individuals, nations, and churches. Recollecting this important truth, his people here declare their comfortable assurance, that he would order peace for them.

For thou hast wrought all our works in us. Thou hast subdued our powerful corruptions; thou hast illuminated our dark minds; thou hast sanctified our impure hearts, and spiritualized our earthly affections. Thou hast wrought in us both to will and to do of thy good pleasure; thou hast shed abroad thy love into our hearts; thou hast strengthened us with strength in our souls, and filled them with peace, and hope, and joy. Not a good work that we have performed, but thou, Lord, hast wrought it: thou didst furnish us for it; thou gavest us the inclination, the ability, and opportunity; thou didst animate us to it by the most powerful motives; and therefore, as is most due, we ascribe to thee the praise. Every creature that hath been subservient in promoting our happiness, de-

rived its efficacy from thy appointment: the success that hath attended every affair in which we prospered, was derived from thy blessing; and therefore, as we ought, we attribute all to thy operation. Whilst we adopt this humble acknowledgment, let us apply it to the practical purpose for which an inspired apostle hath taught us to improve it; namely, ‘to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*.’—The Hebrew word translated *in*, signifies also *for*; and is thus rendered in the margin of some Bibles. Thou hast wrought all our works for us. Thou hast rescued us from the bondage of Egypt, from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, from the Philistines, the Zidonians, the Amalekites, and the Moabites, that oppressed us. Thou hast elevated us from a mean and obscure condition, to a flourishing and prosperous state. Thou hast set us on high from affliction, and makest us families like a flock: these things thou hast done, even when our strength and hope were gone, and our powerful enemies were confident, that we should become a prey to them. Thou hast preserved us in safety amid innumerable dangers, and afforded us the plentiful enjoyment of the most important blessings. From all this profusion of kindness that we have experienced, we are encouraged to hope, that thou wilt ordain for us all manner of happiness.—The argument thus stated, is strong and forcible; and ought to excite us, for whom God hath done as great things as for his people of old, to a lively confidence in his ever-enduring mercy and grace.

13 O LORD our God, *other* lords besides thee have had dominion over us: *but* by thee only will we make mention of thy name.

The upright servants of God acknowledge the unhappy condition in which they once were, and their

* Phil. ii. 12.

fixed determination, henceforward to celebrate the praises of the Lord their God.—They address themselves, with the utmost affection and earnestness, to Jehovah, who had chosen them for his people, and whom they had chosen for their God; confessing, with sorrow, that they had yielded subjection to other lords beside him, who had usurped an unjust dominion over them. Among these masters, may be reckoned, the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Persians, and the Babylonians, all of whom had treated them with great rigour and severity, and exercised authority over them. Besides, they had yielded a spiritual subjection to the god of this world, and to divers lusts and pleasures, whereby they had been captivated, and detained in a most ignominious servitude. The service of these lords they now renounced, firmly resolved, that they would no longer submit to their domination, as in times past.—*By thee only, &c.* The following resolution was formed in humble dependence upon God, by whose gracious assistance alone, they hoped to carry it into execution. Sensible of their own insufficiency and instability, they express their reliance upon Jehovah, that he would enable them to perform their purpose. This is uniformly the language of the sacred writers; of which I give you two instances worthy of your attention: ‘By thee (said David, the servant of the Lord) I have broken through a troop: and by my God have I overleaped a wall*. Through Christ strengthening me, said the apostle Paul, I can do all things.’ Indeed, modesty and diffidence of ourselves, combined with unsuspecting confidence in God, cannot fail to inspire sentiments of this sort.

Will we make mention of thy name. To make mention of the name of God, is to celebrate the divine excellencies, of which he hath revealed himself possessed; to speak of the glorious honour of his majesty,

* Psal. xviii. 29.

and of his wondrous works; to record the might of his terrible acts, and to declare his greatness. It is to utter the memory of his great goodness, and to sing of his righteousness*. It is to resign ourselves to the care and protection of his watchful providence, to worship him in the manner he hath appointed, to acknowledge his manifold mercies, to trust in his faithful promises, to delight in his holy precepts, and to rejoice in his great salvation. It is more especially, to speak with admiration and thankfulness of his blessed name, Immanuel; which signifies God with us; God manifest in the flesh, dwelling among us, and conversing with us, able to preserve us in perpetual safety, and to make us partakers of eternal salvation. It is to make manifest the favour of his knowledge in every place; to mention this name, revealed in the scriptures, with veneration and love, with hope and confidence, before the throne of Jehovah; and to acknowledge before men, our entire dependence upon it.—Let us, my brethren, frequently adopt, with seriousness and solemnity, the devout acknowledgment contained in this verse. O Lord, our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us. This confession we make with sorrow and penitence. What have we any more to do with idols? We present, in thy presence, these hearts, which have been sacrilegiously alienated from thee, and had deserted thy service. Accept of the spirits which thou hast made, possess thy own property, and stamp upon it the impression of thy own image. We wish, for thy sake, that they were ten thousand times better than they are. We consecrate them to thee, hoping, that thou wilt make them what they ought to be. From love to thee, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer, who hast heard our voice, and delivered our souls from death, we willingly offer ourselves to be thy servants: because thou hast loosed our bonds, we

* See Psal. cxlv. 4.

bind ourselves to thy service by the most sacred ties, that, we trust, shall never be broken. Henceforth
 ‘ we will make mention of thy name, and of thy
 ‘ righteousness, even of thine only: we will go in
 ‘ the strength of the Lord God *.’

14 *They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.*

The assembly of the upright here express their confidence in God, that he will perpetuate their present comfortable condition, and that he will not permit their enemies to recover the power and authority they formerly possessed. They triumph in the animating consideration, that those haughty oppressive powers, which threatened their destruction from off the earth, were reduced to such an abject state, as would effectually prevent them from injuring the church of God. To intimate the certain grounds on which their exultation was founded, the expression is repeated in different forms, and the strongest assurance given of the important fact. *They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise.* Our adversaries are so entirely rooted, so irrecoverably broken, that they shall never more live, to tyrannise over us, as in times past.—*Therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them.* To divest them of their power to hurt thy servants, thou, O Lord, hast visited them in wrath: thou hast vexed them in thy sore displeasure, for their wickedness and cruelty exercised toward thy people. Thou hast destroyed them, and they are fallen and gone: they are exterminated from the earth, and shall not rise, to rule or oppress any more; but continue under the crushing weight of those divine judgments whereby their overthrow hath been accom-

* Plal. lxxi. 16.

plished.—*And made all their memory to perish.* ‘The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance: but the name of the wicked shall rot*.’ Their memorial shall be blotted out: they shall either be entirely forgotten, or they shall be remembered, not with honour, but with detestation. Perhaps, whilst they were alive, they had flatterers that complimented them: but, being destroyed by the visitation of the Almighty, their reputation shall perish; their name shall be branded with infamy and disgrace, or buried in everlasting oblivion.—As affliction is greatly aggravated, by the recollection of those happy days which shall never again return, so the felicity of the godly is much increased, by considering, that those enemies, by whom they were harassed and oppressed, shall no more distress them. The very suspicion that our distresses shall recur, gives uneasiness; whereas the removal of the causes which contributed to our calamities, gives real satisfaction and joy. What relief doth it afford to the mind, to be assured, that we shall no more be troubled by those who formerly oppressed us.

15 Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation, thou art glorified; thou hadst removed *it* far *unto* all the ends of the earth.

In these words, the divine mercy is celebrated, on account of the prosperous condition to which God had exalted his church.—The Jewish nation was doubtless primarily intended, in this grateful acknowledgment of the divine goodness. Jehovah had promised to Abraham, that he should become a great and mighty nation; and that his posterity should be multiplied as the sand of the sea, and as the stars in heaven. The accomplishment of this promise was,

* Prov. x. 7.

for wise purposes, delayed for a considerable period of time. Twenty years elapsed before Abraham had the child in whose offspring it was to be fulfilled. Isaac was forty years old when he married, and his wife continued barren about twenty years after marriage. During these eighty years, the patriarch had only one son, in that line wherein the promise was to run; and, at the expiration of two hundred and fifteen years after it was delivered, his whole progeny amounted only to about threescore and ten persons. In the following two hundred and fifteen years, they multiplied exceedingly, in so much that when they came up out of the land of Egypt, they were reckoned above six hundred thousand men, beside women and children. Under the prosperous reign of Solomon, the Israelitish nation were as the sand of the sea-shore for multitude; and they, in the city, increased like the grass of the earth*. In the days of our prophet, so very numerous were the people of Judah, that, when Ahaz was king, Pekah, the king of Israel, slew of Judah 120,000 in one day, and carried away captive 200,000 women and children†. Thus did Jehovah literally increase the Jewish nation.

The Lord hath likewise increased his true Israel, the nation of them that are saved under the New-Testament dispensation. To this great event, the congregation of the upright might have looked forward, when making this acknowledgment. To this nation, thousands have been added in one day. The word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith, as we read, Acts iv. 4. and vi. 7. The churches, throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, were edified, and multiplied, chap. ix. 31. At Antioch, many of the Jews, and religious profelytes, followed Paul and Barnabas; and, at Iconium, they so spake, that a great multi-

* See Psa. lxxii.

† 2 Chron. xxviii. 6. 8.

tude, both of the Jews, and also of the Greeks, believed, chap. xiv. 1. At Corinth, the chief ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord with all his house, and many of the Corinthians, chap. xviii. 8.

From these, and several other passages in the New Testament, it appears, that, on the first preaching of the gospel, the Lord greatly increased the nation of them that are Israelites indeed; of them who are Jews inwardly, whose circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God. In following ages, the Lord still continued to increase them: hence the remarkable words of an ancient apologist for Christianity*, who openly told the Heathens, “That this despised sect
“ had filled their cities and provinces, their councils
“ and camps, the palace and the senate-house, and
“ what not—that such was their multitude, that
“ should they have withdrawn themselves into some
“ remote part of the world, the empire would have
“ been depopulated, and left in dismal solitude and
“ silence.” In the contemplation of this double increase, the prophet, in name of the faithful, greatly rejoiced, and praised the Lord. To another and greater increase, we look forward with hope and joy, when all the kingdoms of this earth shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and his Christ; ‘when men
‘ shall be blessed in Jesus Christ, and all nations shall
‘ call him blessed. And blessed be his glorious name
‘ for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his
‘ glory †. To this prediction and praise, let every one say, Amen, and amen.

Thou art glorified, by the prodigious increase of the natural posterity of the children of Israel. Thy power and faithfulness have been richly displayed, in accomplishing the promises which thou madest to Abraham, and the other patriarchs, contrary to every human appearance, notwithstanding every intervening ob-

* Tertullian.

† Psal. lxxii. 17. 19.

stacle. By this astonishing event, thou hast magnified thy great name, and manifested thy distinguishing regard to thy servants whom thou lovest. All the nations of the earth have contemplated thy power and righteousness, thy grace and veracity, exhibited in this wonderful dispensation toward thy peculiar people; whilst they themselves have glorified thee, by their frequent public acknowledgments of their obligations to thee for thy mercies, by their dependence on thy providence, by their attention to thy worship, by their trust in thy promises, and obedience to thy precepts.—Thou art glorified more especially, by the increase of the nation, composed of the spiritual posterity of Israel. God is not more honoured and praised, on account of any work that he hath done, than for multiplying the number of his faithful subjects. This is indeed a work by which he hath acquired the highest renown and glory. How many and great the obstructions that lie in the way of its accomplishment! How feeble and inadequate, to human view, are the means employed for its execution; such as were esteemed a stumbling-block by the Jews, and foolishness by the Greeks; means not adapted to promote men's worldly interests, nor accommodated to the foolish customs of the world! How weak and unlikely the instruments chosen to perform this arduous work: not persons of extensive learning, superior genius, well skilled in the arts of reasoning and persuasion, and expert in improving circumstances to advance the cause in which they were embarked; but a few, plain, illiterate men, destitute of power and influence, who had to contend with the most virulent opposition, and to vanquish difficulties which seemed altogether unfurmountable. Notwithstanding, such was the success of the gospel and its ministers, when accompanied with power from on high, that they triumphed over the inveterate prejudices and vices of mankind, they subdued the rage and cruelty of their most inveterate enemies, they over-

turned the kingdom of darkness, they abolished idolatry and superstition, they communicated new principles to the minds of men, they converted them to the obedience of the Son of God, and formed them to the practice of justice and charity. Thus the nation of them that are saved, was increased: in this manner Jehovah is glorified; and thus we expect, according to his promise, that he will yet glorify his name.

Thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth. Considering these words in their literal sense, the earth may denote, as in some other passages of scripture, the land of Canaan, which God gave to Israel for an inheritance. According to this interpretation, the meaning of the expression will be, 'Thou hast removed the nation which thou hadst chosen, into the most distant corners of the land, which thou hast assigned to them for a possession, and extended their territories unto the most remote parts of that fruitful country, no part of which remains unoccupied or unconquered. This signal favour which God conferred upon the Jewish nation under the Old Testament, represented the more important benefit which he hath bestowed upon the church under the New Testament, by removing its limits, and extending its influence, to the most distant parts of the earth. This illustrious instance of the divine mercy it becomes us, with grateful hearts, frequently to celebrate, as by this dispensation of providence, we enjoy the ordinances of the gospel.

16 LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer *when* thy chastening *was* upon them.

Having commemorated the divine mercy and goodness, in which they had liberally participated, the chorus of the upright proceed gratefully to acknowledge, the blessed effects that accompanied the afflictions

tions under which they had groaned in former times.—The season to which they refer, was the time of trouble, when God's chastening hand was upon them. Many are the afflictions that befall the righteous: for whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Even those who know and serve God, may become remiss and careless in prayer, and in other duties, until God is pleased to reprove them for their sins, and to correct them for their profit. They may preserve the form, whilst destitute of the spirit of prayer: they may draw nigh to God with their lips, whilst their hearts are far from him; or they may seldom visit the throne of grace, and God may have their homage only on some particular occasions. In the pleasant day of prosperity, we are too prone, like a generation of Israel, to say to God, 'We are lords, we will come no more unto thee;' and in this manner to discover our insensibility of the divine goodness. But when the gloomy day of adversity arrives, and every refuge fails, then we are ready to exclaim with David, 'O Lord, I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living *.' When in trouble, and God's chastening is upon us, we pour forth our supplications before the Lord, and earnestly implore his mercy and deliverance. Thus the church acknowledgeth that they had done. Then,

They visited thee, they poured out a prayer. Though God is frequently said in scripture to visit men, I apprehend, the expression of mens visiting God, is peculiar to the passage now before us. It seems to import, that, in the time of distress, the church remembered the Lord; they looked toward his holy habitation; they had immediate recourse for necessary support and seasonable relief, to him who is a refuge in affliction, and a present help in time of need. They directed their prayers to him, from whom alone their

* Psal. cxlii. 5.

help could come; and earnestly applied to him for strength and consolation, who can send help from his holy hill of Zion. When they visited God, they poured out a prayer. Prayer, you know, consists in presenting requests unto God, for those things which are suited to our necessities, and agreeable to his will, in the manner he hath required. This elegant expression of pouring out prayer, seems to allude to the waters of a fountain, that are plentifully conveyed away by the several streams that issue from it. It intimates, the abundant supplications which incessantly flowed from their hearts, and were continually presented before God. Frequent fervent prayer is, in scripture-language, beautifully expressed, by pouring out the soul before God. ‘Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him*.’ Even in those seasons wherein the godly are confined by distress, their hearts are often enlarged, to express in the divine presence, with great fervour and affection, their doubts and fears, their desires and hopes, their temptations, afflictions, and sorrows. Thus they pour out their prayers with the greatest earnestness.—In all our troubles, let us seriously consider the important purposes which they are intended to accomplish; and when God visits us with afflictions, let us visit him with our fervent supplications, that he would be pleased to favour us with his gracious presence and timely aid, and render our distresses the happy means of promoting our spiritual improvement.

17 Like as a woman with child *that* draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, *and* crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD.

The prayers and agonies of the church, in time of tribulation, had proved ineffectual for attaining their

* Psa. lxii. 8.

deliverance, and had not been attended with proper effects.—This subject our prophet illustrates by a striking similitude, which is frequently used by the inspired writers of the Old and New Testaments, taken from the condition of a woman that is pregnant, who, amidst the pains and anguish that she feels, entertains hopes of deliverance, and of seeing the desirable object of her expectation. Notwithstanding, being big only with a false conception, she is miserably disappointed. In like manner, the church of God, amidst the violent distress, the sharp conflicts, and bitter sorrows, which they sustained, cherished the agreeable prospect of obtaining a happy release from their afflictions, and of beholding the blessed fruits of their calamities. Promising appearances however vanished, their expectations were frustrated, and no substantial good effects were produced.—*So have we been in thy sight, O Lord.* Thou who knowest all things, hast been witness to the acute afflictions, and the severe conflicts, that we have endured, arising from internal, as well as external causes, and the ineffectual assistances that we have received in the time of our distress.

18 We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind, we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.

In this verse, the foregoing similitude is illustrated, and applied to the circumstances of the church.—*We have been with child*; big with the hopes that thy righteous nation, by our means, should have been increased, that thy promises should have had their full effect, and that thou wouldst have done great things for us.—*We have been in pain*, on account of our manifold sufferings and anxious solicitude, that thou wouldst send us speedy and effectual relief from our
forlorn

forlorn deplorable condition.—*We have as it were brought forth wind.* Our conceptions have proved abortive; the pangs of affliction that we have felt have been in vain, and all our sanguine expectations have been frustrated. Our anguish and sorrows have not produced any real, solid, good consequences; nor have we attained the object of our wishes.—*We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth.* Our prayers and cries have not as yet been accompanied with corresponding good fruits: we are not yet emerged from distress and calamity. Though they had requested the divine assistance, they had not placed their confidence in God alone, but yielded subjection to other lords, whereby the efficacy of their prayers was hindered. Notwithstanding divine providence, on several occasions, had mercifully interposed in their favour, and wrought for them some remarkable deliverances (by which they enjoyed lucid intervals of tranquillity and peace), by means of the Egyptians, and their other allies, still, however, that perfect salvation, which the godly looked for, was not accomplished.—*Neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.* Our haughty oppressors and persecutors, by whom we have been most afflicted, have not as yet been humbled; nor are they fallen from the high station, and extensive influence, that they possessed. Flourishing in all the wonted vigour of their strength, their grandeur is not declined; their empires remain in safety; they are not brought low by divine judgments.—The church of God, under both dispensations, hath been in such circumstances as are here particularly delineated. Whilst the state of the Jewish people, about the time this song was sung in the land of Judah, is accurately described, the condition of the church of Christ, prior to the time of the Reformation, is not obscurely depicted. From the twelfth century, there were not a few, who predicted and expected the restoration of the church to a better state. Their prayers, however, were not immediately

mediately answered: they sustained some severe afflictions and conflicts, in the hope of that deliverance, which they obtained not until the sixteenth century. The more particular application of this song to that memorable period, which may be made with ease and propriety, I leave to the intelligent and judicious.

19 Thy dead *men* shall live, *together with* my dead body shall they arise: awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew *is as* the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

In these words, which conclude this beautiful song, the people of God express their pleasing hopes of being restored to a better condition, and joyfully congratulate each other in this animating prospect. The words are so constructed, that whilst, at first view, they seem to treat of the resurrection from the dead, yet, in their secondary and proper sense, they describe a mystical or metaphorical resurrection, which is the principal subject here intended. They are evidently addressed to Jehovah by the church. *Thy dead men*, who died in thy favour, and for thy glory, who nobly confessed thy truth, and suffered for thy sake the loss of all things, or some very grievous calamities, were really, or at least in resolution, martyrs. Concerning them, the voice from heaven declared, in the book of Revelation, ‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: yea, saith the Spirit, they shall rest from their labours; and their works shall follow them*.’ Of them the apostle Paul thus speaks: ‘For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether therefore we live or die, we are the Lord’s†.’ Those who thus glorify God, and are delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, are the objects of his tender affection and peculiar regard. Though they lay down

* Rev. xiv. 13.

† Rom. xiv. 8.

their lives for him, and, in the view of their persecutors, seem to perish, they are dear in God's sight, and their death is precious.—*They shall live.* Their memory shall be blessed in the earth, where they suffered for the sake of righteousness; and their memorial shall be transmitted with honour to following generations. Their souls shall be blessed in the presence and enjoyment of God; 'who is not the God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him*.' And, at the consummation of all things, their bodies shall rise from the dust, on hearing the voice of the Son of God; and, being re-united to their immortal spirits, they shall live for ever, to experience the truth of what Jesus Christ hath affirmed, 'He that shall lose his life, shall preserve it †;' and be exalted, through eternity, to endless joys and pleasures.

My dead body shall they arise. The church is often spoken of in scripture as a body, on account of the intimate connection subsisting among all the members of which it is composed, and their reciprocal influence upon each other. They are emphatically said to be the body of Christ, because of the wonderful union of all the members to him as their Head, the vital influence they derive from him, and his tender sympathy with them in every circumstance. This body is here affirmed to be dead, because, at the time referred to, they were as dead persons, concerning whom there is no hope that they shall return, and live again in this present state. Depressed by the power of their persecutors, they were prevented from actively doing good, and disabled from extricating themselves out of the calamitous condition to which they were reduced. Their state, at the time referred to, was truly deplorable and hopeless. Involved in complicated distress, and deprived of the means of support, their life was almost perished from the earth,

* Luke xx. 38.

† Luke xvii. 33.

and seemed to be nearly extinguished, whilst little hope of restoration remained. In such circumstances, we cannot be surpris'd, that the church should have spoken of themselves as a dead body. In this very humbling and afflicted condition, they promise to themselves deliverance; that should be as life from the dead.

My dead body shall they arise. The scriptures speak of a first and figurative, of a second and real resurrection. In the first and metaphorical resurrection, the souls of the faithful, by divine power accompanying the word of the living God, and the effectual working of the holy Spirit, are raised from spiritual death, to the enjoyment of a rational and divine life, in which they maintain communion with God, and are employed in advancing his glory, their own salvation, and the good of mankind. And as this spiritual life is expos'd to many injuries, which interrupt or retard its exercise, and weaken its influence, its restoration from languor and imbecility, to vigour and activity, in performing its proper functions, is likewise express'd, by their being quicken'd and rais'd *. By the second and real resurrection, their bodies shall be raised from the dust at the end of the world, and be re-united to their souls by divine power, that they may for ever participate of the heavenly glory that is promis'd to the righteous. In both senses, the afflicted church of God shall be raised, according to the words before us, which, while they depict one event, describe another; and they who attentively read what is said of the type, will have their thoughts naturally led forward to the antitype. Many instances occur in scripture of the truth of this remark. In the predictions relating to the destruction of the hypocritical and perfidious among the Jewish people, the punishments to be inflict'd upon them are so express'd, as to give a striking representation of the judgments to

* Psa. cxix. 88.

be executed on the wicked at the last day*. Thus also, in the prophecies respecting the flourishing state of the church of Jesus Christ, the language is so arranged, as to exhibit a lively view of the heavenly glory in its amplitude and magnificence†. In like manner, when the prophets foretold the mystical resurrection of the people of God, they were directed, by the holy Spirit, so to express the subject, as to include the second resurrection, of which it is the figure and emblem‡. Hence it appears, that prophecy frequently takes in at once, different events, distinct both in nature and time, whilst it pursues the extreme and principal design through its several gradations. For this reason, it chiefly employs general ideas, which are capable of comprehending the whole scope of the divine counsels, of accompanying the particular progressions of circumstances, situations, and events, and of being easily applied to intermediate relations and ends. These remarks may assist us in understanding the passage now under consideration, where the church, in a decayed, dejected, and dispersed condition, express their hopes, that they shall rise from under oppression, affliction, and persecution, and be happily elevated to a prosperous and comfortable state; whilst, at the same time, they declare their expectation, that their dead bodies shall be raised from the earth at the resurrection of the just. This prediction received a partial fulfilment in the Jewish church, after having been almost consumed in the days of Antiochus, king of Syria: and again, in the Christian church, at the time of the glorious Reformation, in the sixteenth century; a most illustrious period indeed, to which we look back with gratitude and pleasure.—Though the church may seem to resemble the condition of a dead body, let us not despond, saying, Our hope is perished from the Lord: but rather let us adopt the animating words before us, My dead

* See Psal. l.

† Rev. vii. 9, 10.

‡ Dan xii. *et seq.*

body shall arise. The Spirit of God shall yet enter into them, and they shall live, and flourish, and bring forth fruit abundantly. The church standeth by the grace, the power, and the promise of Jehovah: and therefore, though they may be oppressed for a season, they shall be revived; though they seem to be dead, they shall arise.

Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust. The upright servants of God, rapt into ecstasy, in the delightful prospect of the future deliverance of the church, and unable fully to express the joy which they felt, call upon those who had laid down their lives in the cause of God, as if personally present, to leave their graves, and to unite in celebrating the salvation that Jehovah had wrought for them.—The persons addressed, are those that dwell in dust. The expression plainly intimates, that they considered the death of the godly as a sleep, in which they rest from their labours, in the hope of a joyful resurrection. In this view, our prophet thus represents the state of the righteous after death: ‘He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness*.’ In like manner, our Lord Jesus Christ spake of it, when he said to his disciples, ‘Lazarus, our friend, sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep†.’ The servants of God, who are dead, are only fallen asleep in Jesus. There is a striking contrast between the condition of those who are here called upon, and that of the enemies of the people of God, mentioned in ver. 5. who are said to dwell on high, enjoying dignity and security, proudly elated with their glory; whereas those who are here addressed, were in a state of depression, affliction, yea, in danger of death, or really dead. The circumstances of both were to be reversed. Those who dwelt on high were to be degraded, and their lofty city was to be laid low, even to the ground; whereas those

* Isaiah lvii. 2.

† John xi. 11.

who dwelt in the dust, and were trampled upon by their enemies, were invited to arise, that they might sing and triumph, on account of the victory they obtained. Ye who have been reduced to the lowest and most deplorable circumstances, who abide in the region and shadow of death; ye whose bodies have had their habitation in the dust, for whom no power less than omnipotence can work deliverance—to you we say:

Awake and sing. Similar calls with this, are directed, in the word of God, to those who are most unlikely to obey them. ‘Awake (saith the apostle Paul) thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light*.’ Such animating invitations are often accompanied with divine power, and prove the happy means of conveying that ability which is necessary to comply with them. Those who dwell in the dust, are called upon with as great propriety, to awake and sing, as the trees of the field are required, to rejoice and sing. Neither are expected actually to obey the summons: which is frequently given, to intimate the very strong emotions of joy felt by those who thus expressed themselves; and their confidence, that had inanimate creatures been capable, they would not have declined the invitation. Ye whose powers and faculties have for some time been suspended from their proper employment, and who have remained unaffected with those objects which produce sensations of pleasure or pain, *awake and sing.* Shake off your indolence: put on your beautiful garments: and utter songs of praise unto him who raiseth the poor out of the dust, and the needy from the dunghil †; who hath redeemed his people by a strong hand, and who will ransom them from the grave, by the exceeding greatness of his mighty power. Arise and shine, for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon

* Eph. v. 14.

† Psal. cxiii. 7.

you. Be awakened by these repeated calls, to celebrate the praises of the Lord our God. I conclude this article in the words of the learned Dr. Lowth, in his Note upon this verse: “ The deliverance of
 “ the people of God, from a state of the lowest de-
 “ pression, is explained by images plainly taken from
 “ the resurrection of the dead. In the same manner,
 “ the prophet Ezekiel represents the restoration of
 “ the Jewish nation, from a state of utter dissolution,
 “ by the restoring of dry bones to life, exhibited to
 “ him in a vision, chap. xxxvii. which is directly thus
 “ applied and explained, ver. 11, 12, 13. It appears
 “ from hence, that the doctrine of the resurrection
 “ from the dead, was, at that time, a popular and
 “ common doctrine; for an image which is assumed
 “ in order to express or represent any thing in the
 “ way of allegory or metaphor, whether poetical or
 “ prophetic, must be an image commonly known
 “ and understood, otherwise it will not answer the
 “ purpose for which it is assumed *.”

For thy dew is as the dew of herbs. Dew, you know, is a sort of mist or small rain, that cometh down from heaven, and falling gently upon the earth, renders it moist and fruitful. It is therefore justly considered as a great blessing. By the dew of God, is here meant, the quickening refreshing influences of the holy Spirit, whereby his word and providence are rendered effectual for promoting the growth and fruitfulness of his people. With peculiar propriety and beauty is this spiritual dew compared to the dew of herbs, which cometh down from heaven, and is not the effect of human art, but of divine goodness. In like manner, the dew of the divine blessing, that falleth upon the church, does not proceed from created power, but from the infinite mercy of the benevolent Author of every good and perfect gift.—The dew falleth imperceptibly upon

* Dr. Lowth's Notes on Isaiah, p. 144.

the herbs, which it waters, and is not seen, while it descendeth like the great rain of God's strength: so the benign influences of the Holy Ghost are communicated to men, not with observation, as our Lord says of the coming of the kingdom of heaven; they are secretly and invisibly conveyed into the heart, where they produce most important consequences.—The dew descends very seasonably upon the herbs and fruits of the earth, in warm dry weather, when it is most wanted. Thus opportunely is the holy Spirit given unto men, when they stand most in need of his assistance: in seasons wherein iniquity abounds, and the love of many hath become languid; when persecution is hottest, distress greatest, and necessities most urgent.—The dew falls very plentifully upon the herbage in the fields, and abundantly waters them. In like manner, the refreshing influences of the Holy Ghost are copiously imparted to the people of God: on whom they are elsewhere said to be poured out as water, according to the riches of his grace, and their various exigencies.

Farther, to justify the comparison here stated, which is the most apt and beautiful that can be imagined, let us trace the resemblance, not only in the manner of communication, but likewise in the salutary effects with which they are accompanied.—By the dew, the ground is moistened, the herbs are refreshed; and to its efficacy is attributed, the beauty of the lily, the growth of the cedar, and the revival of the corns. Similar happy effects are produced in the church, by the celestial dew that descendeth upon the souls of men, whereby every divine grace is refreshed and invigorated, and holy obedience is quickened and cherished.—As the dew nourishes the herbage, and renders the fruits of the earth richer and more luxuriant, so the divine influences of the holy Spirit meliorate and increase the precious fruits of righteousness put forth by the people of God, who are thereby greatly strengthened for doing good,
and

and bearing affliction.—The dew beautifies and embellishes the herbs and fruits upon which it falls, and gives them an exquisitely fine appearance in a clear summer-morning. In like manner, the dew of God's blessing gives lustre and comeliness to his saints: it clothes them with simplicity and sincerity; it adorns them with humility and love; and disposes them to follow whatsoever things are lovely, virtuous, and praise-worthy.—Once more, the dew fructifies the earth, and renders it fertile, in producing bread for the use of man, and wine that cheereth his heart: so the Spirit and blessing of God renders those to whom they are conveyed, fruitful in every grace, and every good work; and causes them to abound in those excellent fruits whereby their heavenly Father is glorified. On these, and other accounts, the dew that falleth upon the inheritance of the Lord, resembles the dew that cometh down upon the herbs of the field. Be thou, O Lord! as thou hast promised, as the dew unto thy people Israel.

And the earth shall cast out the dead. There is a peculiar elegance in these forcible words, which may either relate to a figurative spiritual resurrection, whereby the church is delivered from a depressed afflicted condition; or to a literal corporal resurrection, whereby they shall be rescued from the power of death and the grave at the last day. If the expression is interpreted in the former sense, it imports, that those who were spiritually dead, and offensive to good men, should be expelled from the land of Canaan, in which they had their fixed residence: if in the latter, it intimates, that the earth, which contains in its bowels the dead bodies of God's people, should thrust them forth, at the divine command, in the morning of the resurrection, when the earth and the sea shall deliver up the dead that are in them. Both the prophecies and promises of God encourage us to cherish this blessed hope, which, in due time, shall certainly be accomplished. As the earth, moistened
by

by the dew of heaven, brings forth abundance of herbs for the use of man, so when the influences of the holy Spirit descend upon its inhabitants, it shall cast forth the dead in great numbers, who shall spring up, and shine forth in all the beauties of holiness: and, at the consummation of all things, by the quickening Spirit of God, which dwelleth in them, the saints shall be raised from their graves, to enjoy eternal life. According to the infallible declaration of the faithful and true Witness, ‘The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation *.’—This prediction was remarkably fulfilled in the time of the Maccabees, under the Old Testament; again, under the New Testament, when the church was delivered from severe affliction, and deadly oppression: and we still look for its more full accomplishment, in times that are yet future.

20 ¶ Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

To the foregoing beautiful song of mercy and judgment, our prophet subjoins the epilogue, contained in this and the following verse; in which, speaking in the name of God, he confirms the hopes expressed by the faithful. He admonishes them, to keep themselves concealed, during the terrible storm of persecution that was to arise, by which God intended to prove and purify his church, until the promised deliverance should be accomplished, and divine vengeance executed upon their enemies.—The invitation is directed to the people of God: *Come,*

* John v. 28, 29.

my people; with whom I am intimately connected, who are in a peculiar manner my property, whom I have chosen for my heritage, over whom I exercise gracious authority, in whose welfare I am deeply interested, and for whose happiness I discover the most tender concern: you who are mine, by the strong ties of duty and gratitude, and who have consecrated yourselves to my honour and service. To such, God, by the prophet, addresseth himself in the most affectionate manner. He doth not command them, with stern authority, to depart; but, with inexpressible condescension and kindness, he counsels them to come, to lay aside their former estrangement, and to approach him with their whole hearts, in the exercise of humble dependence and unsuspecting confidence. Upon their dutiful compliance with his just demand, he assures them, that he will go before them, and guide them in the way, with his eye fixed upon them; that his presence shall attend them, and he will give them rest.

Enter thou into thy chambers. Chambers are intended, either for retirement, devotion, or safety; and for one or all of these purposes, the people of God might be directed to repair to them.—Enter into the secret chambers of your houses, and there contemplate the glorious attributes of Jehovah, the astonishing wonders he hath wrought in favour of his church; meditate upon the holy scriptures, and the promises made unto the fathers; employ yourselves in communing with your hearts; and, in the exercise of faith and hope, patience and resignation, commit yourselves to the care and protection of the Keeper of Israel.—Enter into the sacred chambers of the sanctuary, where the King of glory entertains his servants with the displays of his mercy, and the fruits of his loving-kindness; where he vouchsafes to converse with them, and they present their supplications before him, and receive instruction, assistance, and comfort from him, according to their necessities. There you

may get your strength renewed, your wants supplied, your doubts resolved, your spiritual distempers cured; you may discover the designs of his providential dispensations toward you, and reverently inquire into his good and acceptable will concerning you.—Enter into the inner chambers of safety, in the strong holds and fortresses to which you have access, where you hope to enjoy defence from your enemies. Remember especially, that the name of the Lord is a strong tower, to which the righteous run, and are safe. When all refuge faileth, do you, after the example of the patriarch David, flee unto him to hide you. In his consummate goodness, you shall find most desirable relief: his mercy shall compass you about as a shield; from his wisdom, you shall receive direction and safe-conduct; by his power, you shall be preserved from evil, and kept as in a garrison. In his faithful promises, which are perfectly suited to your various circumstances, you shall find shelter and comfort in every storm; and, in his watchful providence, which is employed in executing his purposes of grace and mercy toward his church, you shall enjoy never-failing protection.

To enter into these chambers, for the purposes mentioned, supposes, that we have free access to them; that the doors are open to give us admission: it includes, the exercise of fervent prayer, for defence and safety; lively faith in the mercy and power of Jehovah, to preserve us from evil; and is accompanied with the diligent performance of duty, whereby our claim to the divine favour, and the promise of deliverance, is ascertained. In few words, it is to renounce dependence on every other refuge, in which men are apt to seek for shelter; and, placing our trust in God alone, to have recourse to him in every danger, as our dwelling-place, and to repose ourselves under the shadow of the Almighty. It is to retire into these chambers, even as Noah went into the ark, by which he was saved from impending calamity;

ty; and as Elijah, the prophet, resorted to the private place, beside the brook Cherith, where he hid himself, and was miraculously sustained. Having got into this sanctuary and refuge, we must keep within it, as did the Israelites within their houses, when the destroying angel went through the land of Egypt.—The people of God, having entered their chambers, are directed to *shut the doors about them*; in allusion to what persons do when they are apprehensive of disturbance or danger, from those who wish to do them mischief, or when they retire for the purposes of devotion. The servants of God are, in like manner, required to shut the doors behind them; to exclude from their minds vain reasonings, carnal affections, and anxious cares about worldly enjoyments, which might vex and disquiet them, that they may entirely consecrate their time to meditation, devotion, and confidence in God, in patient expectation of his seasonable appearance in their behalf.—This advice clearly points out, what ought to be our employment in every season of danger. Come, my people, enter into thy chambers, &c; think of God's mercies, supplicate his presence and protection, rely upon his power and faithfulness. Exclude every thing that might give you uneasiness, commit yourselves wholly to him, and cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart; and no enemy shall terrify you, no suffering shall disconcert you, no evil shall destroy you. 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all *.'

Hide thyself as it were for a little moment. When a person, in imminent danger of falling into the hands of his enemies, retreats into his chamber, and shuts the door, he still finds, that even there he may be much annoyed; he therefore hides himself in some strong or secret place, where he expects to enjoy safety and comfort. This is the very course which

* Psal. xxxiv. 19.

the people of God are advised to follow. If there be any particular place, any divine perfection, any precious promise, or wonderful providence of God, that you reckon well-adapted to give you tranquillity and consolation in the time of danger and distress, you are invited to resort thither. This prudent measure was taken by the king of Israel, as we learn from Psal. cxliiii. ‘ Deliver me, O Lord (said he), from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me.’—The season mentioned for this purpose, is very short, *for a little moment*. A moment, or the twinkling of an eye, is the shortest space of time of which we can form any just conception. The word cannot here be understood in its strict and proper sense; and therefore must be explained with some latitude, as denoting, a considerable, though comparatively a short space of time. In this extensive meaning, it is used by Ezra the scribe, in his prayer to God, where he thus speaks: ‘ And now for a moment (or for a little space) grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God *.’ In the same sense, the expression is used in other passages of scripture: ‘ Sing unto the Lord (saith the psalmist), for his anger endureth but a moment †.’ And in this prophecy, ‘ For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer ‡.’ The afflictions of the people of God, when properly considered, are of very short continuance, as the apostle Paul acknowledgeth, in these remarkable words: ‘ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ||.’ He forms a beautiful contrast between the affliction and the glory of the saints: the former, he affirms, is light and momentary; the latter, he declares, is weighty and eternal.—For no more than a short period, therefore,

* Ezra ix. 8.
|| 2 Cor. iv. 17.

† Psal. xxx. 5.

‡ Isaiah liv. 7.

are they required to hide themselves, which is here limited, *until the indignation be overpast*; until the rage and fury of their adversaries shall be exhausted; until the furious storm of divine wrath, which was to blow upon their malicious persecutors, shall have buried them in ruins. Whilst divine indignation, like a tempest, beat upon them with unrelenting vehemence, how tranquil, happy, and comfortable, were the servants of the Most High, in the chambers to which they retreated!—In the review of this delightful subject, we may justly exclaim, ‘O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. Blessed be the Lord; for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness, in a strong city*.’

21 For behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

The reason is here subjoined upon which the preceding admonition is founded. The godly ought to wait with hope and patience, until the indignation be overpast, and Jehovah come forth to avenge his own injured honour, and the wrongs done to his people.—In the words before us, there is an obvious allusion to a prince, whose proper place of residence is his palace, from whence, at certain times, he makes excursions, in order to inspect the state of his kingdom, to examine into the conduct of his subjects, and to dispense among them rewards and punishments according to their deserts. In reference to this practice,

* Psal. xxxi. 19, 20, 21.

the Lord is said to come out of his place. The heaven of heavens is his habitation, where he resides amidst ineffable splendor, and manifests his power and glory, his grace and goodness, to ten thousand times ten thousand celestial worshippers. Hence the reply of the church to the inquiry of the Heathen: ‘Where is now your God? Our God (said they) is in the heavens, he hath done whatsoever pleased him *.—From this holy place, the Lord is said to come forth to give glorious demonstrations of his mercy, in preserving and blessing his people; and rich displays of his righteousness, when he proceeds to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. The persons here intended, are doubtless the enemies of the church; and the iniquity which God was about to punish, was their treachery and perfidy, their barbarity and cruelty, exercised toward his servants. Such heinous transgressions he would not suffer to pass without just retribution. Indeed, there is hardly any one truth more frequently repeated in scripture, than God’s determined purpose to punish the workers of iniquity. ‘Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not pass unpunished †. They shall bear the punishment of their iniquity, in whom is sin ‡.’ But I suppose that it is unnecessary to multiply proofs of a proposition, which, however little considered as it ought, cannot be controverted. How often doth the righteous Governor of the universe, in the course of his providence, inflict awful judgments on the inhabitants of the earth for their sins!—Let us then wisely employ the terrors, as well as the mercies of the Lord, as means to preserve us from the practice of that iniquity which exposes to punishment from the Almighty.

The earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. The blood of the saints, who

* Psal. cxv. 2, 3.
Marginal translation.

† Prov. xi. 21.

‡ Hosea xii. 8.

were slain for the testimony of Jesus, and the word of God, is doubtless the blood which is chiefly intended. The people of God, the meek, the innocent, the unarmed followers of Jesus Christ, who, like sheep, were cruelly put to death, by their powerful barbarous persecutors, are the slain which shall be discovered. To shed innocent blood, is unquestionably an enormous crime; to shed innocent blood on account of religion, is still greater wickedness: but to murder the servants of the living God, the appointed ministers of his church, is a species of barbarity which I have not a name to express. This atrocious wickedness, this wanton cruelty, hath been perpetrated in almost every age. 'For thy sake, O Lord (said his oppressed people in ancient times), we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter:' and the history of the church, in every period, bears testimony, that this hath been their condition in following generations. In his wonderful clemency and forbearance, God hath sometimes permitted those bloody scenes, which have been acted in different kingdoms, to pass for a time unpunished, as if he regarded them not: but when he cometh forth out of his place to execute vengeance upon the enemies of his people, who have shed the blood of his servants, their dreadful cruelties shall be published, and terrible punishments shall be inflicted upon them.— This prediction, which was literally fulfilled in the times of the Maccabees, hath been again accomplished in several ages of the church; and probably shall yet be verified in future times, when God shall appear to avenge the blood of his saints, that hath been poured out by their adversaries. And at the final judgment, all the wicked actions of men, which they have industriously concealed, shall be brought to light, and punished.—In this prospect, when you behold, or hear of cruel oppressors, violent tyrants, and inexorable conquerors, injuring and persecuting good people, recollect the certain retribution they shall receive

ceive from God; and let this consideration compose your disturbed minds. There is no darkness, or shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves: though they endeavour to conceal their crimes, the earth will disclose them. As the apostle Paul observed, ‘Some mens sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment. Men easily see what they are, and judge of what they have done: ‘And some men they follow after:’ though at first they were hid, they are afterward discovered. He adds, in the next verse, ‘Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand, and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.’ Notwithstanding the good works of the upright are not presently laid open to view, they shall ere long be fully manifested. Neither good nor bad actions shall long remain hid: for according to the words of Jesus Christ, ‘There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known*.’

* Luke xii. 2.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

OUR prophet, having finished the beautiful song of triumph, recorded in the foregoing chapters, proceeds, in the one now before us, to conclude his discourse, by more fully explaining and illustrating the salutary effects which were to result to the people of God from the calamities above predicted. The awful vengeance which God was to execute upon their adversaries, and the afflictions with which they themselves were to be visited, should be accompanied with the richest displays of the peculiar favour, and tender care, of divine providence toward them. Under the direction of infinite wisdom, they were to become subservient for promoting their purity and enlargement, for delivering them from idolatry and superstition, for rendering them fruitful in every good work, for increasing among them the most amiable union and concord, and for exciting the servants of God to zealous activity, in calling those who were afar off, into the city and kingdom of Jehovah.—The portion of this elegant and excellent discourse, contained in this chapter, may be distributed into four parts, which accurately delineate the remarkable fortunes of the future times, to which it hath a direct reference.—The destruction of the kings and princes that were adverse to the people of God, ver. 1.—The establishment and felicity of the church, after being purified from corruption, under the peculiar care of divine providence, ver. 2.—5.—The progress and increase of the church, through the grace and favour of God, after the overthrow of their enemies, ver. 6.—11.—The collection of the elect of God from their dispersions, and the calling of those who were outcasts, to the worship of Jehovah, and communion with the citizens of Jerusalem. In humble dependence upon the Father of lights, for direction and assistance, let us attentively consider these several topics which are here treated of.

CHAP. XXVII.

IN that day the LORD with his fore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent, and he shall slay the dragon that *is* in the sea.

The terrible overthrow of those formidable potentates and princes, who were inimical to the people of God, is here foretold in allegorical language. This prediction may not improperly be considered as connected with the preceding triumphant song, and might, perhaps, with propriety, have been included in the foregoing chapter.—The awful visitation foretold by the prophet, is limited to a certain period, pointed at by these words, *In that day*. At, or soon after, the time wherein God shall come forth to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth shall disclose her blood, he will accomplish this dreadful threatening: or, perhaps, this prophecy may be connected with the one delivered, chap. xxiv. 21. where it is written, that ‘the Lord shall punish the ‘host of the high ones that are on high, and the ‘kings of the earth upon the earth.’ Two sublime hymns of praise having been subjoined to the predictions contained in that chapter, the inspired writer now proceeds to relate more particularly, some extraordinary events, which were to happen at that remarkable period when the liberation of the church should take place, and divine vengeance be executed upon those powerful enemies and persecutors by whom they had been afflicted.

Three terrible voracious animals are here mentioned; the first of which is, leviathan the piercing serpent. The crocodile is probably the creature intended by this description, to whom it may be very well applied. This monster, which lives both on
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land and in water, lies frequently about the river Nile, in Egypt; and is said to have been seen in some places of America. It measures from about fifteen to thirty feet long. It has about sixty joints on the back, covered with a certain kind of bark or shell, so hard that a dart or spear cannot penetrate it. Its body is so firm and stiff, that it cannot easily turn or wind itself, even when pursuing its prey; so that the easiest way of escaping from this dangerous creature, is by making frequent short turns. It is called a serpent, because of the shortness of its legs, on which it seems rather to creep than to walk; and it is distinguished by the name of the piercing or straight serpent, because it does not roll itself up in folds, like that which is next spoken of—*Leviathan that crooked or long serpent*, which is flexible and winding, easily coiling itself up in a circular form. Of all the wild and dangerous animals that are hostile to mankind, this is the most terrible and hideous. Many things have been collected respecting this creature by a celebrated writer*, some of which exceed belief: among these, is a circumstance that he relates concerning its prodigious size: “Attilus Regulus, the consul, in the first Punic war, encountered one that had its residence at the river Bagrada, in Africa, which, after sustaining a long and furious attack from his whole army, was at length overpowered with stones and darts. Such was its enormous length, that its skin, which was sent to Rome, measured one hundred and twenty feet.”—The third species of living creatures here mentioned, is the dragon that is in the sea. By the last part of this description, he is distinguished from the dragon that frequents rivers and marshy grounds, and from him that resides in the deserts. The sea-monster, or whale, is probably the fish that is intended. In the very elegant description of this largest of all living creatures, which God himself gave

* Bochart Hieroz, part ii. book v. chap. xii.

to his servant Job, he beautifully delineates, in glowing colours, his prodigious bulk, his untractable disposition, his immense strength, the difficulty and danger of catching him; and thus concludes, ‘He be- holdeth all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride*.’

These large animals are here spoken of allegorically, to denote, some great potentates, the enemies and persecutors of the people of God; for it cannot reasonably be supposed, that they are literally the subject of prophecy. In this sense, the leviathan and the dragon may denote, those powerful cruel princes and monarchs, who, actuated by pride, avarice, and envy, inflamed with hatred and rage against true religion, and its inoffensive unarmed confessors, thirsted for their blood, and inhumanly devoured them, as wild beasts do their prey. These are the crocodiles, the serpents, and the dragons, which God threatens severely to punish. In prophetic style, they are often mentioned by the names of ferocious animals: thus Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is prophesied of by Ezekiel, as the great dragon, that lieth in the midst of the rivers †. In like manner, the prophet Jeremiah introduces the church, complaining in these words: ‘Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, hath devoured me—he hath swallowed me like a dragon ‡.’ The import then of this prophecy will be, that, at the time referred to, the Lord, by means of strong and irresistible judgments, would destroy those great monarchs, who were the fierce relentless persecutors of his people. The sword of the Lord, in the prophetic scriptures, denotes, those violent divine judgments which proceed immediately from his power and righteousness, and carry along with them inevitable destruction. ‘Deliver me, O Lord (said David, king of Israel), from the wicked, which are thy sword,’ by whom thou punishest transgressors. This

* Job xli. 34.

† Ezek. xxix. 3.

‡ Jer. li. 34.

sword is called a fore, a great and strong sword, to intimate, the very afflictive and irresistible judgments which were thereby to be inflicted, and their power to kill and destroy those on whom they were executed.

Various have been the opinions of learned men, as to the kingdoms and powers which are especially intended in this prophecy. To me, the exposition of the learned Vitringa seems to be best founded, nearest the truth, and most consistent with the scope of the prophet. He says, that by the two leviathans, are to be understood, the kingdoms of Egypt and Assyria; and by the dragon in the midst of the sea, is meant, the king of Arabia, including the neighbouring nations, such as the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Idumeans, and Tyrians, who were inimical to the people of God under the Old Testament. These hostile powers to the kingdom of God, were severely punished by Jehovah, when he came forth to execute righteous vengeance upon the malicious adversaries of his people. They were, however, followed by others, who, in some respects, resembled the creatures here specified, and who in latter times have harassed and persecuted the church. In this view, by leviathan the piercing or straight serpent, may be meant, those persecutors of the disciples of Jesus Christ, who, without any specious pretexts, have greatly injured and afflicted them: such were some of the Roman emperors. By leviathan the crooked serpent, may be signified, those malicious opposers of the church, who, under some feigned appearance, by various stratagems, have discovered the strongest enmity against their safety and happiness. By the dragon in the midst of the sea, may be intended, mystical Babylon; Rome, called Christian, after it became corrupt in doctrine and practice, comprehending all those powers which shed the blood of the saints of the Most High. According to this interpretation, all these implacable adversaries of the church of God shall,

shall, at the time referred to, be punished and slain. From all which we conclude, that this prophecy hath, in some measure, been already fulfilled; and that it shall be farther accomplished in times yet future. As Jehovah hath declared, he will certainly avenge the wrongs done to his people. Kings and princes, however great and powerful, who have molested and injured them, he will punish. Though vengeance may seem to his servants to be long delayed, yet their cries shall be heard, and in due time he will recompense their adversaries: he will make inquisition for blood, and publicly revenge the blood of his servants which hath been shed*.

2 In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine.

Our prophet now proceeds to represent the establishment and felicity of the church, under the constant care and protection of God, after having been purified in the furnace of affliction. At the period wherein God was to inflict deserved punishment upon the powerful malicious persecutors of his people, they are invited to sing to one another, celebrating the safety and happiness of those who have God for their defence. In this pleasant exercise, they were directed to express their joy in the divine administration; to cheer the hearts of their brethren, which had been greatly depressed by manifold discouragements, afflictions, and sorrows; and to animate them to rejoice in the Lord, and his abundant mercy. When discoursing from the fifth chapter of this prophecy, I treated of the beautiful figure here used, by which the people of God are represented as a vineyard: at present, I shall not recapitulate what was then said on this subject. With great propriety and elegance, the church is called, A vineyard of red wine; *i. e.* of vines

* Psal. lxxix. 10.

bearing grapes, that yielded red wine, which, in the land of Canaan, was celebrated as the strongest and most excellent, and much preferable to white wine. Hence Moses, when reminding the Israelites of the kindness of God, in granting them the possession of that rich country, takes notice of this circumstance, among others, that ‘they drank the pure blood of the ‘grape*.’ The church of God, though internally excellent, and bearing much fruit, acceptable to God, and useful to men, yet, like vines, their external appearance is often mean, having in it little to attract admiration. Notwithstanding, from faith unfeigned, and love without dissimulation, they pour out supplications unto God, which ascend as incense before his throne. By the acknowledgment of the truth which is according to godliness, and the practice of all the Christian virtues, they glorify their heavenly Father, and prove highly beneficial to society. Like a vineyard of red wine, which was a source of opulence, as well as pleasure, to its proprietor, the church is the inheritance, the portion, the peculiar treasure of Jehovah, which yields him the fruits of praise, honour, and glory, and in which he delights to dwell.

3 I the LORD do keep it, I will water it every moment; lest *any* hurt it, I will keep it night and day.

Jehovah is next introduced, expressing his admirable care, and vigilant attention, to the interests of his people, who were spoken of, in the preceding verse, under the beautiful figure of a vineyard. He solemnly declares his tender sollicitude for their welfare, and gives the most explicit reviving assurance, that he will always do every thing necessary for their safety and happiness; and that he might give the greater weight to what he says, he seems to glory in

* Deut. xxxii. 14,

his connection with them. The Lord God hath a vineyard upon the earth, of which he is the sole proprietor, and constant keeper. He is the Husbandman, as Jesus Christ affirms, in the parable concerning the vine; the Shepherd and Bishop of his church, toward which, he, in every respect, performs all those acts of kindness that circumstances require.—*I the Lord do keep it.* I the Lord of heaven and earth, of angels and men, with unremitting attention, observe what passes within it, and what is done against it. All its interests are continually under my peculiar direction and management. I preserve it in order, allowing it to want for nothing that is necessary to promote either its beauty or fruitfulness. I protect it from the many enemies that would injure and lay it waste. I keep it, lest any hurt it, through malice or carelessness, either of fixed purpose, or by rash precipitancy. It hath many powerful adversaries, who are hostile to its best interests, and who unite their efforts to destroy or burn it up with fire: but the gates of hell, and the powers on earth, shall never be able to prevail against it. I the Lord God Almighty do keep my church, composed of all those who are written in the book of life. By my providence and grace, I fortify them against the attacks of their foes, I preserve them in safety amidst every danger, I deliver them from every impurity, and I enrich them with every blessing. Neither temptations nor offences, afflictions nor persecutions, shall essentially injure them: the violence of enemies shall be repressed, and their malevolent assaults converted into real benefits. The Lord will be a wall of fire round about his people, and the glory in the midst of them: he will keep them as in a garrison, yea, as the apple of his eye; and therefore they ought constantly to rely on his gracious protection.—This vigilance and care of Jehovah over his church is unremitting.

Night and day, comprise in them every imaginable space of time. The expression plainly imports, the
uninterrupted

uninterrupted continuance, and everlasting perpetuity, of this inestimable privilege, and that the people of God are under his divine protection at all seasons. The enemies of the vineyard of the Lord of hosts, are restless and unwearied in their attempts to hurt and destroy it: but he who keeps it, neither slumbers nor sleeps, as it is written in Psa. cxxi. ‘The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade on thy right hand. ‘The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon ‘by night.’ It is not so difficult to keep a vineyard by day, when the light shines, that discovers every danger, as to watch it by night, when the darkness prevents from seeing those who might injure it. But to the Keeper of Israel, the darkness and the light are both alike: the darkness hideth not from him; but the night shineth as the day. He watches over his people, not only in the serene and clear day of prosperity, and preserves them from falling a prey to those temptations which, in such seasons, are peculiarly dangerous; but, in the dark and stormy night of affliction and persecution, he preserves them from surrounding evils, and secures all their best interests. He delivers them from the pestilence that walketh in darkness, as well as from the destruction that wasteth at noon-day.—When we consider aright our own weakness, and the many subtle and powerful enemies with which we are environed, we may justly be overwhelmed with dismaying fears. But when we look up to those hills from whence our aid doth come, and behold that omnipotent arm which guards us, and forms around us an invincible defence, which gives safety and stability in the most perilous circumstances, we have good cause to triumph in that almighty power and grace which continually upholds us—especially as it is added,

I will water it every moment. These words clearly relate to the plentiful and continual communication of the gifts and graces of the holy Spirit unto the church. This promised effusion is no less necessary

to the prosperity and fruitfulness of the church, than rain from heaven is to the fertility of the earth. By this means, faith and hope, humility and love, piety and purity, with every other grace, are conveyed, cherished, and strengthened; the saints are conducted to the knowledge of God's ways; and the means of salvation are rendered effectual for promoting the purposes of their institution. From the regular and abundant supply of the Spirit of God, of which the vineyard of Jehovah is assured, arises spiritual growth, fruitfulness, and perseverance. By this inestimable benefit, they grow up in all things to Christ, who is the Head: having nourishment ministered, and being knit together, as the apostle Paul speaks, they increase with the increase of God. Through its benign influence accompanying the ministration of the word and ordinances of God, the number of the faithful is increased; their graces and virtues are exercised and improved. Indeed, this salutary blessing is absolutely necessary to the existence and comfort of the church, and of every individual, in his spiritual capacity, belonging to this highly favoured society. Deprived of this important blessing, they would become like the barren wilderness, and the heath in the desert. Accommodating himself therefore to the necessities of his church, the Lord promiseth, I will water it every moment. With unremitting attention, he seasonably pours forth fresh supplies of his quickening Spirit upon his servants, whereby he renders them like trees planted by rivers of water, that bring forth their fruit in season. By these reviving communications, he heals their backslidings, he enlivens their languid graces, he repairs their decayed strength, he recovers them from their spiritual maladies, and makes them fruitful in every good work.—We plead thy promise, O Lord! We beseech thee do as thou hast said: ‘ Pour out water upon him that is thirsty, and ‘ floods upon the dry ground: pour thy Spirit upon ‘ our children, and thy blessing upon our offspring.

‘ And

‘ And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses.’

4 Fury is not in me: who would set the briars *and* thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.

The Lord here proclaims his own amiable character; and represents, in strong terms, the extreme folly and danger of forming any opposition to the execution of his purposes.—Fury in man, is anger raised to the highest pitch, when the mind is filled with indignation and keen resentment. Of this passion, may be affirmed what Solomon saith of jealousy, ‘ It is the rage of a man;’ who, when under its influence, will not spare to take vengeance on those with whom he is offended. This remark we see exemplified in Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who, when informed of the determined resolution of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, not to obey his orders, was filled with fury, and commanded them to be cast into the fiery furnace, after it was heated seven times. In strict propriety of speech, fury is not in God: it is not in him, as in men, a turbulent uneasy passion, that deprives of sacred tranquillity and self-enjoyment; nor is it manifested by such improper effects as arise too frequently from the highest human displeasure. It is not in him, toward his people, to whom he is always well affected; and when he sees necessary to correct them severely for their faults, this doth not proceed so much from wrath, as from real regard to their welfare. Such dispensations which are designed to give a more full display of the divine glory than could otherwise be enjoyed, are to be traced to other and higher causes than anger or vengeance. True indeed, fury is, in some passages of scripture, ascribed to God. ‘ The Lord (saith the prophet Nahum) is jealous: the Lord revengeth, and is furious: the Lord will take vengeance on his

‘ his adversaries ; and he reserveth wrath for his enemies *.’ Such expressions are used, in condescension to human weakness, to assist our feeble apprehensions ; and must always be understood in a manner consistent with the infinite perfections of Jehovah. Fury attributed to him, denotes no more than his just hatred and indignation against sin, and his determined purpose to shew his resentment by the execution of righteous judgment. If, upon any occasion, his anger is kindled, and burneth like fury, it is not against his church, but against persons of a very different description from them.

Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? The briers and thorns, which are not here literally to be understood, may denote, hypocritical and evil men, profane sinners, who walk in the ways of their own hearts, and mock at sacred things. People of these characters are justly represented by this metaphor, because they are barren and unprofitable, hurtful and troublesome : they are apt to over-run the vineyard of the church, to injure its fertility, and at last they will prove proper fuel for the fire of God’s anger. Under this emblem, they are often mentioned in scripture. ‘ The best of them (saith God, by the prophet Micah) is as a brier : the most upright is sharper than a thorn †.’—Now the Lord inquires, *Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle?* Who that is not destitute of understanding, and altogether infatuated, would act so presumptuously and foolishly ? Words and comparisons are insufficiently to represent the unreasonableness and malignity of such conduct, which is more absurd than any thing that we can imagine. Who would set briers and thorns in opposition to God, who is a consuming ‘ fire?—*I would go through them, I would burn them together,* even as the flame devours the combustible materials that are laid in its way. Though fury is

* Nahum i. 2.

† Micah vii. 4.

not in God, with respect to his peculiar people, whom he considers as his vineyard, and toward whom he entertains a kind affection; yet his wrath is kindled against hypocritical profane transgressors, who set themselves in opposition to him, and who, unless they repent, and take hold of his strength, shall be cast into unquenchable fire. ‘The wicked (saith God, by the prophet David) shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God*.’ If those who are vexatious and troublesome to the vineyard of Jehovah, shall presume to contend with him, he can as easily and suddenly consume them, as the fire burns the briers and the thorns.—How insignificant and vain is all the opposition which sinners can possibly make to the mighty God! The weakness of God is stronger than man. The apostle Paul represses the foolish presumption of obstinate transgressors by this pointed interrogatory, which persons of this sort would do well to consider: ‘Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he†.’ Are you able to contend with the Almighty, who can crush you as a moth, who can break you in pieces as a potter’s vessel, who can consume you as the fire doth briers and thorns?

5 Or let him take hold of my strength, *that* he may make peace with me, *and* he shall make peace with me.

These words point out the only way whereby sinners, who have opposed God, may attain peace and reconciliation with him.—Some learned commentators have observed, that the Hebrew word here rendered *or*, signifies also *unless*, which seems to be the preferable translation in this verse. What is meant by the strength of Jehovah? and what, by taking hold of it? The strength of the Lord is his almighty power, for which nothing is impossible. It is that

* Psal. ix. 17.

† 1 Cor. x. 22.

divine attribute (yea, the excellency of all the divine perfections) whereby God saveth perishing transgressors, who have recourse to him, by faith in his power and grace, and by earnest supplication. It is that omnipotent strength, whereby he grants them remission of sins, delivers them from the bondage of corruption, sanctifies, and furnishes them with all might in the inner man; whereby he defends them from the power of their enemies, gives them victory over death, and exalts them to glory, honour, and immortality. Upon this all-sufficient strength, rests the faith and hope of sinners, ready to perish under the accumulated guilt that they have contracted. Of all the glorious perfections of Jehovah, this strength is the most amiable, and most celebrated in scripture, as the sure foundation on which humble convinced sinners build their hopes of deliverance. Such are the sentiments expressed by the sacred writers on this interesting subject: ‘In the Lord have I righteousness and strength*.’ In God is my salvation, and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God†. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee: in whose heart are the ways of them ‡,’ who have not lifted up their soul unto vanity, who depend not on their own righteousness and strength, and are heartily willing to accept of salvation from God as his free gift. This almighty strength the saints, of every age, have highly extolled, and exulted in the thoughts of its being employed for their benefit. ‘The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I will trust||.’ And from the comfortable experience they have had of its divine efficacy for the most important purposes, they excite others to aspire after this precious blessing. ‘Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face for ever more.’

* Isaiah xlv. 24.
|| Psal. xviii. 2.

† Psal. lxii. 7.

‡ Psal. lxxxiv. 5.

This last quotation directs to the improvement you ought to make of this article.

Let us next consider, what is meant by taking hold of this strength. This expression probably alludes to an ancient custom among the Hebrews. When any person was sensible that he had forfeited his life by some enormous transgression, he went and laid hold on the horns of the altar, where he reckoned himself safe. Two remarkable instances of this sort occur in the Old-Testament history: the one, respecting Joab, and the other, Adonijah; of which we read in 1 Kings i. 50. and in chap. xi. 28. In reference to this practice, the Lord saith, in the words before us, Let him that wisheth to make peace with me, lay hold of my strength. Jesus Christ, the great Messiah, is emphatically styled, the power of God; the altar to which sinners, convinced of the folly and danger of acting in opposition to the Most High, ought to flee, in the exercise of lively faith and true penitence, and lay hold of this all-sufficient Saviour, as the only hope set before us. Upon this almighty Redeemer, concerning whom the prophet Micah foretold, 'that he should feed his people in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of his God,' we must entirely depend, for reconciliation with our offended Sovereign, for eternal redemption, and every needful blessing. Humbly abasing ourselves in his presence, on account of our transgressions, we must wrestle with him, as did Jacob, refusing to let him go, until he bless us with strength. Like Moses, when pleading for pardon to Israel, we should beseech him, to let his power be great, according as he hath spoken; and, with the apostle Paul, to follow after, that we may apprehend that for which also we are apprehended of Christ Jesus. This is the way to get his strength perfected in our weakness, to be strengthened with all might by his glorious power, and to receive all those supplies of grace that our necessities may require.—Do you then, my friends, take hold of
God's

God's strength: firmly depend upon his glorious all-sufficiency, who is able to do for you above what you can ask or think: have continual recourse to his fulness, for relief in all your necessities; and humbly relying on his power, endeavour to the utmost to serve and obey him.

That he may make peace with me. Whilst men continue at variance with God, and act in opposition to him, all his attributes are in hostility against them, and threaten with irremediable destruction. How deplorable their condition, who are continually exposed to the wrath of almighty God; and who, wherever they go, are still within the reach of his vengeance, which may seize upon them every moment! How solicitous then ought we to be, to make peace with God, by taking hold of his strength, that we may have him for our faithful Friend, our sun, our shield, and exceeding great reward! How desirable, how comfortable, to have his glorious perfections employed for our benefit, to have his kind providence to protect and bless us, to have interest in all his precious promises, to have his Spirit to sanctify and comfort us, and to be interested, through the great Redeemer, in all the blessings of the covenant of peace! Happy they who are in such a case as this! This sacred peace with God is a source of never-failing consolation and joy; for when once established, however forlorn our external circumstances, we have access to our best Friend, and are admitted to delightful communion with him. This inestimable benefit was procured by Jesus Christ, who made peace by the blood of his cross, and conveys it in the most endearing manner. Such is its divine influence, that it rules in the heart, it tranquillizes the mind, it composes the passions, and diffuses a sweet serenity through the whole soul. Being founded on the promise, the oath, and covenant of God, and acquired by the life and death, the resurrection and intercession of his own Son, it is permanent and satisfying. When
therefore

therefore the Son of God was going to leave his disciples, and give them his parting blessing, which included all the happiness his liberal heart could devise, he thus expressed himself: ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you*.’

And he shall make peace with me. These words give comfortable assurance of the happy success that shall accompany the means which God hath prescribed, in order to making peace with him. By taking hold of God’s strength, those convictions which were felt by the mind, when awakened to a proper sense of sin, shall be removed; the disquietude arising from an evil conscience shall be pacified; the wounds made by sin shall be healed; former hostilities shall be laid aside; and the alarms excited in the suspicious breast shall no more be heard. The joyful tidings of reconciliation shall be listened to with pleasure and admiration. ‘I am pacified toward you, saith the Lord—mine anger is turned away—your iniquities are pardoned—I will not execute upon you the fierceness of my wrath.’ The glad news are received with humble gratitude, that a perfect sacrifice hath been offered to expiate the guilt of transgression, that a complete ransom is found sufficient to obtain the deliverance of captives, that a fountain is opened which cleanseth from all impurity, and that sufficient provision is made for restoring peace between an offended God, and those who were at variance with him. The blood of Christ being sprinkled upon the heart by the Holy Ghost, in the language of an inspired writer, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we receive the atonement. Thus are we furnished with a satisfying reply to every difficulty that can be started on this subject, and with the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I shall give it you in the emphatical words of

* John xiv. 27.

the apostle Paul: 'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us *.'—Sensible of the evil of your former ways, and the danger to which you are thereby exposed, throw down, with noble disdain, the weapons of rebellion, whereby you have acted in hostility against him. Prostrate yourself in his gracious presence, and, with real penitence, acknowledge your transgressions. Humble yourself in his sight, and earnestly implore his mercy, through the mediation of his Son, that, being reconciled unto him, you may live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you. If any of you think that I have treated this verse too much in the language of the New Testament, and not in a manner suited to the more obscure views of the church under the former dispensation, I shall only say, that the way of peace being now more clearly revealed than it then was, I judged that I should have been culpable, had I not availed myself of the light thrown upon this important subject by the new and better Testament.

6 He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit.

The enlargement and fruitfulness of the church of God, after having been delivered from afflictions and persecutions, are here foretold in beautiful figurative language. If fury is not in God, with respect to his church; if he hath no other view in afflicting his people, than to promote their real benefit, and to separate from them hypocritical professors and profane sinners; then, after these purposes are attained, the church must shine forth with much additional light and purity. This important event is predicted in the

* Rom. viii. 34.

verse now before us.—The persons to whom this prophècy relates, are those that come of Jacob and Israel, not only the lineal descendants, the natural posterity of that renowned patriarch, but especially his spiritual offspring, who resemble him in integrity of heart, in importunity in prayer, and simplicity of manners.—Them the Lord

Shall cause to take root. There is an obvious allusion, in these words, to the figurative description that is sometimes given in scripture of the godly, who are compared to fruit-bearing trees. As trees must take fast hold of the earth in which they are planted, before they blossom and bear fruit, so Israel must cast forth their roots as Lebanon, be rooted and grounded in love, and established by grace, that they may become fruitful in holiness and righteousness. To this steadfastness in the faith, the prediction before us plainly refers.—After which it is foretold, *Israel shall blossom and bud.* They shall assume the most promising and flourishing appearances, portending the abundance of good fruits which they were to yield in due season.—Accordingly, it is immediately added, *And fill the face of the world with fruit.* The fruits which they were to produce, are in scripture denominated, in reference to the secret cause from which they proceed, ‘the fruits of the Spirit*.’ In respect to the substantial matter whereof they are composed, they are called, the ‘fruits of holiness and righteousness †.’ In allusion to the peculiar character of those who bear them to perfection, they are said to be ‘fruits meet for repentance ‡.’ ‘The root of the righteous (saith Solomon) yieldeth fruit ||.’ The first fruits of their hearts, are good thoughts, which ripen into actions; and therefore David, king of Israel, thus speaks: ‘How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!’ The thoughts that

* Gal. v. 22.

† Phil. i. 11.

‡ Matth iii. 8.

|| Prov. xii. 12.

I have of thee, O Lord, are exceeding precious unto me, and I have more of them than I am able to recount. Good thoughts are always accompanied with good affections; such as, love and delight, hope and joy: both issue in holy resolutions, and useful conversation, which tend to edification and comfort: these are ever productive of good works, of holiness toward God, of righteousness and charity toward men. Such are the amiable fruits wherewith Israel shall fill the face of the world. So numerous and fragrant were they to be, that, through the blessing of God, who giveth the increase, they should extend their benign influence, and salutary effects, over all the earth.—The fact hath already, in some measure, corresponded with the prediction. About the time of the Maccabees, the natural posterity of Jacob were greatly increased, and spread themselves over the world, with the fruits of their religion. At the memorable æra of the Reformation, the church of God, being delivered from affliction and persecution, in a short time, extended its boundaries to many kingdoms and states, and filled the world with excellent fruits: and, in periods yet future, we trust it shall receive its full completion, when the church, being again purified by affliction, shall shine forth in the beauties of holiness.—I beseech you then, brethren, to walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work. Walk worthy of God, by cultivating a growing acquaintance with him, by endeavouring a progressive conformity to his holy will, and by cherishing increasing desires after the full enjoyment of him. Make it your chief business in all things to please him, to act for his glory, and to obtain his approbation. Study to be fruitful in works of piety toward God, and in works of mercy toward men, that others, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven.

7 ¶ Hath he smitten him, as he smote those that smote him? *or* is he slain according to the slaughter of *them that are* slain by him?

The equity of the divine procedure is here vindicated, by a comparison, instituted between the severe punishment inflicted upon the enemies of the people of God, and the moderated afflictions wherewith the church had been visited.—The person introduced, as having smitten and slain, is Jehovah, who punished leviathan, and who keeps his vineyard. The people whom he smote with moderation, were Jacob and Israel, whom he causeth to take root, and to fill the world with fruit. The other persons spoken of, are the briers and thorns, who wounded and injured the servants of the Most High. The prophet inquires, if God hath smitten Israel, as he smote their persecutors. The question hath evidently the force of a strong negation, as questions of this sort frequently have in scripture. The words, divested of their interrogatory form, plainly denote what they are intended to express; namely, that God hath not smitten and slain his people, as he hath done their wicked enemies. Both the righteous and the wicked, in the all-wise and just providence of God, are subjected to afflictions and death: no exemptions are made by him who correcteth the nations, and hath appointed for all men once to die. Notwithstanding, God doth not smite and slay the righteous, as he doth their malicious adversaries and cruel persecutors; such as the Assyrians and Syrians were in ancient times. Them he smote and slew in his hot displeasure, with just indignation against their enormous crimes, until they were entirely overthrown; a judgment this, which the servants of God deprecate, as the greatest evil that can befall them. His people he afflicts in mercy, loving-kindness, and faithfulness, with the view of promoting their spiritual advantage; and though he slay them, they are encouraged to trust in his wisdom,
love,

love, power, and veracity. The punishments inflicted upon the wicked, are the just recompense of their iniquities, whereby the Almighty displays his consummate righteousness and awful vengeance. The afflictions wherewith the people of God are tried, are designed to accomplish the most salutary purposes, to purify them from corruption, to detach them from this present evil world, to imbitter sin, and to prepare them for another and happier state than this. The calamities sent upon the wicked, are intended to demonstrate the righteousness of the Lord, to give alarming examples of his dreadful displeasure against sin, and to rid his church of their implacable enemies.—By this verse, we are reminded of the reciprocal opposition that never fails to discover itself, subsisting between the Israel of God, and those who rise up against them. The difference of their character and conduct, and of God's dispensations toward them, is uniformly conspicuous in every age. 'An unjust man (saith the proverb) is an abomination to the just—And he that is upright in his way, 'is abomination to the wicked.' In consequence of this contrariety, the wicked plotteth against the just, and smiteth them; and the righteous Lord, who hateth iniquity, and avengeth the injuries done to his servants, smiteth them much more severely than he doth his peculiar people.

8 In measure when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it; he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east-wind.

Our prophet declares in these words, that God will be graciously pleased to mitigate the afflictions with which he visiteth his people, and to proportion them to their particular circumstances.—A person chastizes or punishes in measure, when the chastisement or punishment is exactly suited to the demerit of the transgression, or the enormity of the crime committed.

ted. He is also said to punish in measure, when the correction administered is greatly moderated, and less than the offence hath merited. Even when God seems to punish men with the greatest severity, he proceeds according to the strictest justice; but when he chastizes his people, the correction he administers is always less than their iniquities deserve. This is the doctrine uniformly established in scripture, as may be evident from the following expressions, taken from among many that might have been adduced on this subject: ‘He will not contend for ever, neither will he be always wroth*. In the midst of deserved wrath, he remembers mercy. I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished †.’ — *When it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it.* If transgression, which is the source of every calamity, be intended by that which shooteth forth, the expression may import, that, when the people of God proceed to trespass against him, and their corruptions begin to shew themselves, he will give an early and seasonable check to their progress, and prevent them from growing to any great height. If affliction, which is the just consequence of sin, be meant, the words may denote, as the marginal translation seems to intimate, that, when God is about to send afflictions upon his people, he will attentively consider what kind, and what measure, is best adapted to accomplish the end he hath in view; and exactly proportion them to their circumstances, and the salutary purposes he intends to promote. He will not dispense to them one grain of more trouble than his consummate wisdom sees proper for their benefit, nor suffer them to be tempted above what they are able to bear; but with the trial, he will open a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it.

He stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east-wind. From whatever natural causes the wind arises, it may justly be considered as one of the wonderful

* Isaiah lvii. 16.

† Jer. xxx. 11.

works of God, who bringeth it forth out of his treasures. In the language of scripture, he is said to have created, to have prepared, to have commanded it, to execute divers purposes. He appointeth the particular seasons in which it shall blow, the places in which it shall arise, the direction it shall take, and the effects it shall produce. Two sorts of winds are here mentioned, the rough and the east wind; both of which, I suppose, must be understood, not in the literal, but in the figurative sense, denoting afflictions, which, like the wind, are entirely at the divine disposal, are strong, violent, and troublesome, though, at the same time, they are useful and salutary. Some afflictions resemble rough and boisterous winds, that are awful and terrible; others are like the east-wind, sharp, penetrating, and withering. Now the prophet here declares, that God will in mercy stay the one, when the other arises. Such is his tender compassion displayed in his dispensations toward his people, that, when he visits them with sharp afflictions, he will graciously restrain those violent distresses which might precipitate them into the depths of irremediable calamities. God deals gently and kindly with his peculiar people at all times, especially in troublous days. Even when they commit iniquity, he chastens them only with the rod of man: the Hebrew word signifies, of a frail and feeble man, who doth not give a very hard stroke.—When we accurately trace the divine procedure toward the church, especially in times of distress and calamity, we cannot fail to observe the accomplishment of this prophecy, which hath been verified in a thousand instances, and been gratefully acknowledged to the praise of divine grace. Sensible of the divine goodness expressed in this declaration, let us unite our requests to God, in the words of the prophet Jeremiah: ‘O Lord, correct us, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring us to nothing*.’

* Jer. x. 24.

9 By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this *is* all the fruit to take away his sin; when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalk-stones *that are* beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up.

These words explicitly declare, that the afflictions wherewith the church were to be visited, should prove the happy means of delivering them from idolatry, superstition, and hypocrisy; and of restoring them to purity in doctrine, worship, and practice. This verse is connected with the preceding, by the word *therefore*, intimating, that the effects here mentioned, are such as may be expected to follow from what was there said. Since the all-wise God graciously attends to every circumstance relative to his people, and is pleased to proportion and mitigate their afflictions, they must be accompanied with the most salutary effects.—*By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged.* By means of the ills and calamities of life wherewith the posterity of Jacob are visited, their iniquity shall be purged. In scripture-language, purging of iniquity sometimes denotes, the taking away the guilt which hath been thereby contracted; the dissolving the obligation to suffer punishment, by forgiving the trespass. In this sense, the expression is to be understood in that awful declaration made to Eli the priest, ‘That the iniquity of his house shall not be purged with sacrifice, nor offering for ever*’; *i. e.* the guilt contracted by his family, was not to be removed by those means which were instituted for obtaining the pardon of sin. According to this interpretation, the words before us import, that the people of God, by means of afflictions, are purified from iniquity. Seasons of distress are especially appropriated to seek the Lord: affliction excites them earnestly to implore, that he would forgive their sins, and take away their

* 1 Sam. iii. 14.

guilt, in virtue of the great propitiatory sacrifice which he himself hath set forth; that he would restore them to a comfortable sense of his pardoning mercy, and the inestimable benefits connected with it. In times of trouble, when God is thus sought, he often manifests himself favourable and propitious; and conveys to his afflicted servants, the renewed pardon of their sins, with a reviving sense of his favour and love.

And this is all the fruit to take away his sin. The effects intended to be produced, by the afflictive dispensations wherewith God visits his people, are, depriving sin of its power over them, and vanquishing those evil habits that they have contracted. 'Though afflictions for the present are not joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness, to them who are exercised thereby*.' The inspired writer, whose words I have now quoted, that he might give the children of God a just sense of the utility of divine chastisements, puts as it were into the one scale, the uneasiness with which they are accompanied, and into the other, he places the good which they tend to promote; and, weighing them in a just balance, he shews, that the latter evidently preponderate the former. Afflictions to the people of God, are a bitter, but often a wholesome medicine, attended with salutary effects. When blessed and sanctified of God, they not only induce them to beg of God the forgiveness of sins, but they serve to shew them the vanity of the world, the uncertainty of its enjoyments, the deceitfulness of its pleasures, and the precariousness of its riches and honours. They remove those false colours with which sin was covered; they awaken the conscience to feel the power of divine truths; they take off the heart from confidence in the creature; they make sensible of the dreadful desert of transgression, and shew what an evil and bitter thing it is to

* Heb. xii. 11.

depart from the Lord our God. Sanctified afflictions tend likewise to humble the pride of the human heart, to discover the folly of carnal confidence, to mortify sin, to mould into filial subjection to the Father of spirits, to exercise and improve every divine grace, such as patience, submission, resignation, and heavenly mindedness. The design of God then, in bringing his servants into distressed circumstances, is not to hurt, but to do them good; not to destroy, but to purify them from corruption. Let the consideration of these gracious ends which God hath in view to accomplish, by the evils that we suffer, engage us to bear them patiently, and to improve them faithfully for our spiritual and eternal benefit: and let us frequently recollect, if these precious fruits have been produced in us, by means of the afflictions with which we have been visited.

When he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalk-stones that are beaten in sunder, &c. There seems to be an allusion, in these words, to the express command which God gave to Israel of old, ‘to destroy
‘ all the places which the nations whom they expelled
‘ had consecrated to idolatry and superstition, to over-
‘ throw their altars, to break down their pillars, to
‘ burn their groves with fire, to hew down the graven
‘ images of their gods, and to destroy their names
‘ out of the land*.’ So completely were they required to abolish the monuments and instruments of idolatry and superstition, that they beat them to powder like soft chalk-stones, and then threw the dust into some river, that the least vestige of them might not be found. In this manner, Moses destroyed the golden calf that the Israelites worshipped †; and thus Hezekiah put an end to the brazen serpent, to which they did burn incense ‡. The punctual execution of the order above mentioned, would be reckoned a proof of their obedience to the divine authority, and

* Deut. xii. 3. † Exod. xxxii. 20. ‡ 2 Kings xviii. 4.

their indignation against idolatry. The time wherein God would take away the iniquity of Jacob is thus described, when he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalk-stones; when the altars, that had been erected for the purposes of sacrificing unto idols, and of performing thereon prohibited superstitious worship, shall be broken down, the stones of which they were built shall be beaten to powder like chalk-stones, and thrown with detestation into the water, that they may never more be used in any work.—*The groves and images shall not stand up*; but be entirely overthrown, as a public testimony of their hatred of idolatrous and superstitious practices.—Such were the remarkable effects that followed the captivity at Babylon, that ever since that memorable period wherein the posterity of Israel were greatly afflicted, they have uniformly discovered as great an aversion to, as ever they had shewn a fondness for idolatry. This circumstance represents, in a striking light, what ought to be the effects of those afflictive dispensations of providence, that are accompanied with the happy fruits of taking away sin. They dispose the persons who experience them, to adopt, with a noble disdain, the language of Ephraim: ‘What have I any more to do with idols? We will say no more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee (the Lord our God) the fatherless findeth mercy*.’ We heartily renounce those lying vanities, which, in times past, we have followed, firmly determined, through thy grace, to testify the utmost abhorrence of our former iniquities, and to cleave unto thee with purpose of heart. Such are the prevailing sentiments of those who are purified from all iniquity unto God, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

10 Yet the defenced city *shall be desolate, and the habitation forsaken, and left like a wilder-*

* Hosea xiv. 3.

nefs: there fhall the calf feed, and there fhall he lie down, and confume the branches thereof.

Having mentioned the ftrong expreffions of deteftation againft idolatry, which were to be the effects of fanctified afflictions to the people of God, our prophet, as I fuppofe, proceeds to foretel the total defolation of that great city, which was the chief fupport of idolatry and fuperftition. The defenced city, of which he fpeaks, was probably no other than Babylon, which was always inimical to the people of God, the patron of idolatry, the mother of the abominations of the earth. The country around it, and its inhabitants, are thus defcribed by the prophet Jeremiah: ‘ It is a land of graven images, and they are ‘ mad upon their idols *.’ According to this fuppofition, the feveral parts of Ifaiah’s difcourfe are admirably connected; and the defign of it, which was to represent the awful judgments which were to be executed upon the enemies of the church, is fully answered.—The Jews, after their return from Babylon to their own land (groves and images being abolifhed, and that great city deftroyed), were no more to fall into idolatry, but to adhere clofely to the worfhip of the true God. The folitary and uninhabited condition of that powerful and populous city, is here exhibited in diverfe emphatical expreffions, which, when complexly confidered, depi&ct, in ftrong colours, the miserable ftate to which it was to be reduced.—*The defenced city fhall be defolate, entirely laid wafte and overthrown. And the habitation forfaken.* The magnificent palaces, and fplendid houfes, wherein the kings, the princes, and nobles refided, were to be buried in ruins. *And left like a wildernefs, lonely, and without inhabitant. There fhall the calf feed, and there fhall he lie down.* The place whereon the city ftood, was to be occupied by cattle, which were to

* Jer. l. 38.

graze there; and, ranging at full liberty, they would eat up and *consume the branches thereof*, which sprung from the trees and the willows, that grew by the river Euphrates. Having illustrated this subject at considerable length, when lecturing from chap. xiii. 19. and following verses, I only notice one other circumstance mentioned in the next verse.

11 When the boughs thereof are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come *and* set them on fire: for it *is* a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour.

The small branches and young twigs, that had become dry and withered, were to be broken off, and gathered by women for fuel, or set on fire in the open fields for various purposes. This, taken in connection with what was said in the former verse, plainly intimates, the complete desolation of the fenced city. Consider Babylon here, as in many prophecies where she is mentioned, as comprehending other cities and empires inimical to the church of God, addicted to idolatry and superstition, and in her destruction, behold their total subversion. And as the literal Babylon was a type and figure of mystical Babylon, in the desolation of the former, contemplate the image of the entire overthrow of the latter.

For it is a people of no understanding. These words suggest the reason why the preceding predicted judgments were to be inflicted. The men of Babylon were indeed a people of no understanding, in matters relative to true religion; which no man knoweth, but those to whom God hath revealed them by his Spirit. Though they were naturally intelligent and judicious, they were destitute of spiritual understanding; they had no knowledge of the infinite glory of
 Jehovah,

Jehovah, the perfection of his law, the purity of his worship, and the excellence of his salvation. They were not acquainted with their own best and eternal interests, nor did they pursue them by those means whereby they could be effectually promoted and secured. In this respect, notwithstanding all their high pretensions to wisdom and knowledge, they were perfectly on a level with the children of men; concerning whom God declares, ‘There is none that standeth, there is none that seeketh after God*.’ They were wise to do evil; but to do good, they had no knowledge. ‘They had become vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man †.’—On account of this gross insensibility, and base perversion of the benefits they enjoyed, it was foretold,

Therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, &c. God is the Maker of all men: his hands hath made and fashioned them: he curiously wrought them in the lower parts of the earth; and therefore he often acknowledges, that he stands connected with us in this intimate relation. As he made, so he also formed them into those several societies into which they are ranked. He forms them in their civil capacity, high and low, rich and poor, strong and weak, as seemeth good in his sight. Men should therefore reverence and honour their Maker: they ought to depend on him who formed them, for their preservation; they ought to obey his laws, and to submit to his appointment. Indeed, they must be void of understanding, who do not thus acknowledge their Maker, and by neglecting their duty toward him, forfeit his mercy and favour.—*Therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them.* Mankind, by transgression, have not only obscured their under-

* Rom. iii. 11.

† Rom. i. 21, 22, 23.

standings,

standings, and lost all claim to the divine favour, but they have also exposed themselves to present and future misery. This, in particular, was the case with the inhabitants of Babylon, who had become extremely impious and wicked. Now, when God hath mercy upon men, and sheweth them favour, he delivers them from deserved destruction, and gives them an understanding to know him. This favour, however, he declares, by our prophet, he would not confer upon the Babylonians. Jehovah is holy and righteous in all his ways. Possessed of sovereign right to dispense and withhold his mercy, a prerogative to which princes, to which indeed all men lay claim, he distributes his favours according to his good pleasure. ‘He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will, he hardeneth*.’ ‘What shall we say then, Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid †.’—I consider it not to be my business to start difficulties, and then to display ingenuity and learning in resolving them. This province, in my opinion, falls to the professor of divinity, and the critical writer, who are expected to be well-skilled in this art. A plain practical preacher wishes rather to instruct and edify his people, and thoroughly to furnish them for every good work, whereby they may adorn their profession, and glorify their heavenly Father, than, by nice discussion, to perplex their heads, and amuse their fancies. I will not therefore stay to state and solve a difficulty which this subject naturally suggests, to the solution of which, modesty, humility, and a sacred regard to the word of God, will contribute much more than a learned disquisition.

12 ¶ And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the LORD shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt, and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel.

* Rom. ix. 18.

† Ver. 14.

The Lord here promises to open the way for collecting his people, from their dispersions in different countries, that they might unite in his worship and service.—*And it shall come to pass in that day.* The expression, as I have often remarked, must be understood with considerable latitude, denoting, that, about the time, or soon after the preceding predictions were to be accomplished, the Lord, who is wise in heart, mighty in strength, and faithful to all his promises, *shall beat off from the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt.* The Hebrew word translated *beat off*, signifies such a beating as is given to the wheat, in order to separate it from the straw and the chaff; or such a beating, or striking, as is given to an olive or fig tree, to shake off the fruit that is upon it. In this last sense, it is used by Moses, in the law: ‘When thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the widow, and for the fatherless*.’ In allusion to this practice, the word is elegantly used in its metaphorical sense, to express some powerful act of Jehovah, whereby he was to shake the kingdoms, and to raise a violent concussion in the countries, situated between the rivers mentioned, where the Jews were dispersed; which should be the means of separating them from the people among whom they were scattered, of restoring them to liberty, and of collecting them into the body of the church. The Babylonians, Egyptians, and Syrians, were the nations which possessed the extensive tract of country which is thus described:

From the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt. The river here meant, is the Euphrates, which is repeatedly intended in this prophecy, where the river is mentioned without a name being given to it. By the stream or river of Egypt, is signified the Nile, the celebrated river that flows through that

* Deut. xxiv. 20.

country. These two remarkable rivers formed the boundaries of that extensive country, which God was about to shake, or beat, that he might collect together his dispersed people.—*And ye shall be gathered one by one, &c.* The prophet Jeremiah uses a similar expression, when speaking to the same people: ‘I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion*.’ The prophet Ezekiel also predicted the same great event: Therefore, Thus saith the Lord God, I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you from the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel †. Ye shall be gathered one by one, as the olives, which are shaken off the olive-tree, are gathered with great care, so that none of them may be left, or lost. This prophecy Isaiah addressed, not only to the posterity of Judah, but to all the tribes of Israel, that he might give them to understand, the paternal care of Jehovah over all the descendants of that renowned patriarch.—The Lord continually observeth his people, and taketh particular notice of them, wherever they are. Earthly parents, when their children are dispersed into different countries, cannot attend them, nor be acquainted with their several circumstances. It is not so with God, the Father of his people, whose eyes run to and fro throughout the earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of the upright in heart. His eyes are in every place, observing their particular conduct and condition, that he may strengthen, comfort, and do them good, as their necessities require. Though you may be in mean and destitute circumstances, he will graciously regard you: he will hear your prayer, and remember you for good; so that you shall have reason to say with David, ‘I was brought low, and he helped me ‡.’

13 And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall

* Jer. iii. 14.

† Ezek. xi. 17.

‡ Psal. cxvi. 6.

come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

These words describe the happy success of the means to be employed for gathering all God's elect, who were scattered abroad, that they might unite together in the solemn services of his worship.—*And it shall come to pass in that day*: after the foregoing predictions shall be fulfilled, when Israel shall have taken root, and blossomed, and filled the face of the world with fruit; and when, by means of afflictions, they shall have been purified from iniquity—*The great trumpet shall be blown*. This prophecy may perhaps allude to the following command, which the Lord gave to his servant Moses, recorded Numb. x. 2. 'Make thee two trumpets of silver; of an whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps.' From this statute for Israel, and this law of the God of Jacob, it appears, that the trumpets which God appointed his servant to make, were intended to convene the congregation of Israel, to solemnize the sacred festivals that they were required to observe unto the Lord: or rather, it may refer to the commencement of the year of jubilee, which was proclaimed throughout the land, by the sound of a trumpet; when servants were released, debts were cancelled, and possessions that had been sold, reverted to the tribes to whom they originally belonged. At the time to which our prophet looked forward, the great trumpet was to be blown: some remarkable signal should be given, for assembling the children of Israel, who were then to recover their liberty, and to return from their dispersions, to the land given to their fathers for inheritance; and to Jerusalem, that they might worship the Lord their God, according to his appointment.

And

And they shall come who were ready to perish, &c. These words represent the joyful consequences of the above proclamation. The miserable condition of the persons who were to take the benefit of it, is thus graphically described: *They were ready to perish.* To this deplorable state, the children of Israel were repeatedly reduced. When detained in hard bondage by the Egyptians, they were ready to die, through hard labour and ill treatment; and, therefore, with this acknowledgment began the humble confession, made at the offering of the first-fruits of their land: ‘A Syrian ready to perish was my father*.’ When in captivity at Babylon, their circumstances were little better. The king of Assyria ruled the nations in anger, and smote the people in wrath: with a continual stroke, he greatly oppressed those whom he conquered; especially the captives, whom he carried away into his own land. Under the power of this haughty monarch, and subject to his caprice, whose tender mercies were cruelty, through affliction and oppression, they were ready to perish.—Others of them *were outcasts in the land of Egypt.* Many of them had retired into Egypt, in times of danger: many had been carried thither, at different periods, by the Egyptians, and remained in the land; concerning whom the Lord thus spake, by the prophet Jeremiah: ‘They called thee an outcast †.’ In this manner were they treated, as a reproach, a proverb, a taunt, and a curse, in all places whither they went †.—From these distant countries, it is foretold, *they shall come.* The accomplishment of this prediction might seem to themselves, and to others, extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible. They lived in distant kingdoms, they were subject to powerful nations, they were employed in servile hard labour, and did they offer to depart out of those kingdoms which reaped the benefit of their work, the consequences to

* Deut. xxvi. 5. † Jer. xxx. 17. ‡ See Jer. xxiv. 9.

them might have proved fatal. Read the estimate which they themselves formed of their condition: ‘ Our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off for our parts *.’ Notwithstanding their despondency, their condition became hopeful, in consequence of such predictions as the following: ‘ Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel †.’ They shall come, and

Shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem. Worship sometimes denotes no more in scripture, than some particular acts of homage and reverence which are due to the Most High. In this restricted sense, the expression is used concerning Elkanah, who went up out of his city yearly, to worship, and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. Though sacrifices were anciently a part of divine worship, yet they are separately mentioned in the passage referred to. Sometimes it has a more extensive meaning, and includes the whole of that sacred service which men owe to their great Creator and Lord, as in Psal. xlv. where it is written: ‘ He is thy Lord, worship thou him.’ Fear and love, trust and obey him, in a manner suited to his infinite majesty and grandeur, his adorable condescension and grace, according to the rules that he hath prescribed in the ordinances which he hath instituted. In this large sense, worship must be understood in the prediction before us. Those who were outcasts, and ready to perish, were to come, according to this prophecy, and do homage unto Jehovah, by performing those acts of worship which he hath enjoined, and to which he hath annexed the promise of his gracious presence and favourable acceptance.—The place where this shall be done, is, *in the holy mount at Jerusalem*; which God was pleased to appropriate and set apart

* Ezek. xxxvii. 11.

† Ver. 12.

for the solemn services of his worship under the former dispensation, where he promised to meet with his people, and to command his blessing upon them. Many fine eulogiums are pronounced in scripture upon this highly favoured city Jerusalem. It is called, the city of the great King, the beloved city, the joy of the whole earth, the holy city, the city of the Lord, of which glorious things indeed were spoken. It was greatly exalted above all other cities, and distinguished by the most important privileges. Thither the tribes of the Lord were again to go up, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord.

Such seems to be the literal import of the remarkable prophecy contained in this verse, which was fulfilled by means of the royal proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he caused to be put in writing, and published throughout all his kingdom. See a copy of it in the book of Ezra, chap. i. 2, 3, 4. In consequence of this famous edict, a great company of above forty thousand of the posterity of Israel, who were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, returned from that country unto the land of their fathers, under the conduct of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel. These, doubtless, were joined by outcasts from the land of Egypt, who came to worship with them the Lord at Jerusalem.

The prediction however admits of another meaning, which is couched under the same terms. It may be interpreted so as to relate to another event, distant in time, and distinct in its nature; namely, the great accession to be made to the church of God, by the promulgation of the gospel under the New Testament. These different relations of prophecy are termed, the literal and mystical senses, which constitute one of the most difficult and important subjects of theology. In the prophetic scriptures, persons, places, things, times, and the like, sustain as it were a double character, the one proper, and the other allegorical;

allegorical; and these subjects are sometimes treated in such a manner, as to relate either to the one sense or the other singly, or to both united, as in the passage before us. Those wonderful deliverances which God foretold he was about to work for his people in times of old, exhibited instructive representations of the far more glorious salvation which he was to accomplish in after-times for his church. These events our prophet connects together; and, whilst he treats of the former, he gives plain intimations of the certain approach of the latter. Let us therefore shortly consider the mystical sense of the words, of which we have heard the literal meaning.

And it shall come to pass in that day, wherein the foregoing prophecies shall be fulfilled in their figurative signification, to the people of God under the New Testament—That the great trumpet shall be blown. The gospel of the Son of God shall be published throughout the world, which proclaims liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; which announces the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.—And they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt. In consequence of divine power accompanying the publication of these tidings of forgiveness, liberty, restoration, and eternal inheritance, multitudes scattered abroad, throughout kingdoms adverse to the interests of the church, who were outcasts from God, and exposed to everlasting perdition, leaving their wretched condition, shall return—And shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem. They shall serve with one consent the only living and true God, their Redeemer, righteousness, and strength; and join in celebrating his praises with his church, anciently prefigured by mount Zion. In this view also, the prediction hath had its accomplishment in an eminent degree, as we learn from

from the Acts of the Apostles, and other writings. Still we look forward with joy to its full completion, at the final manifestation of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, when all the elect of God shall be gathered together from the four winds of heaven, by the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God, that they may worship him that liveth for ever and ever, in the Jerusalem that is above. Amen, and amen.

PRELIMI.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

ACCORDING to the hypothesis which I have adopted, we now enter upon the second discourse, comprised in the third part of the prophecies of Isaiah. This long discourse is recorded in the six following chapters. Though it is not separated from the former by any mark of distinction, nor doth it bear any inscription, and though it hath some affinity to that which went before it, yet both its subject and form differ from the preceding. Great part of that which we last considered, was consolatory, intended to comfort the church, suffering for the sake of religion, with the hope of deliverance from powerful enemies, and the enjoyment of better times. The largest portion of that which we have now before us, is minatory, threatening with divine judgments the Ephraimites and the Jews, who were involved in gross errors and abominable vices; who corrupted divine truths, and depended more on human than divine assistance. Persons of this description, the prophet sharply reproveth for their crimes, and threatens with various severe calamities; whilst, from time to time, he takes occasion to console the minds of the godly, with many precious promises of those excellent benefits wherewith the church, under the Messiah, was to be enriched. This opinion seems to be confirmed by a circumstance worthy of notice; namely, that the several sections, or parts, of this large discourse begin with the word *wo*. See chap. xxviii. xxix. xxx. xxxi. and xxxiii. From the whole structure and subject of this variegated sermon, it seems to have been delivered prior to the memorable slaughter of the Assyrian army, which is foretold, chap. xxxi. 7, 8.; and followed by a very flourishing state of Hezekiah's kingdom, typical of the felicity of Messiah's reign. It was probably published about the time in which a solemn embassy was sent into Egypt, to

solicit the assistance of that kingdom against the Assyrians.—The discourse may be distributed into three distinct parts. The first is addressed to the Jews and Ephraimites, and is comprehended in chap. xxviii. The second is directed to the Jews who resided at Jerusalem, and is included in chap. xxix. The third is spoken to the people of both nations, who were looking for assistance from Egypt, and is recorded in chap. xxx. xxxi. xxxii. and xxxiii.

In the first section, replete with elegance and variety, contained in chap. xxviii. the Ephraimites, under the image of a drunken or sottish person, are severely reprov'd, and their approaching destruction is denounced, on account of their corrupt expositions of the doctrines concerning salvation, and the extreme folly of their infatuated public counsels, ver. 1.—4. Turning to the people of Judah, our prophet next foretels, their happy restoration to a flourishing condition under king Hezekiah, emblematical of the more glorious state to which the church was to be advanced in after-times, ver. 5, 6. He then proceeds to admonish the intemperate and profane, who derided God's method of instructing and warning them by the prophets, ver. 7.—14. After which, he pathetically addresses these wicked scoffers; and assures them, that there was no way but one whereby they could possibly escape threatened destruction, and that every other refuge would certainly fail in the day of visitation, ver. 15.—22. The chapter concludes with a beautiful defence of the divine procedure, in which the dispensations of providence are finely illustrated, by the various methods adopted by a prudent husbandman, in sowing several kinds of grain, in attending to soils and seasons, and in the different means he employs to separate the corn from the straw and the chaff, ver. 23.—29.

CHAP. XXVIII.

WO to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty *is* a fading flower, which *are* on the head of the fat valleys *of them that are* overcome with wine.

The discourse opens with a severe reprehension, administered in figurative terms to the Ephraimites; and with them, more indirectly to the Jews, who followed the same sinful practices.—By the crown of pride, whose glorious beauty is here spoken of, may be meant, the city of Samaria, which was built by Omri, the father of Ahab; and was beautifully situated on the top of a round hill, encircled with a rich valley, which was encompassed with hills. These circumstances suggested the idea of a crown or wreath of flowers, frequently worn by the Hebrews at banquets. Hence the metropolis of Ephraim had the name of the crown of pride, which was possessed of glorious beauty. About the time that this prophecy was delivered, it had begun to fade, and its destruction fast approached.—*The drunkards of Ephraim* are next mentioned. Before Samaria was taken by Shalmaneser, and the land of Israel was laid waste, the Ephraimites were probably very much addicted to the abominable vice of drunkenness, which is the fruitful source of many other crimes, and therefore most deservedly reprov'd by the prophets. On this account, Amos sharply reprimanded them in the following terms: ‘Wo to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria—that drink wine in bowls*.’ I suppose that the character includes, not only those who were addicted to intemperance, and befottered themselves by drinking to ex-

* Amos vi. 1. 6.

cess, but them also who were stupified by divine judgments, and so intoxicated by self-conceit, that, in the most critical circumstances, and weighty affairs, they formed the most absurd and foolish resolutions. Hence the same persons here spoken of, are thus described, chap. xxix. 9, 10. : ‘ They are drunken, but
 ‘ not with wine ; they stagger, but not with strong
 ‘ drink. For the Lord hath poured out upon you
 ‘ the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes :
 ‘ the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he
 ‘ covered.’ Drunkards then, in the allegorical as well as literal sense, seem to be intended, who did not act soberly, according to the dictates of sound judgment and true religion, but were proud, rash, foolish, and inconsistent ; who, like intoxicated persons, were deprived of the exercise of sound reason, disturbed in their minds, precipitate in their measures, foolish in their projects, and destitute of prudence and steadiness in their actions.—Against persons of this description, *wo* is denounced, comprehending all manner of evils, both in this and the future world. They might perhaps flatter themselves with the hopes of impunity ; but God, who is faithful, will not fail to execute upon them his awful threatenings, unless they repent, and forsake their evil ways. I request the attention of all who live in intemperance, to the word of God, recorded Deut. xxix. 19, 20. : ‘ And it come
 ‘ to pass when he heareth the words of this curse,
 ‘ that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have
 ‘ peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine
 ‘ heart, to add drunkenness to thirst : the Lord will
 ‘ not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and
 ‘ his jealousy, shall smoke against that man, and all
 ‘ the curses that are written in this book shall lie
 ‘ upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name
 ‘ from under heaven.’

Whose glorious beauty is a fading flower. The possessions of Ephraim were exceedingly rich and fertile, producing great abundance of the best corns and
 finest

finest fruits. Their land was clothed with a glorious beauty: the pastures were covered with flocks, and the valleys with corns; the hills were adorned with vines and olive-trees, affording the richest and most luxuriant prospect ever presented to the eye of man. This glorious beauty, however, was to become like a fading flower: notwithstanding its former lovely appearance, it was soon to wither and perish.—The reason of this sudden change is suggested in the next words: *Which is on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine.* To what a shameful and inglorious conquest did they submit, who allowed themselves to be vanquished by that which should have cheered and strengthened them, when properly used. Alas! that man, originally made after the similitude of God, and invested with dominion over the works of his hands, should ever have divested himself, by taking too much wine, of that dominion with which he was intrusted, and of the noble faculty of reason by which he is distinguished. This conquest was a terrible reproach to the Ephraimites, who, by profession, were the peculiar people of God, and lay under manifold obligations to serve and obey him. It justly exposed them to misery and wo. The Hebrew word translated *overcome*, is rendered, in the margin of some Bibles, *broken*. Their constitutions were broken, their health was impaired, their reputation was blasted, their possessions were injured; and the hearts of their friends were broken, who in vain dissuaded them from this ruinous practice. Above all, God was dishonoured, his law was transgressed, and his judgments were incurred.—‘ Hear then, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not amongst wine-bibbers; amongst riotous eaters of flesh. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags*.’

* Prov. xxiii. 19, 20, 21.

2 Behold, the LORD hath a mighty and strong one, *which* as a tempest of hail *and* a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand,

In this and the two following verses, the complicated misery included in the wo threatened, in the exordium of this discourse, against the persons above described, is amplified and explained. It consists of three articles: the first of which is mentioned in the verse before us, where *the Lord is said to have a strong and mighty one*; some powerful prince, having numerous armies, which he could send against the Ephraimites, to punish them for their atrocious crimes. The person who seems to have been more directly intended, was Shalmaneser; though Nebuchadnezzar, Sennacherib, and other kings, whom the Almighty employed to execute his righteous judgments upon the posterity of Israel, may be also included. The devastation to be made by this mighty prince among the people of Ephraim, is illustrated by a beautiful similitude, frequently used by the prophets, when speaking of those monarchs whereby God would chastize his people for their sins*.—*As a tempest of hail falls with great force upon the ground, so the army of this mighty one was to come with irresistible impetuosity upon the men of Ephraim.*—*And as a destroying storm, which beats with the utmost violence upon whatever comes within its reach, so the troops of this powerful prince should vanquish every obstacle that might oppose their progress, and forcibly drive it out of the way.*—*As a flood of mighty waters deluges the country over which it extends, spreading desolation wherever it comes, so the forces of this victorious monarch were to expand themselves over the whole land of Ephraim, laying*

* See Ezek. xiii. 11. 13.

waste every thing esteemed valuable and desirable, and demolishing the whole fabric of their civil and ecclesiastical constitution.— *Casting down to the earth with the hand*; overthrowing, even to the ground, that glorious superstructure of church and state which had been reared among them, and long preserved with care and expence.—Thus doth our prophet explain what is every where inculcated in scripture, that the Governor among the nations presides over all the movements of the greatest princes and most powerful empires in the world, which always act according to his pleasure, even when they attack and desolate his professing people: and that the righteous judgments which he inflicts, ought to be considered as the just punishment of the sins which men have committed, whereby they have abused his goodness, and provoked him to anger. Let us endeavour to learn these instructive lessons, which are frequently repeated in this prophecy; and earnestly beg of God, to seal our profit by every opening of the mouth.

3 The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under feet.

Another article is here specified, comprised in the wo and misery denounced against Ephraim. The city of Samaria I have supposed to be meant, by the crown of pride that is spoken of: with that metropolis, the drunkards of Ephraim were to be trodden under the feet of their victorious enemies; they were to be treated with the greatest ignominy and contempt, and to be reduced by them to a state of the lowest subjection.—By this prediction, we are instructed in this important truth, That those who contribute, by their wickedness, to bring down the judgments of the Almighty, shall certainly share in the awful calamities which their crimes have procured. This observation was remarkably verified with respect to the Israelites, who, by intemperance,

perance, pride, and other sins, exposed their nation to destruction, and were themselves severely punished by their powerful enemies.

4 And the glorious beauty which *is* on the head of the fat valley, shall be a fading flower, *and* as the hasty fruit before the summer: which *when* he that looketh upon it, seeth *it*, while it is yet in his hand, he eateth it up.

The third ingredient, in the wo denounced against the Ephraimites, is mentioned in this verse, and is beautifully illustrated by an elegant similitude.—That people were informed, that their glorious beauty was not only to be a fading flower, that, after having gradually decayed, perisheth, but that it was to be *as the hasty fruit before the summer*; like the early figs, which grow upon the fig-tree, that bears at different seasons. No sooner doth the early fruit draw near to perfection, in the month of June, than the summer-fig is formed, that ripens against August; when the same tree sometimes throws out a third crop, called the winter-fig. The fruit of which our prophet here speaks, was that which was hasty and first ripe, the best and most delicious.—*Which when he that looketh upon it, and seeth it* to be a desirable morsel, having plucked, should put it into his mouth. So rich and pleasant are the first ripe fruits here supposed to be in the eye of the beholder, that, when within his reach, he could not refrain from eating them. By this image, is finely represented the sudden irremediable destruction of the beauty and glory of Ephraim, which was quickly to be devoured by the king of Assyria.—The judgments of the Most High, inflicted upon a disobedient and gainsaying people, are often not only extensive, reaching to all ranks, but sudden and unexpected, as is plainly intimated in the verse before us. Sudden judgments, which strongly testify the divine displeasure, are commonly
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severe; they are unthought of, unprepared for, and unavoidable, as saith the proverb: ‘ Therefore his calamity shall come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy *.’

5 ¶ In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty unto the residue of his people.

The prophet proceeds next to foretel, the happy flourishing condition to which the residue of God’s people were to be advanced.—*In that day.* After the remarkable period wherein the awful judgments of God above mentioned had been inflicted, *the Lord of hosts shall be for a crown of glory, &c.* A crown, or diadem, is one of the ensigns and ornaments of royalty; a pleasant emblem of the honour, the dignity, and authority, to which God promiseth to exalt his faithful servants. The peculiar advantages which people eminently possess, in scripture-language they are said to be crowned with. ‘ Thou, Lord (saith the psalmist), hast crowned man with honour and dignity †;’ thou hast highly distinguished him by an abundant measure of these prerogatives: and again, ‘ Thou crownest him with loving-kindness and tender mercy;’ thou greatly enrichest him with the precious fruits of thy benevolent compassion. The prediction then imports, that Jehovah will elevate the remnant of his people to the highest honour and glory. Though, in the words of the royal prophet, they have lien among the pots, in a state of affliction and wretchedness, they shall be as the wings of a dove, whose feathers are covered with silver and gold ‡. Their condition shall be reversed; and become as different from what it formerly was, as the pot, discoloured by smoke, is from the bright feathers of a beautiful bird, whose plumage seems to glister

* Prov. vi. 15.

† Psal. viii. 5.

‡ Psal. lxxviii. 13.

like the purest and finest metals. Such is the blessed change made in the state of the church, when delivered from oppression and bondage, and brought into the glorious liberty of God's children.—It intimates, that he would raise them to considerable grandeur and dignity; forming them into a royal priesthood, that they might reign on the earth, and be employed in offering up to God spiritual and acceptable sacrifices.—He would acknowledge them for his peculiar people, preside over them, defend them by his power, govern them by his laws; and that he would so build up and prosper them, as to set a crown upon their heads. In the beautiful words of Elihu, ‘ He with-
 ‘ draweth not his eyes from the righteous; but with
 ‘ kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish
 ‘ them for ever, and they are exalted *.’—It also includes, that the Lord would invest them with authority and influence, giving them power, not only over the nations, to rule them, but over their own spirits, which is greater glory than had they conquered the strongest city; that he would render them victorious over all their enemies, and cause them to triumph over them.

And for a diadem of beauty to the residue of his people.
 The expression imports, that the Lord of hosts would render them truly amiable, by his comeliness put upon them; that he would cure them of their spiritual distempers; that he would remove their deformities, and cleanse them from the pollutions they had contracted:—That he would clothe them with the robes of righteousness, and garments of salvation; and adorn them with those divine graces whereby they were to shine forth in the beauties of holiness, so as to attract the notice and admiration of surrounding nations:—That, having restored them to their own land, which was renowned for glory and beauty, he would afford them special testimonies of his gracious presence; and grant them his ordinances, his servants,

* Job xxxvi. 7.

and access to his sanctuary:—That he would be their Counsellor and strength, their God and portion; and fulfil to them his promise, recorded chap. xlvi. 13. ‘I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory.’ In consequence whereof, their renown was to spread abroad among the Heathen. In this manner, I suppose, God accomplished this promise to his people. Indeed, predictions of this sort must be explained with considerable latitude, in a way suited to the former dispensation, when they were delivered, and to the condition of the church after the Babylonish captivity, the period to which they more immediately referred. Accordingly, after that memorable event, God was pleased in some measure to verify this promise, which in after times was to receive its full completion. In the days of Zerubbabel and Joshua, and in the times that followed, under the Maccabees, he poured out his Spirit in large measures upon the residue of his people, and dignified them with the most important privileges. And after the appearance of the Son of God, the King, Priest, and Teacher of his church, their crown of glory and beauty, the Spirit of the Lord rested upon them; the beauty of the Lord our God was upon them.—All the dignity and comeliness possessed by churches and individuals, proceeds from the Lord of hosts. The word, the ordinances, the Sabbaths, and servants of the Most High; the gifts and graces of the Spirit, whereby the people of God are dignified and beautified, are his rich donations. Who maketh thee to differ? or, What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Be thankful to him who hath dealt bountifully with you: beware of perverting his goodness, and abusing his mercies, and thereby obscuring his glory, and ruining yourselves.

6 And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate.

The

The Lord of hosts farther declares, that he would endow the judges and officers of his people with a spirit suited to their several departments.—Judges in Israel, when employed in the exercise of their office, hearing and determining causes brought before them, were accustomed to a sitting-posture. The members of the great sanhedrim (the supreme ecclesiastical court among them), their kings and civil judges, were all seated when they gave judgment. To this circumstance, the description before us seems evidently to refer. The office of judges is appointed by infinite wisdom, to preserve order, equity, and peace in society, by punishing evil-doers, and being a praise to them that do well. In this important capacity, they judge not for man, but for the Lord, of whom they hold their office; and who is with them in the judgment, observing what they do. In performing the duties of their station, they greatly need penetration, wisdom, and integrity, to qualify them for the faithful discharge of their office. God therefore promised to the judges of his people, that he would furnish them with a spirit of judgment, that, with inflexible justice and integrity, they might pronounce decisions on the causes brought before them. For this purpose, he would give them a spirit of discernment, clearly to perceive the true state of the matters laid before them, so as exactly to distinguish between truth and falsehood, between justice and iniquity. He would possess them of an inflexible regard to the sacred interests of righteousness, veracity, and mercy, and an utter abhorrence of every species of fraud, injustice, and oppression; and incline them uniformly to support the cause of equity, to discountenance all manner of impiety and wickedness. Thus the best interests of the nation should be advanced and established: righteousness should flow down their streets as a stream, and their peace be as the mighty waters.

And

And for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate. The Lord of hosts would suit the communication of his mercy and grace to the several characters among his people: to military men, whose business was to turn the battle from the gate of the city, to some place where it might be fought with greater advantage, and to carry it to the gates and fortifications of the enemy, that they might besiege and possess them. To such persons, who, of all others, have most need of vigour, both in body and mind, God promiseth strength. He would fortify their minds with invincible courage and magnanimity: he would enable them, with determined firmness and resolution, to surmount the difficulties, and sustain the hardships, which they might have to encounter. He would also furnish them with all necessary bodily strength, to sustain the fatigues and dangers to which they might be exposed, in the execution of the wise plans which were adopted, to promote the safety and prosperity of his people. The benefit here promised, is acknowledged, with incomparable elegance and beauty, to have been enjoyed by the king of Israel. ‘ I will love thee, O Lord, my strength—for thou hast girded me with strength unto battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me *.’—After the return of the Jews from Babylon, in the time of Ezra, the scribe, the former part of this prophecy was in some measure fulfilled, in consequence of the decree published by Artaxerxes, the king, in favour of that good man. ‘ And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, who may judge all the people that are beyond the river, such as know the law of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not †.’ In consequence of this edict, it may be supposed, that the Jewish judgment-seats were occupied by skilful upright judges, very different from those who filled them in

* Psal. xviii. 1. 39.

† Ezra vii. 25.

some periods. The latter part was accomplished in the time of the Maccabees, when God was pleased to endow his people with a noble heroic spirit, according to the prediction of Zechariah: 'They shall be
' as mighty men, who tread down their enemies in
' the mire of the streets in the battle; and they shall
' fight, because the Lord is with them*.' The judges and soldiers of God's people, under the New Testament, ought to improve this promise, for their encouragement and consolation: and let us fervently pray, that God may confer upon them these necessary blessings.

7 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way: the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink, they err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment.

In these words, the intemperate and profane, especially those who held important offices in the church and state, are sharply admonished and reprov'd.—*But they also have erred through wine, &c.* Those who sat in judgment, and who turned the battle to the gate, seem to be the persons here spoken of. Notwithstanding they ought to have distinguished themselves by their temperance, yet, disregarding the strong obligations by which they were bound to be sober, they erred through excess in drinking wine and strong drink.—*And through strong drink are out of the way.* By the intemperate use of intoxicating liquors, they departed from the paths of righteousness, in which they ought to have walked, without turning to the right hand or to the left.—*The priest and the prophet have erred, &c.* The priests, whose business was to minister before the Lord in

* Zech. x. 5.

holy things, were obliged, by their sacred office, and by special divine command, to abstain from all manner of excess. The prophet, who was honoured of God to communicate his will to the people, to reprove them for their sins, and who was bound, by peculiar ties, to study exemplary holiness in life, was addicted to intemperance.—*They are swallowed up of wine.* The judgments of both these classes of persons were thereby perverted, their understandings were obscured, their characters were hurt, their offices were dishonoured, and their usefulness marred.—*They are out of the way through strong drink.* They had forsaken the ways of truth and holiness, and gone into the paths which lead to disgrace and ruin.—*They err in vision:* the prophets impiously pretending to have been favoured with those visions that they never received, and misinterpreting those which had been seen by others.—*They stumble in judgment;* entertaining wrong apprehensions of the matters that came under their cognizance, and delivering wrong decisions respecting subjects which they were called to determine.—Such is the literal import of the words, which I suppose is chiefly intended. Some commentators indeed are of opinion, that they should be metaphorically explained, as descriptive of those who were deluded by false doctrines; and, like persons intoxicated, had a high opinion of themselves, and despised others, whilst they indulged in erroneous sentiments and practices, highly injurious to the truths and authority of God. In this view, it is not difficult to find out who were the persons to whom this character belonged, and to whom they were peculiarly applicable.

8 For all tables are full of vomit *and* filthiness, *so that there is no place clean.*

The fatal consequences of the vices reprov'd in the preceding verse, are here strongly delineated.—

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The words must be understood with some restriction ; for we cannot well suppose what is here said, should be considered as literally and universally the condition of all tables and places. The case described, however, was so frequent and common, as fully to justify the odious representation given by the prophet. The expression plainly denotes, that such were to be the unhappy effects of the priests and prophets being drunk with wine, or intoxicated with false doctrines, which were greedily received in large measures by the people, that they would quickly spread abroad the odious sentiments they had imbibed, which were to prove exceedingly offensive to all sober-minded and upright men.—At whatever period this prediction was literally fulfilled, it was remarkably verified in the figurative sense, by the Scribes and Pharisees, who lived about the time of our Lord's manifestation in the flesh. Filled with false notions concerning the kingdom and salvation of the Messiah, puffed up with a vain opinion of themselves, and despising others, they not only erred themselves, but, by their instructions and example, they led multitudes astray. All those places where they convened and taught, were replete with abominable errors, highly offensive to Jesus Christ and his disciples, who reprobated them in the strongest terms.

9 ¶ Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.*

In this and the following verses, is demonstrated the unfitness of those who have departed from the paths of truth and righteousness, and are poisoned with erroneous opinions, to learn the doctrine of salvation.—The person here spoken of, can be no other than the blessed God, who giveth wisdom, and out of whose mouth cometh understanding.—

Whom shall he teach knowledge? that excellent knowledge which is precious above rubies, highly necessary and ornamental to the children of men. *Whom shall he teach this knowledge?* Where are they who are apt to learn the instructive lessons inculcated by his word and providence?—*And whom shall he make to understand doctrine?* the important sublime truths revealed in his holy word. Since those who have held the most sacred offices among his professing people, have gone astray, and have not obeyed his commandments; since few of them whom the Most High hath condescended to instruct, hath profited under the means employed to make them truly wise; it may justly be inquired, *Whom shall God teach with success the doctrine of grace, righteousness, and peace?* The answer is returned in the latter part of the verse:

Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts Those who are grown up to manhood, deride his judgments, and contemn his statutes: he will therefore teach infants, who are weak and helpless; or those who resemble little children lately weaned, who have laid aside improper, though natural desires of those things whereof they were formerly exceeding fond, and to which they were much attached. To such persons, God is pleased to reveal his Son, his covenant and salvation, the mysteries of the gospel, the riches of his grace, and the glories of the world to come. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, he thus ordaineth strength, and perfecteth praise. The words to which I allude, were cited by Jesus Christ; and applied to the little children in the temple, who, crying Hosanna to the son of David, vexed and confounded his malignant adversaries. By teaching these children that knowledge which others despised, and putting strength into them, to publish his praises with great ardor and vehemence, the Son of God displayed the efficacy of his instructions, shewed who were the persons he meant to teach,

whom he would enable to confound the wise and the strong. On this account, he gave solemn thanks to his heavenly Father: 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes*.' The babes and infants, of whom our Saviour speaks, were his apostles and disciples, who were simple, inoffensive, and who, like children, drank in the sincere milk of the word, that they might grow thereby. From all which we may conclude, that infants, and those who resemble them, in simplicity, teachableness, and submission, are the persons who, in general, are taught of God.—Would you then, my friends, be taught knowledge, and understand doctrine? earnestly beg from God, a humble and teachable disposition. Those whom he is pleased effectually to instruct, he first humbles, and then brings them to constant dependence upon himself, to render them wise unto salvation. Convinced that your acquaintance with divine truths is faint, partial, and often confused, submit wholly to him who teacheth sinners the way that they should choose.

10 For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little.

This verse beautifully represents the amiable condescending manner in which the Lord God conveyed instruction to those whom he took under his tuition, who required slow and gentle methods to be used in order to their profiting.—*For precept must be upon precept.* They must be taught, with equal attention, diligence, and care, as the youngest children, whose masters give them one rule or precept to learn, and after that another. In like manner, the great Instruc-

* Matth. xi. 25.

tor of his church, suiting himself to the weak capacities of his people, who are slow of understanding, and often negligent and forgetful of a precept respecting the absolute necessity of new hearts, subjoined a precept relating to the high importance of faith in the promised Messiah: to a precept on devotion, he added one on morality. And that nothing might be wanting on his part, precepts upon every subject were diversified and multiplied.—*Line upon line.* As little children, who cannot receive much at once, and who must not be burdened, have now and then a line given them to read, or commit to memory; so the Teacher of the foolish hath vouchsafed, in the same easy manner, to inculcate upon his church, the doctrine of his holy word. He gave them one line, informing them of their depravity and sin; another, shewing their duty; and a third, prefiguring their redemption.—*Here a little, and there a little.* He communicated to them a little instruction by one of his servants, and a little by another, that they might the more easily comprehend what they were taught; that the pleasing variety of instruments he employed; and the diversity of subjects of which they treated, might attract their attention, and promote their benefit. In this agreeable winning manner, hath God been graciously pleased to teach his people; which shews at once, his admirable condescension, their slowness of capacity to learn, and the criminal conduct of those scornful men who rejected and derided the admonitions of his servants.—In this gentle manner, hath God also taught you, my friends, what you ought to avoid, to do, and to desire. Endeavour to profit under the various methods he takes for your improvement: and pray earnestly, that he may render his instructions effectual, by his Spirit and blessing accompanying them.

11 For with stammering lips, and another tongue, will he speak to this people.

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The Lord God having spoken with great plainness, by his servants, to the posterity of Israel, and frequently repeated to them his precepts, infomuch that young children might have learned them, yet such was their stupidity and obstinacy, that they slighted and contemned them. The Most High, whose instructions they had even dared to ridicule, was determined to speak to them in strange languages, in the course of his providence; first by the Chaldeans, and afterward by the Romans. He therefore retorts upon them with great severity, the opprobrious deriding language which they had insolently used, in censuring his method of teaching them. The words before us, contain the awful threatening which God denounced against them, on account of their unprofitableness under the various means he had employed for their improvement, and the scorn with which they had treated his prophets.—For with stammering, or, as the Hebrew word signifies, with mocking lips, and another tongue, or foreign language, which shall be unintelligible to you; and which, notwithstanding, like children, ye shall be obliged to learn. They were to be carried away by their enemies into a distant country, where they would hear a language that they did not understand; and be forced, contrary to their inclination, to learn it with great difficulty.—Or this prediction may possibly relate to the uncertain, indistinct, and strange manner of teaching, which, in after-periods of the Jewish church, was adopted by those who assumed the character of their instructors. According to either interpretation, the prophecy hath been exactly fulfilled. After the Jews were taken captive to Babylon, they were obliged to learn, with stammering lips, the language of that country: and there God spake to them in a foreign tongue, as a just punishment for the scorn and contempt they poured upon his servants and instructions. And, in following ages, this threatening took effect, when the Jewish doctors,
whose

whose business was to instruct the people, overlooking the sacred oracles of God, taught, in the Syrian language, those foolish expositions of scripture given in Talmuds, Chaldee paraphrases, and oral traditions.—Those who do not profit by the gentle methods employed for their benefit by infinite wisdom and grace, are assured by this prediction, that the Lord will ere long deal with them in another and very different manner. If you will not listen to the plain repeated instructions delivered in the word of God, you have reason to fear, that the threatening denounced against the Jewish people, shall, in one way or other, be executed upon you. They who presumptuously abuse the choicest mercies, shall have judgment without mercy. They must perish for lack of knowledge, who despise divine teaching: they shall be taught with another tongue, who contemn the simple method whereby the Lord teacheth his people. This verse is cited by the apostle Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, when treating of the proper use of the gift of tongues, which was over-rated by some in that church. God having threatened by Isaiah, to speak to the men of Judah in different or strange languages, as the just punishment of their sin, the apostle, by quoting the passage before us, reminded those to whom he was writing, that they had little reason to boast of the gift of tongues; that they ought to beware of abusing it, sensible that gifts are to be estimated by their real utility.

12 To whom he said, *This is the rest where-with ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.*

The Lord God hath been pleased to adopt the most winning methods for instructing his people; and, in order to their profiting, he hath solicited their attention in the most obliging manner.—*To whom he said, This is the rest—and this is the refreshing.* The doctrines

doctrines of grace, relating to Jesus Christ and his redemption, have been uniformly inculcated by the servants of God, as the only means of conveying rest and peace, tranquillity and joy, to the weary and disquieted minds of men. ‘ To him (said the apostle Peter) ‘ gave all the prophets witness, that, through his ‘ name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins *.’ The saints, in all generations, have cordially embraced this important doctrine, as the sure foundation of their hope and comfort. This glorious truth our blessed Saviour affirmed during his ministry, whilst he opened the fountain of consolation; and demonstrated, that he himself was the Author of salvation, possessed of all the fulness of celestial wisdom, grace, and righteousness, and that he came into this world to give rest and refreshment to weary and heavy laden sinners. ‘ Come unto me, ‘ said the compassionate Redeemer, all ye that labour, ‘ and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest †.’ I will refresh you with liberty, tranquillity, peace, and consolation. No rest so excellent, none so desirable, as this which is promised, and conferred by Jesus Christ. Agreeable to his name and character, he saves all that come to him, from their sins: he delivers them from condemnation: he cleanses them from all unrighteousness; and introduces them into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. He invests them in the possession of peace that passeth all understanding, which is the never-failing source of abundant satisfaction. He either delivers them from affliction, or enables them to sustain it with composure and resignation, and renders it subservient to their real benefit. At their dissolution, he releases them from the unavoidable troubles to which they are here exposed: their bodies being laid in the grave, where the weary are at rest, their souls do enter into peace. They sleep in Jesus, until the morning of the resur-

* Acts x. 43.

† Matth. xi. 28.

rection, when soul and body shall be re-united, and conducted into the rest that remaineth for the people of God, in its full perfection, comfortable extent, and everlasting duration. The partial enjoyment of this rest, and the reviving prospect of its completion and perpetuity in the future world, are truly agreeable and refreshing. What pleasing refreshment must it afford to those who are wearied with roaming after satisfaction among the creatures, and with the fruitless pursuit of happiness where it could not be found, to obtain delightful repose in Jesus Christ, to find their most enlarged desires gratified, and to enjoy communion with the source of eternal felicity! This is rest, this is relief indeed, highly worthy of our keenest pursuit, and peculiarly grateful to all who are sensible of their need of it.

Wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest. Weariness arises either from weakness or fatigue of body, or from fainting and failure of the spirits, through long-continued unsuccessful exertion. The weary, who are here intended, are those who are faint in their minds, who have been weary of God and his ordinances, and who have wearied themselves with iniquity and very vanity. The expression under consideration, represents, in a striking light, not only their miserable condition, and their unspeakable need of rest, but likewise the tender compassions of God, in providing refreshment for them. As rest is most acceptable to weary persons, and refreshment is most comfortable to those who are heavy laden with some oppressive burden, so rest to the soul will be most desirable to those who are weary in their minds. Though all mankind may be included in the character before us, yet, I suppose, they are especially intended, who are sensible that this is their real condition. Multitudes there are who come under this description, who feel not their necessities: but this arises, not from their state being better than that of others, but from their insensibility, which renders their

their circumstances worse, and more dangerous.— As the divine benefits are of inestimable worth, and incomparable excellence, so they are freely offered, and generously conferred, on all who are willing to partake of them: nay, such is the grace of God, that he employs his servants to cause the weary to rest. If then men are miserable, they only are to blame: if they do not find rest, it is because they will not accept of this precious blessing. Now, if people commonly estimate things according to the sense they have of their need of them, might it not be justly expected, that the rest and refreshment here spoken of, would be most acceptable, and thankfully received by all to whom they are offered?

Yet they would not hear. Blinded by inveterate prejudices, puffed up with a vain opinion of their own good condition, the people to whom the servants of God were sent, would not hearken to their voice: they would not part with their errors and vices, nor return to the exercise of a sound and sober mind. Some would not so much as hear the instructions delivered by the ministers of the Lord: they cared for none of these things; and greatly preferred indolence and amusement to his sacred counsels and admonitions, who gave them all things richly to enjoy. Some who attended, did not listen with diligence and impartiality to the important truths that were spoken to them; being neither interested in them, nor affected with them, they treated them with great indifference, and sovereign contempt. Others who attended, were dissatisfied, and found fault with what they heard: they discovered a strong aversion to believe, and obey the truth: they mocked the speakers, and derided the truths that they delivered. Far from receiving them with faith and love, that they might profit their souls, many were careless and unconcerned, whilst not a few were irritated and enraged. In few words, they hated instruction, and would not bear reproof; and, by this malignant
odious

odious conduct, they brought upon themselves what was threatened by the prophet Jeremiah: ‘ I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach among all the nations whither I have driven them: because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the Lord, which I have sent unto them by my servants the prophets *.’—If ye, brethren, have a proper sense of the corruption and misery wherein ye are involved; if ye are wearied with iniquity and vanity; if ye are acquainted with the inestimable worth of rest and refreshment; if your hearts are broken, and your spirits contrite; ye will, in some measure, hear as ye ought, the reviving voice that speaketh to you from heaven. Ye will give diligent attention to the things spoken concerning salvation: ye will lay them up in your hearts, that ye offend not against God: ye will gratefully accept of his offered mercy, and endeavour to live to his glory.

13 But the word of the LORD was unto them, precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

The unhappy effects of the contempt and misimprovement of divine instructions, is here expressed in very strong terms.—The word of the Lord, which was sent unto the children of Israel by his servants the prophets, and which was afterward delivered to them by his own Son, was communicated in the most insinuating and gradual manner; precept was upon precept, line was upon line, here a little, and there a little. By such easy and gentle methods of teach-

* Jer. xxix. 18, 19.

ing, it might have been expected, that, captivated by the condescending grace of their great Instructor, they would have made rapid advances in acquiring the knowledge of divine truths. The fact however, through their obstinacy and unteachableness, proved quite the reverse. Instead of hearing and obeying the voice of the Lord, and accepting the precious blessings that he offered them, they neglected and despised them. Those signal advantages, therefore, for spiritual improvement which they enjoyed, were, by the just judgment of God, made to serve another and very opposite purpose.—*That they might go, and fall backward, &c.* The expressions, which are multiplied, to shew the dangerous progress that they made toward destruction, seem to allude to what sometimes occurs to an unwary traveller, who, by taking some wrong steps, falls backward, and endeavouring to recover himself, is caught in a snare, and taken by an enemy. Thus it was to happen to the unteachable and incorrigible among the posterity of Israel. They might go on in the dangerous course which they had foolishly chosen; but, in their progress, they would fall backward, and be so hurt or broken, as to be disabled from proceeding in the way of life. But this is not all: through their abuse of the word of God, they were to be so entangled in the snare of the wicked, that they should be destroyed by their own folly and perversity. That word which was to others the favour of life unto life, was to prove to them the favour of death unto death. It must be so. Since they would not hearken to the words of eternal life, they must remain dead in trespasses; since they would not come to the light, they must walk in darkness; since they would not believe, they could not be saved; since their hearts were not meliorated by the word of God, they must have been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin: and being given up to a reprobate mind, their spiritual condition would become worse and worse, until they fell under the crushing weight of
righteous

righteous vengeance.—Such were the dismal effects that followed the perverse abuse of the word of God, sent to the Jewish people, especially in the time of the Messiah. By their unbelief, they exhibited a prodigy of hardness of heart, and the most obstinate infidelity, which is the everlasting reproach of their nation; in consequence whereof, they fell and were broken, they were snared and taken. Contrasting ourselves with them, we may be apt to claim the preference; and say, Had we lived in their days, we would not have been partakers with them in their unbelief, and other sins. Let us rather acknowledge our past errors, and the imminent danger we have incurred, by slighting divine instructions. By the diligent improvement of the means of salvation, which, through the indulgence of Heaven, are still afforded, let us avoid the dreadful evils that beset the unbelieving Jews: and let us earnestly supplicate the enlightening, converting, and sanctifying influence of the holy Spirit, to work in us that grace and holiness which is the best ornament, and surest evidence, of our holy profession.

14 ¶ Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men that rule this people which is in Jerusalem.

Our prophet, having forewarned the profane among the Jews, of approaching spiritual judgments, proceeds to foretel the temporal calamities which were to beset them. In the name of God, he solemnly admonishes them, that the prudence whereof they boasted, and the alliances with other kingdoms which they had formed, should not afford protection from the complicated miseries to which their sins exposed them.—He thus addresses them: *Ye scornful men.* There is certainly a gradation in wickedness. People do not commonly arrive at once, but by degrees, at any great height in wickedness: several steps are previously

viously requisite to be taken, before they can reach the dangerous summit. Having walked in the counsel of the ungodly, they next take their station in the way of sinners; after which, they proceed to take the seat of the scorner. Such considerable advances in sin had been made by the rulers in Jerusalem, as gave sufficient reason to brand them with this odious character. Devoid of every good principle, and destitute of all regard to the word, the providence, and servants of God, and having laid aside all respect for religion, they scoffed at things sacred; they mocked the prophets, they derided their predictions, and ridiculed all that they ought to have esteemed and venerated. With hearts full of malignity against celestial truths, they treated divine institutions and warnings with derision: they laughed at the principles and practice of godliness; and, acting under the influence of their corrupt passions, they fortified themselves against every attempt for their amendment, by proudly rejecting the means used to reclaim them. Though, by their office, as rulers, they were under peculiar obligations to have exhibited good examples before those over whom they presided, yet they boldly presumed to sneer with contempt at the institutions, predictions, and admonitions of the Most High. Notwithstanding they resided in Jerusalem, where they enjoyed special advantages for becoming acquainted with the revelations of God's will, and for performing the exercises of his worship, yet all these were either neglected or abused. Observe also, that the people whom these scornful men governed, having, by their enormous transgressions, forfeited the honourable character of being the people of God, are here called *this people*. And though these rulers were the persons primarily addressed, yet the words may be considered as directed to all who are of the same bad temper, and who follow the same pernicious practices.

Wherefore hear the word of the Lord. Since you would not hearken to those instructions which the
Lord

Lord God was pleased to give you in the most gentle manner, and frequently to inculcate upon you, hear the awful message that I now bring to you. If attention ought to be proportioned to the importance of the subject, to your interest in it, and the authority by which it is stamped, all these circumstances unite, at present, to claim your highest respect. Hear the word of the Lord. Hear it not only with your ears, which is a natural easy operation, but hearken diligently, so as to receive instruction. Let the word that I speak sink down into your hearts: give ear to the words of my mouth; and seriously ponder the truths I am commissioned to deliver. Believe what is spoken, and you shall be established: obey what is required by the Lord, so shall you prosper: submit, with meekness, to whatsoever is made known to you; and let it have a suitable influence upon your after-conduct. Similar exordiums are frequently used by the inspired writers; and particularly by Isaiah, in these prophecies. In obedience to this solemn call, let us hearken diligently, and incline our ears to the word of Jehovah, who condescends to speak to us from heaven. Whatsoever he saith, merits our firm belief, and cordial reception; and his word properly heard, is always accompanied with salutary consequences.

15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves.

These words specify the reasons why the following prediction was published; and were designed to convince the Jewish rulers, of their base defection from the true God, on whose favour alone they ought to have

have founded all their expectations of deliverance and safety. They comprehend the whole argument, both the antecedent and consequent.—*We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement.* As it is evident, that these expressions cannot be literally understood, they must be explained according to their figurative sense. As life, you know, often signifies, the enjoyment of the most desirable blessings, which render it agreeable and pleasant; so death sometimes denotes, those heavy afflictions, and great calamities, which threaten immediate destruction. Hell, or the grave, as the Hebrew word might be translated, frequently denotes, that vast gulf, which swallows up all the living, and shuts them up in the land of darkness. It is uniformly represented, as possessing an insatiable desire of devouring those who are alive. Our prophet therefore, with great beauty and propriety, introduces cruel tyrannical princes, presiding over great empires, and furnished with strength to vanquish all that come in their way, under the images of death and the grave, to which these attributes peculiarly belong. The prophet Habakkuk, speaking of the king of Assyria, with great elegance, employs the same images: ‘He enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people*.’ Death and hell, then, are here used emphatically, to represent some terrible spoiler of the nations, who spread among them desolation and ruin, with whom the rulers of Judah had formed a strict alliance, on which they founded their hopes of preservation and safety.—This the Jewish governors are charged with having said. This language they had adopted; and been heard to express; or it was really the fair interpretation of their conduct. Actions speak as plainly as words: and in one or other of these ways, they had

* Hab. ii. 5.

made this foolish and criminal declaration of their sentiments, that, having entered into a solemn treaty of alliance with some powerful monarch, they rather placed their confidence in him than in God.

When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us. Those whom God employs as instruments to punish the wicked, or to chastize his own people, are, in scripture, called *scourges*. By the scourge here spoken of, is meant, the great army of some mighty prince, which was to spread itself among the neighbouring nations, to the great damage of the inhabitants. From this threatened calamity, the governors of Judah promised themselves exemption, in consequence of the league above mentioned. Two metaphors, of a different kind, are mixed together by our prophet, in the description before us. The use of a scourge is to strike, but not to overflow: and as the great army, signified by the scourge, was not only to inflict severe punishment upon those to whom it reached, but, like a river extending itself over its banks, it was to lay waste the whole country through which it passed. Notwithstanding, the scornful men of Judah pleased themselves with the thoughts, that it would not reach to them. The rulers of that people, far from being alarmed by the explicit declaration made in the beginning of this chapter, respecting a mighty one, who, as a flood of waters, was to overflow, and cast down to the earth, the crown of pride, and drunkards of Ephraim, foolishly imagined, that this judgment was not to come nigh them, or hurt them.—How ill-founded, how absurd, the confident expectations of safety which proud self-conceited persons frequently express! ‘The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit*.’ Secure in the midst of danger, he regards neither the providential dispensations, nor the awful threatenings of

* Prov. xviii. 11.

the Almighty. Though admonished and reproved by the servants of God, he dreams of nothing but peace and safety, until carried away by the desolating judgments of heaven.—The reason assigned for their expectation of safety, is truly surprising and extraordinary :

For we have made lies our refuge, &c. The lies and falsehood which they made their refuge, might comprehend all that, in scripture-language, is signified by these terms: the idols and lying vanities, which were honoured by the Heathen nations, to which they united in paying their homage. Of them the prophet Jeremiah thus speaks: ‘The graven image, and the molten image, is falsehood; and there is no breath in them: they are vanity; the work of errors*.’—The wealth, wisdom, and power, wherein they presumptuously placed their confidence, fondly imagining, that they might prove sufficient to screen them from danger in the time of calamity. These deceitful vanities the royal prophet, who trusted in the Lord, declares, that he hated †.—The false doctrines of lying prophets, who erred from the truth, and prophesied falsehood; concerning whom the Lord declares, ‘They prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart †.’ Under some one or other of these coverts, did the scornful rulers of Judah take shelter from impending judgments, and then thought themselves secure from fear of evil. Hence their shameful confession, their impious language, *We have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves.* All their expectations of safety, on these accounts, were disappointed. Notwithstanding they implored the assistance of the Egyptians against the Assyrians, and afterward, about the time of Messiah’s appearance, they became subject to the Romans, yet neither of these powerful nations could afford them protec-

* Jer. x. 14, 15.

† Psal. xxxi. 6.

‡ Jer. xiv. 14.

tion from predicted calamities.—Reason and experience teach, that we are weak defenceless creatures, who must look for help and shelter to some quarter or other. Warned by the folly of the profane in Judah, and the disappointment that terminated their vain hopes, let us place our trust in God, who is a sure defence, a never-failing refuge.

16 ¶ Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Few predictions delivered in scripture, are ushered in with greater majesty and authority, or placed in a more remarkable connection, than that which lies now before us. The prophet, having solemnly demanded attention to the word of the Lord which he had in command to speak, after exposing the folly and wickedness of the scornful men that were in power, who presumptuously expressed their confidence in deceit and falsehood, publishes the glorious truth contained in the words now read, before he proceeds to denounce the judgments determined to be inflicted upon them. He declares, in the name of Jehovah, that infinite wisdom and grace would lay a more firm foundation of trust and dependence than that upon which profane men built their expectations, whereupon the great edifice of his church should be established, and to which the eyes of all them that believe ought, in every age, to be directed. He connects the promised mercy with the preceding reproof, by the word *therefore*; which not only points out the order wherein one thing was to follow another, but intimates, that God would take occasion, from the atrocious crimes committed by the rulers of his people, to manifest the greatness of his mercy, and the riches of his grace. We have said, We made

lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: *therefore saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, &c.* The inference is truly remarkable, and cannot fail to excite the admiring attention of all the faithful servants of God. Notwithstanding proud worldly men may impiously imagine, that there is no other ground whereupon the church can rest their faith and hope than that which is suggested by human prudence, that there is no other way of obtaining deliverance than what is devised by the sagacity of man, the Lord God hath laid a far more excellent and sure foundation, that shall never decay; upon which he will erect a spiritual and living temple, that shall rise to amazing height, magnificence, and glory.

The prediction is delivered in beautiful figurative language, justly meriting the most serious discussion. In describing or embellishing illustrious actions, or future events, the prophets are accustomed to introduce allusions to the actions of former times, such as possess a conspicuous place in sacred history; and thus they illuminate the future by the past, facts less known by others more generally understood. In the words, there seems to be a manifest reference to the noble structures of ancient times, whose foundations were laid amidst multitudes of admiring spectators, who accompanied the solemnity with shouts and acclamations of joy. When the foundations of the earth were laid by the Almighty, the morning-stars, who witnessed this great work, sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. At the commencement of those grand material buildings, which typified the church of the living God, vast numbers of beholders assembled: and when the workmen began to build the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel, with the Levites, who sung together by course, in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord*.

* Ezra iii. 10. 11.

In like manner, when Jehovah was about to lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, he calls upon men to attend, admire, and praise. Accordingly, the appearance of the Son of God for this wonderful purpose, was announced from on high, to be glad tidings of great joy unto all people: his divine discourses, his beneficent miracles, his triumphant entry into Jerufalem, his glorious resurrection from the dead, and magnificent ascension into heaven, were contemplated and celebrated with exultation and joy.—Behold all ye kindreds of the earth, people of every language, and of every description; ye scornful men, stout-hearted, and far from righteousness; ye desponding transgressors, who are humble and contrite in heart; ye people of the Most High, who are built together, for an habitation of God, through the Spirit. Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Behold this admirable work of the Lord God, which infinitely surpasses all created power to execute; and which the most enlarged capacity cannot fully comprehend, or sufficiently celebrate. Contemplate him performing this astonishing enterprise, according to his own purpose and grace, thereby exhibiting the brightest displays of majesty and mercy, of righteousness and holiness, power and veracity; and whilst you behold, admire, love, and rejoice.

I lay in Zion for a foundation. A foundation properly denotes, the lowest part of the material building, which supports the whole weight of the superstructure, and gives it union, strength, and stability. Figuratively, it signifies those persons or things, which sustain and unite the fabric that is raised upon them; and which communicate to it, firmness, consistency, and perpetuity. In this sense, the foundation of a state or empire, is, its constitution, laws, and governors; its counsels, riches, and allies. The foundation of the church of God, is Jesus Christ, who upholds, and intimately connects together in fraternal affection,

all

all the people of God, who depend on him alone for their faith and holiness, their present privileges, their divine consolations and future hopes. This most illustrious Person possesses, in high perfection, all those qualifications which are requisite to a good foundation; and to him the apostle Peter expressly applies this prophecy.—Having represented the happy condition, and distinguished dignity of true Christians, as a spiritual temple, and holy priesthood, he amplifies and confirms what he had said, by quoting the words under consideration*. And the apostle Paul, reminding the saints at Corinth, that they were God's building, and ought to take heed that they did not build improper materials upon the foundation he had laid, enforces the caution by this powerful argument: 'For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ †.' Indeed, this chief work of God, which in itself is most excellent, and most interesting to us, forms the chief subject of his word. All the scriptures, written both before and after its execution, testify concerning it; and meet here, as in their common centre. The strength and duration of the edifice depends on the firmness of the foundation; and therefore the Lord God, having purposed to build a spiritual house, for the honour of his majesty, that should endure for ever, placed, at the bottom of this immense structure, a suitable and permanent foundation. How glorious the work that he declares he would perform in Zion: and which, in the fulness of time, he executed, according to the plan he formed in his eternal mind, when the Son of God assumed our nature, magnified the divine law that we have broken, and endured the curse that we have merited! This is the Lord's doing, and ought to be wondrous in our eyes.

Let us now proceed attentively to survey this foundation, which God hath laid; whereupon is fitly

* 1 Peter ii. 6.

† 1 Cor. iii. 11.

framed together that noble edifice, which riseth into an holy temple in the Lord. Let us minutely examine the materials of which it is composed, and the peculiar properties whereof it is possessed, that, having seen its all-sufficiency and glory, we may place upon it unshaken dependence for every promised blessing. Whilst thus pleasantly employed, may the Spirit of the living God open the eyes of our understandings to perceive the glorious beauty of this incomparable object, and unite us unto it by strong and indissoluble affection!

Our prophet having expressed a noble sentiment with the utmost brevity and simplicity, illustrated by no circumstances, adorned with no epithets, calls in the aid of ornament: he repeats, he varies, he amplifies the sentiment; and adds to it several short sentences, more fully to elucidate the subject. He returns to the favourite topic; and more particularly delineates it, by imagery borrowed from a well-known and familiar object.

A stone is the most proper material that can be laid for a foundation. By this figurative expression, Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, the great Redeemer, is doubtless intended. Under this designation, he is frequently spoken of in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. He is the stone which the builders rejected, that is now become the head of the corner*. This text, which is several times cited by the apostles, is acknowledged by all, in the full and proper sense, to belong to the Messiah, who expressly applies it to himself†. The apostle of the circumcision particularly speaks of him under this figure; where, having said that the Lord is gracious, he immediately adds, ‘To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious‡.’ He calls him a living stone, to intimate, that he hath life in himself, and communicates

* Psal. cxviii. 22.

† Matth. xxi. 42.

‡ 1 Peter ii. 4.

life to all who are built upon him. A stone, which is remarkable for its strength, firmness, and duration, exhibits an instructive emblem of the mighty One, on whom our help is laid, who possesses invincible strength, who upholdeth all things by the word of his power; and, being able to save to the uttermost, sustains the whole weight of his church. Its solidity and firmness represent the stability of Jesus Christ, whose throne is established in the heavens, whose purposes and promises are sure and unalterable, and whose covenant of peace cannot be removed. Its continuance and duration sets forth his everlasting perpetuity, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; who is unchangeably possessed of every divine excellency: his love, righteousness, and strength, never decay; nor are they impaired by exertion. A large stone, properly hewn, and laid at the bottom of a great building, gives a strong idea of an immoveable object, that cannot be displaced; and affords a lively emblem of his immutability and permanency, upon whom rests the faith, the holiness, and hope of the saints.—The inspired writers frequently mention this wonderful Person in figurative terms, under a pleasing variety of amiable characters, highly necessary to the welfare and support of the church of God. He is the Author of eternal salvation, who conveys to them, all the inestimable benefits requisite to consummate their felicity; such as the remission of sins, the renovation of their natures, strength to obey the divine commandments, and those consolations which revive their hearts. He is the great High Priest, by whom they have access unto God; the infallible Teacher, who instructs them so as to make them wise unto salvation; the spiritual King, who rescues them from servitude, introduces them into glorious liberty, and defends them from evil. He is the great Law-giver, who is able to save, and to destroy; the skilful Physician, who cures them of their spiritual maladies, and restores them to perfect soundness; the tender-hearted Shepherd,

Shepherd, who brings them back from their wanderings, and gently leads them into green pastures; the supreme Judge, who corrects them for their faults, and who, at the final judgment, will assign them glory, honour, and immortality, as their everlasting portion. He is the Sun of righteousness, who illuminates and warms them by his refreshing beams; the bread of life, which nourishes and sustains them; the rock and stone upon which they are built, and from whence they derive strength and establishment.

A tried stone, or, as the Hebrew word may be rendered, 'a stone of trial.' In both senses, the description is perfectly applicable to Jesus Christ. It is a strong recommendation of persons or things, in which we are called to place unsuspecting confidence, that they have been well-tried; and found upon trial, fully to answer the expectations formed concerning them, and to serve every purpose for which they were intended. This remark was, in every respect, verified in the promised Messiah, here spoken of, as a tried stone. His claim to the high character of the Son of God, and Saviour of the world, was severely tried, and found incontestably valid and sufficient. He fully authenticated his title to this high designation and office, by the strongest proofs that could be demanded. In him were accomplished the ancient predictions, which declared, that he should be a Prophet like unto Moses; a high Priest, after the order of Melchisedec, who, by one offering, was to put an end to sin, to finish transgression, and bring in everlasting righteousness; the Prince of peace, the King of Zion, just, and having salvation. In him were fulfilled the types, which prefigured many instructive circumstances, relative to his office, and the design of his manifestation. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so he was lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him, might not perish, but have everlasting life. As our passover, he was sacrificed for us: and as Jonah was three days and three
nights

nights in the whale's belly, so he was three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. By him were performed those stupendous miracles, which were foretold should be wrought by the Messiah. He opened the eyes of the blind; he unstopped the ears of the deaf; he made the lame to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing. And after the temple of his body was destroyed, he raised it up in three days; and ascended gloriously up on high, that God the Lord might dwell among us.

Besides, his abilities to accomplish the arduous purposes of his appearance in this world, underwent the severest trial. His love to God, his zeal for his glory, his obedience to his commands, his patience under sufferings, his resignation to the divine will, his love and compassion to men, were all fairly tried, and found worthy of praise, and honour, and glory. After having sustained the most painful labours, the most complicated afflictions, the sharpest reproaches, and shameful indignities, he was laid, by infinite wisdom, the foundation of the church. Since that period, he hath been tried by multitudes, which no man can number, of every kindred, nation, language, and tongue. Men, of every character, of every age, of every generation, have united in gratefully acknowledging his consummate ability to save to the uttermost; and, with thankfulness, have celebrated the efficacy of his blood, and the riches of his grace. That which they have heard, and seen, and tasted, they have declared unto us, that we also may have fellowship with them.—I remarked, that the Hebrew words may be also rendered, 'a stone of trial.' According to this interpretation, they contain the same sentiment delivered by our prophet, chap. viii. 14. 'And he shall be—for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence, to both the houses of Israel,' &c. In this view, devout Simeon contemplated him, when he thus spake: 'He is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign that shall be

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‘ be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts ‘ may be revealed *.’ These prophecies were exactly accomplished in Jesus Christ, who makes full discovery of the spiritual state and character of men. By the sentiments they entertain concerning him, the reception which they give him, and the subjection that they yield to him, they plainly shew, whether or not their hearts are upright or deceived, their faith is real or hypocritical, their acquaintance with the way of salvation is clear or indistinct. By cordially embracing this great Redeemer, in the important characters he sustains, and firmly relying upon him, as their alone foundation, they clearly evince, that they heartily approve of him, and love his salvation; whereas, by rejecting this tried stone, they give convincing evidence of their pride, obstinacy, and other criminal passions.

A corner-stone. Jesus Christ is not only the foundation-stone, which supports the weight of the superstructure laid upon it, but he is likewise the corner-stone, which unites, beautifies, and strengthens the whole building.—He unites together the different parts whereof the church of God is composed. In this great edifice, there are multitudes of people, of all nations, kindreds, and languages, whose laws and manners are as opposite to one another as the sides of a house. Jews and Greeks, Barbarians and Scythians, bond and free, honourable and dishonourable, rich and poor, furnish materials for this house of God. All these different descriptions of people, who were at variance with one another, are reconciled, and united together by Jesus Christ, who of them forms one magnificent temple for Jehovah. Having abolished the enmity that formerly subsisted among them, he makes in himself of twain one new man, so making peace. Not only Jews, but Gentiles, who were afar off, strangers and foreigners, are brought nigh

* Luke ii. 34, 35.

by Jesus Christ, made fellow-citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God.—This corner-stone not only unites, but it beautifies the edifice of the church. Corner-stones are commonly large, properly squared, and well polished, serving for ornament, as well as use, to the building; and on this account, likewise, is Jesus Christ spoken of under this similitude. He himself is fairer than the children of men, the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. He gives spiritual beauty to all who are connected with him; insomuch that his comeliness, grace, and favour, are said to be upon them. By communicating to them the graces of the holy Spirit, he renders them all glorious within; and, by his righteousness, which the apostle Paul affirms, is upon all them that believe, he makes them comely indeed. Thus does he become the beauty and glory of his people, among whom he preserves the most desirable harmony; and, by means of his ordinances, laws, and promises, he disposes them to shine forth in the beauty of holiness.—Once more; This corner-stone strengthens the whole building, which it connects and adorns. The mighty One, upon whom the Lord God hath laid our help, conveys spiritual strength to all the living stones, which are built into the temple of the Lord; in consequence whereof, they are strong in him, and in the power of his might, for performing duty, for contending with enemies, and sustaining the afflictions to which they are appointed. The spirit of power, as well as of love, and of a sound mind, pervades the whole of this great building, and gives it strength and establishment. The church of God therefore, supported and united by the omnipotent Saviour, notwithstanding all the combined efforts of earth and hell, shall continue rooted and grounded in him, and unmoved from the hope of the gospel. From all which it appears, that Jesus Christ, who is the corner-stone, that unites, beautifies, and strengthens the whole church of God, knits together

together all his people, who live in every age and place of the world. This animating consideration ought to make us solicitous to be firmly united to him, and to one another, by the strong bonds of indissoluble affection.

A precious corner-stone. The illustrious Person here spoken of, is truly precious and valuable, on account of his intrinsic perfection and glory. Being the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, he possesses incomparable divine beauty, ineffable splendor and brilliancy. Even when covered by the veil of humanity, his supreme majesty and excellence shone forth at times with such refulgent lustre, that those who beheld him, acknowledged, that they saw the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Every divine attribute, every human virtue, every created and uncreated beauty, which baffle all description, centre in him. Viewing him manifested in the flesh, he is the fairest ornament, and the highest glory of our nature. No such person to be found either in heaven or in earth. 'Being made so much better than the angels, he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they*.' He is greater than Jonah, the prophet; yea, than Solomon, king of Israel, in all his glory. He is the Prince of the kings of the earth; and infinitely superior to all the renowned prophets, priests, judges, and saviours, that ever arose in the church. In the person of Messiah, is united, the Ancient of days, and the Child born; God over all, blessed for ever, and that nature which, concerning the flesh, descended from the fathers; the form of God, and the form of a servant; the Lord of life, and the Man of sorrows. This sublime and wonderful character, which will for ever employ the admiring contemplation of the most exalted celestial intelligences, renders him inexpressibly precious and desir-

* Heb. i. 4.

able. Can there be any thing too arduous or difficult for him, to whom all power in heaven and earth is committed? Can our interests ever miscarry in his hands, whose compassions fail not, and whose faithfulness endureth to all generations?

Besides, he is equally precious, on account of the inestimable benefits which he confers. Having life in himself, he communicates eternal life to all those who build on him as their only foundation. When dead in trespasses and sins, obnoxious to endless destruction, he quickens them, and restores them to immortal life and felicity. When alienated from God, and enemies to him in their minds, and by wicked works, he reconciles them unto God, having made peace by the blood of his cross. When sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death, he translates them into his marvellous light. When subject to the service of sin, and the power of Satan, he brings them into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. He gives wisdom to the foolish, strength to them that have no might: he gives light to them that walk in darkness, and direction to them that are in perplexity. He forgives all their trespasses; he cleanses them from all unrighteousness; he sanctifies them in soul and body; he comforts them when they are cast down, and preserves them to his heavenly kingdom. Riches and honour are with him, yea, durable riches and righteousness: his fruit is better than gold, and his revenue than choice silver. He is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired, are not to be compared to him. He cannot be valued by the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or sapphire. Though despised and rejected of men, who know not his infinite worth, yet, in the view of all who have spiritual discernment, he appears worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. The thoughts of his transcendent excellence, and exuberant goodness, ought to melt
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our hearts into the tenderest emotions, and fill them with admiration and gratitude. It is added,

A sure foundation. Having treated of the foundation that the Lord God hath laid in Zion, it only remains, in discussing this subject, to shew its firmness and stability. The insufficiency of a foundation arises either from the unskilfulness of the architect—the decay of the materials—or the hostile attempts of its enemies. The foundation laid by the Lord God, is not subject to any of these causes of instability.—He possesses consummate skill and ability to execute the most stupendous labours; and all his works are done in truth and uprightness. He laid the foundations of the earth; and hath established it for ever, that it cannot be removed. He who made the world in his wisdom, and established the earth by his power, cannot be deficient in ability to lay a sure foundation in Zion, to support his church: and, in this prediction, he pledges his veracity that he would do it, and invites us to contemplate his marvellous work.—Nor can it possibly fail, through the decay of the materials of which it is composed. The heavens and the earth shall perish; but he, who is a tried stone, shall endure: yea, all of them shall wax old as doth a garment; as a vesture shall he change them, and they shall be changed; but he is the same, and his years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee. Time, which brings to ruin every foundation laid by human power, shall never impair that which God hath laid in Zion. It is an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations.—Nor shall the hostile attempts of its enemies be ever able to undermine or shake this foundation. Many inveterate foes, no doubt, it hath, possessed of much subtilty and strength, who cease not to endeavour, by their utmost exertions, more secretly, or more openly, to injure its interests. They vex themselves, however, in vain: no weapon formed against it, or the superstructure raised upon

upon it, shall ever prosper. The kings of the earth, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed: but however many and mighty they may be, they only imagine a vain thing, in which they can never succeed. He that sitteth in the heavens, shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision: he will pour contempt upon their presumptuous efforts, and his wrath upon themselves. Upon this immovable rock, this everlasting foundation, God will build his church; and the gates of hell, infernal principalities and powers, shall not prevail against it. Hence we joyfully conclude, that the foundation which God hath laid in Zion, shall never be removed, but endure throughout all generations.

Review the subject, brethren, and with it, your own spiritual condition, that you may become acquainted with your interest in what hath been said. If you are not intimately connected with this tried precious corner-stone, and built upon this sure foundation, your state is truly deplorable; and if you persist in rejecting the Saviour, he will prove to you a stone of stumbling, and rock of offence, on which you will stumble, and fall, and be broken. Cast yourselves down, then, before the Lord God: humbly acknowledge your unworthiness to be built into the habitation he is now, through the Spirit, preparing for himself: confess your wickedness, in having despised this precious corner-stone; and your extreme folly, in having substituted other grounds of confidence, in place of this sure foundation. Earnestly entreat, that he who calleth the things that are not as though they were, and who of stones can raise up children to Abraham, would build you upon the Rock of ages; and unite you to one another by the strong bond of perfection, that, being fitly framed together, you may grow up unto an holy temple in the Lord, which he will vouchsafe to fill with his presence and glory.

Have

Have you been happily brought off from dependence on those refuges of lies, in which multitudes place their trust? Have you renounced all confidence in yourselves, and in every creature; and come unto Jesus Christ as unto a living stone, that, as lively stones, you may be built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ? In consequence of this connection, do you partake of divine life, strength, beauty, and stability? and do you see such infinite excellence in this glorious object, that, in comparison of it, you account all other things as loss. Take then the comfort that flows from this high privilege; and adopt the triumphant language of the apostle Paul, saying, ‘ I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord *.’ You may be separated unexpectedly from your houses and lands, your dearest friends, and most intimate connections; or they may be removed suddenly from you: but no creature, not even death itself; shall dissolve the blessed union subsisting between you and Jesus Christ. Neglect not the duty that results from this glorious prerogative; but study to practise the precepts recommended by the apostles of our Lord and Saviour. ‘ As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving †. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life ‡. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build

* Rom. viii. 38, 39. † Col. ii. 6, 7. ‡ Jude 20, 21.

‘ you up, and to give you an inheritance among all
‘ them that are sanctified *.’

He that believeth shall not make haste. These words are twice cited by the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans. First, To confirm what he said concerning ‘ Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness, and attained not to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, ‘ Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone, and rock of offence; and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed †.’ Secondly, To prove the certain connection between faith and righteousness, between confession and salvation; and to shew, that they who believe on Jesus Christ shall be saved †. The apostle Peter also quotes them with some small variation, to shew the firmness and stability of Christians, as a spiritual temple, and holy priesthood †. You may observe, that Isaiah saith, He that believeth shall not make haste; the apostle of the Gentiles, He shall not be ashamed; the apostle of the circumcision, He shall not be confounded. The meaning is the same; for, according to a learned writer §, well acquainted with the oriental languages, the Hebrew word here used, hath three significations, to hasten, to be afraid, to be ashamed or confounded. The first is retained in our English version; the second, by the Syriac translation; and the third, by the Septuagint, and the apostles. He that believeth shall not be afraid of evil tidings; he will not fear, though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. He shall never be ashamed of his faith and hope; nor confounded in the great and terrible day of the Lord, when, amidst the dissolu-

* Acts xx. 32. † Rom. ix. 31, 32, 33. † Rom.
x. 11. † 1 Peter ii. 6. § Pocock Not. Miscel. in Pent.
Mosis, p. 10, 11.

tion of the heavens and the earth, he shall lift up his head with joy.

To believe, is to give credit to his testimony, in whose knowledge, integrity, and veracity, we safely confide, firmly persuaded of the truth of what is declared. In this sense, the word is frequently used in scripture; as where it is written, ‘ Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people utterly to abhor him *.’ This simple definition may assist us, in understanding the import of the character before us. He that believeth, gives undoubted credit to the testimony of the Lord God; and relies, with unsuspecting confidence, on his omnipotence, truth, and faithfulness, for the accomplishment of what he hath promised. He receives the record that God hath given concerning his Son; and, being fully assured of his perfect suitableness, and glorious all-sufficiency, to relieve all his necessities, he commits himself, and all his concerns, to the compassionate care of this mighty One. His faith, being the substance of things hoped for, gives the blessings contained in the promises of God a real subsistence in his mind, and enters him as it were upon the present possession. Being the evidence of things not seen, it realizes invisible objects, and places them fully before his view. In this manner, there is an intimate connection formed between the person that believeth, and the things which are believed; in consequence whereof, he participates in the love, the consolation, and other benefits, resulting from them. And this faith, whereby he believes the report of the gospel, is an active powerful principle: it purifies the heart; it overcomes the world; it worketh by love, and is accompanied with good works. The character is more simple, and easy to be understood, than some people would have us imagine. Indeed, it is not sufficient to entitle to this description, that we have heard of Jesus Christ;

* 1 Sam. xxvii. 12.

that we have some little acquaintance with his person, offices, and salvation; that we can talk of his character, and extol his compassion. By believing the record of God concerning him, we must set to our seal that God is true; and, by forsaking every refuge of lies, we must discover our confidence in that sure foundation, laid in Zion by infinite wisdom and love. To this character, which is every where represented in scripture as of the highest importance, is annexed the most glorious privileges; whilst the most awful judgments are denounced against him that believeth not. Our prophet affirms,

He that believeth shall not make haste. Rashness and precipitation are the effects of unbelief, which prompts to impatience, excites eager desires of present enjoyment, and prevents from quietly waiting for the salvation of the Lord. What but this induced the Israelites (who would not wait until Moses came down from the mountain) to make a golden calf, and then to fall down and worship the idol? What tempted the wicked servant to eat and drink with the drunken, and to beat his fellow-servant, but the thoughts that his Lord delayed his coming*? Infidelity excites those under its influence, hastily to grasp at present pleasures, possessions, and assistances; and will not allow them to stay for the accomplishment of God's promises. He that believeth, is of another and better spirit, and follows an opposite line of conduct. He shall not make haste to draw rash conclusions from God's delaying to grant him aid and relief; but he will patiently wait upon him that waits to be gracious. Though mercies are delayed, he will not, like one dismayed and terrified, flee to the creature for help and happiness, but will humbly stay upon God until he have mercy upon him. In every condition, he will place unshaken confidence in the promises of God, expecting, with undisturbed tranquil-

* Matth. xxiv. 48.

lity of mind, their fulfilment in due season. Though the vision tarry, he will wait for it; because it surely shall come, and shall not tarry.—Beware then of speaking, or acting, with precipitation. When David, king of Israel, was in haste, he uttered unguarded expressions; and said unto God, ‘I am cut off from before thine eyes*.’ He affirmed, ‘All men are liars †.’ The tide of corruption, joined with the wind of temptation, are apt to carry us with impetuosity into manifold dangers. Endeavour then, on all occasions, to speak and act with coolness and deliberation: let your words and actions be the result of mature consideration; and thus give evidence, that you believe the word of God.

17 Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place.

The prophet next addresses profane hypocritical mockers, who, rejecting the rich provision which God determined to make for the safety of his people, had entered into an agreement with death and the grave; and against them, he denounces very awful judgments. The divine procedure toward them, should be marked with the strictest justice, untempered by clemency and mercy; whilst the people with whom they had entered into covenant, were to attack, and to overwhelm them with desolation. Having spoken of the salvation which God was about to accomplish for his church, in reference to the work of a skilful architect, he continues the allusion in the first part of the verse, when threatening the awful punishment to be inflicted upon those who derided his servants and instructions.—*Judgment also will I lay to the line*, that there may not be the least defi-

* Psal. xxxi. 22.

† Psal. cxvi. 11.

ciency in the deserved calamities, which shall be exactly commensurate to the demerit of the crimes which they are intended to punish.—*And righteousness to the plummet*, that I may discover the strictest regard to equity and justice in the administration of divine judgments, so as they may neither lean to the side of mercy, nor to its opposite, rigorous severity. The remarkable vision which was shewed by the Lord to the prophet Amos, hath some resemblance to the prediction now before us: ‘Behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in his hand.—Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more *,’ &c. From all which we learn, that the Lord ponders, with most exact attention, all the distinctions of characters, times, and circumstances, all the various motives both to lenity and severity; and that he acts in a manner suited to his perfect knowledge.

And the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, &c. The numerous powerful armies, which, by divine command, were to be sent into the land of Canaan, to inflict deserved judgments upon its inhabitants, for their vain confidence in an arm of flesh, were intended by the hail that is here mentioned. The wisdom and power, riches, counsels, and allies, on which their delusive hopes of safety were founded, were the refuge of lies, which was to be entirely overthrown, and clean swept away, by the calamities wherewith they were to be visited.—*And the waters shall overflow the hiding-place.* The mighty armies, of which the prophet speaks, in figurative language, were, like a flood, to come suddenly into the land of Israel, to reach far beyond expectation, and, with irresistible force, to overflow and spread desolation into every place. Even the hiding-places, from which many

* Amos vii. 7, 8.

might promise themselves security, were not to exempt them from the general ruin.—Men are most apt to fall, when they imagine that they stand upon an even place; and wicked people are often in the most imminent danger, when they suppose they are in the greatest safety. ‘ A deceived heart (saith Isaiah) hath turned them aside, that they cannot deliver their soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in our right-hand *? Take heed therefore, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin †.’—This prediction was completely verified by the Romans, who, like a storm of hail, swept away the refuges of lies, wherein this people had taken shelter; and who, like waters, overflowed their land, and executed upon them the righteous judgments which our prophet foretold.

18 ¶ And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.

This and the following verse, suggest the reasons why the above predicted divine judgments were to be executed, and represent the alarming consequences wherewith they were to be attended.—The agreement that they had made with death and hell, by which, I have supposed, were signified the Roman empire, from whence they expected defence and safety, being broken and dissolved, they were to be exposed to the power and vengeance of that great people. Deprived of that assistance from Heaven, which, by their enormous transgressions, they had

* Isaiah xlv. 20.

† Heb. iii. 12, 13.

forfeited, they were utterly unable to resist the forces brought against them by that powerful empire, who trampled upon them, and afterward totally destroyed them. In this sentence, our prophet blends together three metaphors, which are all exceedingly suitable to the subject. The hostile army, which was to be employed in punishing the Jews, he represents as a scourge; then as waters, that were to overflow the land; and lastly, as an incensed hero, who, having conquered, was to tread them under foot, and to treat them with the greatest contempt.—Though men may form powerful alliances, from which they may promise themselves many advantages, yet their expectations may be miserably disappointed. The Lord bringeth to nought the counsel of the Heathen, and maketh the devices of the people of none effect. It is the glorious prerogative of the Almighty, to frustrate the wicked designs which are formed in opposition to his purposes. He baffled the foolish attempts of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to retain in bondage the children of Israel: he confounded the dangerous device of Haman, the Agagite, which had for its object, the destruction of the Jews: he defeated the machinations of Herod, and the Pharisees, against Jesus Christ: and he broke the covenant that the scornful rulers of Judah, who made light of the foundation which he laid in Zion, had entered into with the Romans.

19 From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night; and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report.

These words delineate some circumstances accompanying the predicted calamities, and the great distress to which they were to give rise.—The overflowing scourge, mentioned in the preceding verse, is here spoken of, as going forth to punish scornful transgressors.

gressors. From the time wherein the Romans commenced hostilities against the Jews, who broke covenant with them, they were to go forth against these objects of their vengeance; and to lay such fast hold upon them, that they could not escape.—*For morning by morning shall it pass over.* Their enemies, intent upon spreading devastation over the whole land, were to be employed for this purpose, with unwearied diligence, until they laid waste all the country of Palestine. Divine judgments were not to make any unnecessary delay, but to make progress by day and night.—*And it shall be a vexation, &c.* Some evils are of such vast magnitude, that the very report of them creates continual vexation: the rumour that reaches the ear, penetrates to the heart, and gives it much uneasiness. So alarming and terrible were the calamities that befel the Jewish people, that their minds could not fail to be distressed with perplexing fears, and overwhelming sorrows. Those who are stout-hearted in times of prosperity, when they apprehend no immediate danger, are often most timid and frightened at the approach of divine judgments coming upon the earth. If the report produced such effects, in what a deplorable condition would they find themselves, when inevitable destruction seized upon them, and they could not escape? The words may be thus rendered: ‘For only vexation will cause you to understand doctrine.’ This translation suggests a good interpretation of this passage, which may be thus explained. Ye who would not attend to the precepts and predictions of Jehovah, which he gave you by his servants, shall be brought, by other means than those which have hitherto been employed, to understand their truth and importance. Vexation and anguish shall render you better acquainted with them, than you have been in prosperous days. Those who will not learn instruction by gentle, may expect to be taught by severe methods. Take heed then lest, by obstinacy and perversity, you provoke God to teach you,

you, as he did the people of Judah, by corrections and vexations.

20 For the bed is shorter than that *a man* can stretch himself on *it*; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in *it*.

These words are subjoined as an argument, to evince the truth of what is above asserted, that those who resort to refuges of lies, shall certainly feel disappointment and vexation.—They contain a proverbial saying, the meaning of which seems to be, that all the means of obtaining protection and safety, beside those which God hath provided, shall prove insufficient to secure from impending evils. The Jewish beds were only mattresses, laid on the floor; and the cover was a sheet, or carpet, laid over it, in which the person wrapped himself. In this adage, there is an allusion to the condition of one who, being weary and inclined to rest, goes to bed, that he may get refreshing repose. Having betaken himself to a bed that is too short for him, and having got a covering that is too narrow to wrap himself in, he is disappointed of the comfortable rest that he expected to enjoy; and, instead of getting agreeable warmth and refreshment, he becomes cold, restless, and uneasy. This painful state represents, the distressed disappointed condition of those who hide themselves under falsehood and refuges of lies, in order to obtain either temporal or spiritual deliverance. The truth of this aphorism, thus explained, was exemplified in the Jews, who resorted to other expedients for safety than divine wisdom had ordained, and found all their expectations frustrated. In consequence of this foolish conduct, they were filled with shame and anguish; and exposed to that destruction, in which they perished by the hands of the Romans, with whom they were formerly in league, and on whom they reposed their confidence.—The above illustration of this
proverbial

proverbial saying, points out another application of it to those who, though Jews outwardly, or Christians nominally, yet seek for spiritual relief and salvation from other quarters than from him, concerning whom it is affirmed, ‘ That there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved *.’ Apply it then to every thing, besides his mediation and Spirit, in which you are apt to place your hopes, from which you expect relief and comfort in the time of affliction, and in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Your natural endowments, however great, can afford neither rest to your souls, nor defence in the day of wrath. Your worldly enjoyments, however extensive, cannot yield support and consolation, in the season of danger and divine displeasure. Your external privileges, however valuable, cannot give you tranquillity and safety, in the time of impending desolation and ruin. Your religious attainments, however eminent, cannot secure you from the punishment of your transgressions, or prove a sufficient foundation whereon to build your hopes of eternal salvation. If you expect redemption, and rest to your souls, from any of these things, however excellent in themselves, and not from Jesus Christ, who is the only hope set before us, I see not how you can claim the character of Christians; who count all things loss, that they may win him, and be found in him.

21 For the LORD shall rise up as *in* mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as *in* the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.

In this verse, our prophet illustrates, confirms, and concludes the predictions, that respect the awful judgments which God was about to inflict upon the pro-

* Acts iv. 12.

fane and hypocritical people of the Jews. He explains and amplifies the subject by two comparisons, both which are intended to shew the greatness of the calamities that were to befall them.—*For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim.* In this expression, there seems to be a manifest allusion to the conduct of some great personage, who, incensed against those who have highly provoked him, is determined no longer to conceal his displeasure, but to execute righteous vengeance upon those who have excited his resentment. For this purpose, he arises to exert his power in punishing their crimes. In like manner, the Lord was to rise up as one prepared for action, that he might employ his power, in recompensing the atrocious wickednesses that had been committed by those whom he had taken for his people. At the time to which this prophecy refers, Jehovah was to appear, as he did of old on mount Perazim. The remarkable event alluded to, is recorded, 2 Sam. v. 19. and following verses, where it is thus written: ‘ And
‘ the Lord said unto David, Go up to the Philistines;
‘ for I will doubtless deliver them into thine hand.
‘ And David came to Baal-perazim, and David smote
‘ them there, and said, The Lord hath broken forth
‘ upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of wa-
‘ ters. Therefore he called the name of that place
‘ Baal-perazim,’ &c. From the history, it plainly appears, that, on this memorable occasion, God was pleased to interpose in an extraordinary manner; and, by some remarkable judgment, to overthrow the Philistines, who came forth to fight against David, king of Israel.—The other similitude, by which this prophecy is illustrated, is taken from the wonderful defeat of the kings of Canaan, that met together to fight against Israel; the circumstances of which are mentioned by Joshua, chap. x. 8. *et seq.* where we read,
‘ That God delivered them into the hand of Joshua:
‘ that a man of them was not able to stand before
‘ him: and that the Lord cast down great hail-stones
‘ from

‘ from heaven upon them, and they died,’ &c. So very great was to be the slaughter and desolation here foretold, that it should resemble either, or both of these memorable interpositions of Jehovah, for the destruction of his people’s enemies.—Indeed, the execution of this threatening, by the Romans, upon the Jews, fully corresponded with this prediction: for after, like the Canaanites of old, they had opposed the execution of the divine purpose; after they rose up in hostility against Jesus Christ, and would not submit to David’s Son and Lord, that he might rule over them; they were consumed by divine vengeance, as the Romans themselves saw, and acknowledged.

That he may do his work, his strange work, &c. I suppose, that the same dispensations of providence are intended by the work, and the act of Jehovah. That work, or act, is called strange, which is reckoned uncommon, surprising, and that cannot be easily accounted for. When the people saw the man afflicted by the palsy, cured by a word from our Saviour, and walking home, carrying his couch, they glorified God, saying, We have seen strange things to day. The strange work, or act of God, whereof our prophet speaks, can be no other, than the awful desolating judgments which he was to execute upon those who professed to be connected with him as his people. This is emphatically called, his strange work, as it is not agreeable to his gracious nature and inclination, and forms a contrast to the ordinary course of his dispensations; who doth not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men; who hath no pleasure in the death of sinners, and doth not delight in trampling under foot the prisoners of the earth. The judgments which the Almighty inflicts, are, as it were, extorted from his beneficent hand. He delights in exercising loving-kindness, righteousness, and tender mercy in the earth: often doth he shew mercy, but seldom doth he execute dreadful judgments.—The people, against whom this threatening was directed, had,

had, for a long period, enjoyed innumerable favours from Heaven; and judgment, comparatively speaking, was to them a strange act. Indeed, God often severely corrected them for their sins; but now, as Moses anciently foretold, ‘The Lord was to make ‘their plagues wonderful*,’ beyond what had been seen or heard in times past. The greater part of the nation was to be rejected of God. That highly favoured people, in whose behalf the Most High had given many signal displays of his power and providence, were to be cast off: that temple, in which it was believed he had his peculiar residence, was to be destroyed: that state, which he himself had formed and preserved, was to be entirely overturned: that people, whose battles he had often fought, he was himself to oppose, and extirpate from their own land. This was indeed a strange work: ‘The kings of the ‘earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would ‘not have believed, that the adversary and the enemy ‘should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem †.’—Those who distinguish themselves by the abuse and contempt of the privileges which they enjoy, have just cause to fear, that God will visit them with the most terrible calamities. The sins of the Jews were greatly multiplied, and aggravated beyond those of other nations; and, therefore, the Lord inflicted upon them strange and extraordinary punishments. Our sins, who are favoured with the gospel, are still more heinous than theirs, in as much as we reject and abuse still greater mercy, love, and grace, than they enjoyed. We ought therefore to remember, that, unless we repent, and return to the Lord from our evil ways, our punishment may be greater, and more strange, than that which they suffered. What a powerful motive doth this consideration suggest, to engage us to abandon our transgressions, and every

* Deut. xxviii. 59, 60, 61.

† Lam. iv. 12.

refuge of lies; and to build all our hopes on the sure foundation that God hath laid in Zion!

22 Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.

This part of our prophet's discourse is here concluded, by a practical inference, containing a salutary advice, in which he admonishes all who hear his voice, to avoid a very wicked and dangerous practice.—Since the Almighty hath, in this explicit manner, declared, that he will execute righteous vengeance upon profane scoffers, beware of deriding the scriptures, the servants, the ordinances, the providences of God, or of turning things sacred into ridicule. Avoid every approach to this abominable practice, which must be odious to every person of good sense; which will incur the censure of the godly, and expose to the wrath of the Almighty. It is no small degree of impiety, to call in question the veracity of God, and to disobey his authority; but to deride his truths, to mock his messengers, and to laugh at his laws, is wickedness in the extreme. There are three degrees, by which men advance to this enormous height of profaneness. They begin, by walking in the counsel of the ungodly; they next proceed, to stand in the way of sinners; after which, they ascend to the highest degree of profanity, and take the seat of the scorner. Would you avoid, as you ought, this last step, in an irreligious course? cautiously shun making the least advances toward this dangerous extreme.—*Lest your bands be made strong.* Among other things that God doth to those who are guilty of atrocious crimes, he binds and holds them fast by his righteous judgments, so that, unless their bands be loosed, they cannot possibly escape. The bands whereby they are bound, are the cords of iniquity,
the

the fetters of affliction, and the chains of darkness, in which presumptuous scornful transgressors are often reserved to the judgment of the great day*. The expression intimates, the slavish miserable condition in which mockers of divine things are detained; that by persisting in this wickedness, both their sin and misery is increased, so that their bands receive additional strength, and their state becomes more confirmed. Be not then mockers, lest your bands be made strong; and consequently, your salvation become more improbable, and more difficult.

For I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth. The same sentiment occurred, chap. x. 23. where it is thus written: ‘For the Lord God of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined in the midst of all the land.’ After what was there said to illustrate the subject, I shall not stay to resume or enlarge at present. Those to whom this prophecy was primarily addressed, considering Isaiah as a man of like passions with themselves, might be apt to think, that his predictions were of little or no consequence, and therefore might despise both him and them. To prevent this dangerous mistake, they are plainly informed, that the judgments he denounced, were intimated to him by the Lord God of hosts, and actually determined by his irrevocable decree. He revealed to Isaiah, that he might make known to them, the terrible consumption; the extensive desolation which he had purposed to bring upon the whole earth. The earth, I suppose, must be understood here, as in some other places of scripture, in its restricted sense, as signifying the land of Canaan. This determined consumption was to be inflicted by means of God’s awful judgments, the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, which were to devour the inhabitants of Judea. This prophecy received its full accomplishment, when

* 2 Peter ii. 4.

the Jewish state, city, and temple, were overthrown by the Romans.—The desolations which God sends upon kingdoms and cities, are sometimes very terrible: and therefore, in the prophetic scriptures, they are represented as the noise of a great army; as the roaring of the sea, in a storm; as a mighty earthquake, that shakes every thing to its foundation: they are compared to a strong tempest, that drives all before it; to the overflowing of waters, that deluges the country wherever they reach; to the great hail, that spreads universal desolation where it falls. No wonder that even a renowned warrior, who feared neither lion nor giant, should have acknowledged, that he was afraid of God's righteous judgments. Let us reverence the majesty and providence of Jehovah, stand in awe, and sin not.

23 ¶ Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech.

The prophet concludes this part of his discourse, with an elegant parable or allegory, in which he employs a variety of images, all taken from agriculture and threshing, to explain and defend God's method of dealing with his people. This imagery is admirably suited to illustrate the subject, to which it is here consecrated.—The introduction is solemn and interesting: *Give ye ear, and hear my voice, &c.* The prophet repeatedly demands the closest attention, from persons of every description, to what he was about to deliver. Young and old, rich and poor, whatsoever be your character and condition, hearken with diligence and reverence, with earnestness and solicitude. Your ears were given you, not merely for ornament, but for use; not only that you might derive entertainment from conversation, but that, by their means, you may receive spiritual improvement and edification. Employ then the noble faculty of hearing, in attending to the voice of God,
by

by Isaiah.—*Hearken, and hear my speech.* Would you obey this summons? you must be attentive, not only with your bodily ears, but you ought seriously to apply your minds to what is said; and so hearken to his speech, as to receive, understand, believe, and obey it. Endeavour to feel, then to yield to the force of truth; and to act under a powerful conviction of its excellence and importance. There were many of old, who heard the discourses of the prophets, who neither understood, believed, nor obeyed them, as is abundantly evident from several passages of scripture. ‘Hear, O my people (said God, by his servant David), and I will testify to thee*.’ What were the consequences, we are informed, ver. 11. ‘My people would not hearken to my voice:’ they rejected his call, and refused to comply with his requisition. Let us learn wisdom from their folly, and obedience from their obstinacy. The words of God, by our prophet, are like fine gold, the smallest particles of which are valuable, and carefully preserved. All of them are truly precious, and the least portion ought not to be neglected or lost. One tittle should in no wise be suffered to pass unnoticed; and the whole ought to be carefully collected into the repository of our hearts, that we may not offend against God. There are, however, some truths, which have a signature of peculiar excellence stamped upon them, that demand our special regard; and among these, are the following, to which this admonition is prefixed. Give ear then diligently, ponder his speech, receive his words, and hide his commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding. This is your truest wisdom, your indispensable duty, and highest interest.

24 Doth the ploughman plough all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground?

* Psa. lxxxi. 8.

In this and the following verses, to the end of the chapter, is contained the instructive parable, to which we are called to give diligent heed. It is an elegant and beautiful composition, simple, regular, and complete in its form and colouring, delivered in figurative style, which, under the literal sense of the words, conceals another and more important meaning. The imagery is taken from familiar objects, in one of the most useful occupations of human life, the labour in the field and the barn, which were generally known among the Jews, and are well understood by many among you. To perceive the design, and full import of this allegory, it is necessary to consider the literal meaning of the words; which I, therefore, proceed to investigate.—*Doth the ploughman plough all day, &c.?* The husbandman, or the person whom he employs, regularly proceeds to perform the various parts of agricultural work. The first, and one principal part of his business, is, with skill and assiduity, to till the ground, and to prepare it for receiving the seed he intends to cast into it in due season. By this necessary laborious operation, in which he is constantly occupied for great part of the day, he turns up the ground, he cuts the roots of the weeds that may have spread through the soil, and regularly lays one furrow close to another, until he hath got over the whole field, and made it ready, against a favourable opportunity offer, for farther cultivation and improvement. If, after this work is finished, the ground remains hard and untoward, and wears a rough appearance, he then proceeds to break the clods with some of the implements of husbandry, and to bring upon it a fine mould and smooth surface. Our prophet states this matter in a questionary form, intimating, that the answer to this inquiry is generally known; and that every person, acquainted with agriculture, agrees, that this is the first thing requisite to be done to the land that is in an improved state.

25 When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat, and the appointed barley, and the rye in their place?

After the husbandman, with much pains, hath ploughed the ground, and smoothed its surface, his next business is, to sow the several sorts of grain, which he judges best suited to the soil in its present condition.—*Doth he not cast abroad the fitches?* a kind of seed, pretty well known in this country; and frequently sown in Judea, as by the farmers among us, for the use of cattle.—*And scatter the cummin;* a small seed, much cultivated in Canaan, which the inhabitants tithed along with mint and anise, as we learn from the New Testament.—*And cast in the principal wheat,* which of all sorts of grain, is the chief and most valuable; and made a considerable part of the produce of the land of Israel.—*And the appointed barley, and the rye in their place;* or, as the Hebrew words may be translated, the wheat in the principal, and barley in the appointed place. The best and the most excellent grain is sown into the richest and best cultivated grounds, which are most adapted to yield plentiful luxuriant crops; whilst those that are less valuable, have their several places allotted them, which the skill and discretion of the husbandman point out as most proper. This suiting of the several seeds to different soils and circumstances, is the next thing in the process of well-managed agriculture, on which it is unnecessary here to enlarge.

26 For his God doth instruct him to discretion, *and* doth teach him.

The sentiment expressed in these words, hath been adopted by most nations, who have attributed agriculture

culture to the suggestions of the Deity. Every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, or shadow of turning. It is God who hath taught men to dig out of the bowels of the earth, iron, brass, silver, gold, and other metals, and to apply them to purposes useful to society. It is God who gives them wisdom and understanding, to work in gold and purple, in fine linen and muslin, which gives employment to the poor, and proves ornamental to the rich. It is God who teacheth their hands to war, and their fingers to fight, against those who would unjustly hurt or destroy them. God giveth to men all that knowledge and discretion whereby they manage their affairs. He taught man at first the art of ploughing and sowing the ground; and still he vouchsafes to instruct the husbandman, how and when to perform these necessary operations with the greatest advantage and success.—Do you ask, How doth God instruct him to discretion in this business? I answer, He confers upon him the noble faculties of reason and understanding, to discern the nature of things, and thence to deduce useful conclusions; to discover the most proper seasons and methods of performing the several parts of his work, so as to accomplish the end he hath in view. He furnishes him with wisdom and prudence, to order his affairs, to adjust and manage whatsoever relates to his business, so that every thing may be done in its proper time and place. He forms him with a capacity to attend to every circumstance conducive to his benefit, and to convert them into means of improvement in this useful science. He endows him with a propensity to inquire into causes and effects, which contribute to increase his knowledge, and to assist him in performing aright the several operations belonging to good husbandry. To all which, I add, that God giveth him a teachable disposition: he inclines him to receive instruction, to profit by the
experience

experience of others, and blesteth to him these means of meliorating his condition.

To the Lord God, then, you husbandmen are indebted for all the skill by which you manage your farms, and for all the success with which your labours have been crowned. Surely you ought not to be insensible of your manifold obligations to God, and ungrateful for such a profusion of kindness as you have received from Heaven. Had I, had any person taught you some valuable improvement in agriculture, you would certainly have considered yourselves thereby laid under peculiar obligations to the man who communicated to you the useful discovery. What dutiful returns of thanksgiving and obedience do you then owe to Almighty God, who is not only the Proprietor of the grounds that you possess, and the houses wherein you dwell (for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof), but who gives you rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons; who teaches you discretion to guide your affairs, affords you strength for your work, and his blessing upon your fields! The landlord, of whom you hold your farms, expects you to pay him the stipulated rent at the term agreed upon, and you are desirous punctually to fulfil your engagements. Be equally attentive to discharge the still stronger obligations you are under to the great Lord of all. Shall the blessed God, to whom you are infinitely more indebted than to the whole world, be overlooked and neglected? Shall he have no revenue of praise, and honour, and glory, given to him, for all the good things that you enjoy? Will you presume to cultivate his lands, by the discretion he hath taught you, and the strength he hath given you, and yet decline to worship him in your families, to give him the seventh part of your time, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity, and to give of your substance to the poor, which he condescends to regard as lent to himself? ' I beseech
' you, by the mercies of God, that you present your
' bodies

‘ bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto
 ‘ God, which is your reasonable service *.’

27 For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing-instrument, neither is a cart-wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod.

The discretion which God is pleased to teach the husbandman, not only directs him in tilling and sowing his grounds, but also in managing his corns, after they are cut down; and particularly, in threshing them, so as, in the best manner, to separate the grain from the chaff and the straw. Notwithstanding threshing does not seem to be a very ingenious contrivance, yet divine instruction is requisite to teach the best way of doing this work, and what are the most proper instruments to use in performing it. Four methods of threshing, by different instruments, suited to the nature and condition of the corns to which they are applied, are here mentioned, all of which were anciently used. There was the staff, rod, or flail, wherewith the fitches, the cummin, and other small grain, were beat out, that were too tender to be treated by other methods. With this simple instrument, it is probable, that Ruth beat out the barley which she had gleaned †. There was a sort of drag, or frame, made of strong heavy planks, shod with iron, that was drawn by horses, or oxen, over the sheaves, after they were spread upon the threshing-floor. To this practice, Moses seems to have referred, in the statute, which requires, that ‘ the ox shall not be muzzled that treadeth out the corn †.’ There was a threshing-instrument, having rollers armed with iron-teeth, or wheels, probably somewhat of a similar construction with those used among us. Of this kind,

* Rom. xii. 1. † See Ruth ii. 17. ‡ Deut. xxv. 4.

our prophet speaks: 'Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing-instrument, having teeth *.' There was also a little cart, or sledge, moved by cattle, that had likewise wheels, and edges like a saw, by means of which the corn was separated from the straw, which it cut to pieces, for fodder to the cattle. Now, our prophet affirms, that God teacheth the husbandman what instrument to use, in order to thresh out, to most advantage, the several sorts of grain. He does not therefore beat out his fitches with a large threshing-instrument, but with a staff, or flail. He does not turn round a cart-wheel upon the cummin, which might hurt, if not destroy it, but beats it out with a rod. The wheat, the barley, and the rye, which are large, strong, and weighty, he threshes out with the threshing-instrument, with the wheel of his cart, or by bringing the drag over them.

28 Bread-corn is bruised: because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen.

The instruction that God giveth to the husbandman, teaches him to conduct with prudence and frugality, every thing relative to the threshing-out of his corns, and preparing them for being made into bread. This, if I mistake not, is the import of this verse, on which, after what hath been already said, it is unnecessary to expatiate. As it would be a wearisome and endless work to be ever breaking and bruising the corn that is to be made into bread, by the same instruments whereby it is threshed, it is bruised and grinded into meal or flour, at the mill that is erected for this very purpose. By this process, it is made ready for the use of man, and yields good returns to the industrious skilful farmer.

* Isaiah xli. 15.

29 This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, *which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.*

All the good management of the husbandman in his agricultural affairs, beautifully represented in the preceding verses, is the effect of divine instruction: it proceeds from the Lord of hosts, who, by his wise providence, hath established the connection and order of all things in heaven and in earth. It cometh from him who hath endowed man with reason and prudence, whereby he is enabled to conduct his affairs in such a manner, as tends to promote both the welfare of individuals, and of society at large. Wisdom, profitable to direct, is his rich donation, *who is wonderful in counsel*, and worthy to be adored, on account of all the wise purposes that he hath formed and executed—who is also *excellent in working*; supremely glorious in all his dispensations of providence, which, when contemplated aright, by an enlightened mind, exhibit a just emblem of that beautiful order which is manifest in the administration of the concerns of his church. Of this, an admirable specimen is given in the allegory we have been considering. As the husbandman, by the exercise of reason, recollection, and industry, regularly carries forward the several operations in agriculture, according to their instituted order, in their proper season; so almighty God, in his infinite wisdom and prudence, proceeds in dealing with his people: and comparing the latter with the former, our admiration of the depth of his counsels, and the magnificence of his works, ought to be excited and increased.

Let us now consider the spiritual import, and chief design of this parable, of which we have heard the literal meaning. Of this, the prophet himself says nothing, leaving the whole matter to be investigated from the argument of the preceding prophecy, the analogy, connection, and nature of the subject, of which

which he had been discoursing. Attentive meditation, great caution and circumspection, are necessary, that we do not injure the truth, or depart from the intention of the inspired writer.—The peculiar design of the figurative and parabolic style, is to exhibit spiritual objects in a clearer and more striking light, in a sublimer and more forcible manner; and, by adopting this mode of instruction, our prophet, under the conduct of the Holy Ghost, adds a lustre to the most sublime, and a force to the most important topic he is now discussing.

The scope of this elegant allegorical discourse, is to explain and defend God's method of dealing with his people, to shew the equity and wisdom, and to point out the end of his providential dispensations toward them, which is so often mistaken by erring mortals. In executing this design, our prophet teaches, that the reasons or grounds upon which divine providence acts toward the church, are similar to those which determine the prudent husbandman in managing his tillage. He employs, with much skill and discretion, various methods with his farm; ploughing, smoothing, and sowing his land with proper seeds; reaping, threshing, and grinding the corn which it produces, that it may be made into bread; in which the whole process terminates. In like manner, God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Husbandman of his church, by the ministry of his servants, ploughs and breaks up the fallow ground of mens hearts, and prepares them, by different means, for receiving the seed to be cast into them. He accurately observes times and seasons, the several conditions and capacities of those whom he takes under his special inspection, and accommodates his dispensations to their circumstances.—The land in tillage, is emblematical of the church of God, to which Jehovah extends his distinguishing care, and which, by his providence and servants, he cultivates and improves; and, therefore, they are said to be God's husbandry.—The ploughing

ploughing, and breaking of the clods in the field, represent those peculiar works of providence and grace, whereby the Most High meliorates and sanctifies the minds of his people, changes the condition of their hearts, cuts up the roots of vicious dispositions, subdues their rough and corrupt passions, so that they are restored to sound reason, and the knowledge of themselves. Of this sort, are, convictions of sin, and divine judgments which give force to these convictions, which break the obdurate hearts of sinners, and prepare them for bringing forth fruit unto God.—

The prudence of the husbandman, displayed in sowing various kinds of grain, in the several soils best adapted to them, sets forth, the infinite wisdom of Jehovah, in appointing the servants whom he employs, to sow the seed of his word; to administer instruction, reproof, exhortation, and comfort, in every proper season, through the different districts in which they labour, in a manner suited to the condition of those committed to their care.—In ordering them to cast into some places, the word of the law, which concludeth all under sin, denounces awful threatenings against transgressors, and points out the paths of righteousness, wherein men ought to walk; and into others, the word of the gospel, which publishes redemption from all iniquity, promises life and salvation, and opens the joyful prospect of glory, honour, and immortality.—The several instruments and modes of threshing, employed by the husbandman, exhibit the various severe methods suited to the circumstances of his people, whereby God separates them from the straw and the chaff; the ungodly and hypocritical with whom they are intermixed, the corruptions and vanities by which they are blinded. Sometimes he threshes them only with a rod or staff, as at the Babylonish captivity, when the Jewish people were delivered from idolatry. At other times, they are bruised and pressed, by a threshing instrument or wheel, as they were by the Romans; from whom

they received a severe threshing, at the time of harvest, when the Lord purged his floor, gathered his wheat into his garner, and consumed the chaff.

To conclude, if he that plougheth the ground, and thresheth the corn, is indebted to the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working, for wisdom and discretion to manage his affairs, how much more need have we to be divinely taught the spiritual exercises of breaking up the fallow ground of our hearts, and of sowing in righteousness, that we may reap in mercy? Deeply sensible that we need wisdom to conduct our spiritual concerns, let us betake ourselves to earnest supplication, which is the instituted mean of obtaining this inestimable blessing from the Father of lights. For our encouragement, let us be firmly persuaded of this comfortable truth, that God giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not. Solomon asked wisdom from God; and he gave him wisdom, and riches, and honour. Abraham asked of him a son; and God gave him posterity, in number, as the stars of heaven. The debtor, of whom our Saviour speaks, requested forbearance for a little; and the master generously forgave the whole debt. The apostle Paul besought the Lord, that the messenger of Satan might depart from him; and he received for answer, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. ‘Ask then, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened*.’

* Matth. vii. 7, 8.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THIS chapter contains another section of the second discourse, recorded in the third part of these prophecies. The inspired prophet, addressing himself chiefly to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, under the mystical name of Ariel, foretels the great calamities which, in process of time, were to be inflicted upon that city; and to commence with the expedition of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, into Judea. He labours to convince them of their insensibility as to divine dispensations, and their ignorance of the true doctrine of salvation, on account of which he denounces against them the terrible judgments of the Almighty. Notwithstanding, he declares, that the church of God should not be left in a destitute forlorn condition, the time being fast approaching, when great revolutions were to be accomplished in the world; the disobedient Jewish people being rejected, the Gentiles, who had been hitherto involved in darkness, were to be illuminated by the knowledge of the truth, and to manifest themselves to be the true spiritual children of Abraham. These predictions are interspersed with some important truths, and precious promises, intended for the consolation of the godly.—This portion of the discourse seems to have been principally intended, to convince the Jews of their unacquaintedness with the ways of God, their corruption of divine truths, and their detestable hypocrisy, by which, under the veil of external profession of religion, they covered the most enormous crimes. The prophet, therefore, brings forth to view, their gross impiety, which he sharply reproves; and shews them, what would be the consequences of their fatal stupidity and corruption, which would inevitably expose them to temporal and spiritual judgments.—The prophecy begins with denouncing the temporal calamities

mities which were to befall the inhabitants of Jerusalem, on account of their hypocrisy, pride, and other sins, ver. 1.—4. It proceeds to give an admirable description of the terrible overthrow of Sennacherib's army, that besieged Jerusalem, and to shew the greatness and suddenness of that astonishing event, ver. 5.—8. This is followed with predictions of the various spiritual judgments whereby the people of Judea were to be visited, and the lamentable consequences with which they were to be accompanied, ver. 10.—17. It concludes, with obscurely foretelling the call of the Gentiles, who, for a long period of time, had been walking in darkness, to the knowledge and worship of the only true God, and the happy effects with which that great event was to be attended, ver. 18.—24.

CHAP. XXIX.

WO to Ariel, to Ariel the city *where* David dwelt: add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices.

This prophecy commences with a general denunciation of misery and wo against Jerusalem, here spoken of by the name of Ariel. From the whole prophecy, it appears, that the metropolis of Judea was intended by this description, though its meaning seems obscure and doubtful. Some have supposed, that this name signifies the *lion of God*; and that it was applied to Jerusalem, to intimate the uncommon strength of that city, which, for a long period, had withstood the assaults of its many powerful enemies. Some have been of opinion, that this designation is compounded of two words, which denote the *fire of God*; and that the capital of Judea was so called, from the hearth of the great altar of burnt-offerings, whereon

whereon the sacrifices were consumed. Others have conjectured, that the name is made up of two words, signifying the *mountain of God*; and that it was given to Jerusalem, because it was situated upon mount Zion, which God had chosen for his habitation. I pretend not to determine which of these suppositions is best founded, and ought to be preferred. Each of them seems plausible and natural.—The following description clearly determines the place of which our prophet here speaks: *The city where David dwelt.* Sacred history informs us, ‘That David, king of Israel, took the strong hold of Zion (the fortification erected by the Jebusites, on the summit of that mountain): the same is the city of David*.’ In this place, that renowned warrior took up his residence; for it is written, ‘David dwelt in the castle, therefore they called it, The city of David †.’ Though this fortress was undoubtedly the strongest and best defended part of the city Jerusalem, esteemed the most impregnable, and unlikely to suffer from the assaults of enemies, yet against this citadel, our prophet denounces misery, wo, and desolation.

Add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. The import of these words is shortly this: Ye profane and hypocritical people, who foolishly imagine, that, by continuing to perform external rites, by celebrating your solemn festivals, and offering great numbers of sacrifices, ye can appease the divine displeasure—go on, from one year to another, as ye now do, in discharging these outward acts of homage to God—but know, that ye shall never conciliate the favour of Jehovah by such formal superficial services; that whilst ye indulge in detestable hypocrisy, and remain destitute of faith, and love to God, ye shall not escape these threatened deserved calamities, which shall terminate in the overthrow of your state, city, and temple.—How absurd to imagine, that God, who

* 2 Sam. v. 7.

† 1 Chron. xi. 7.

is a Spirit, could be pleased with sacrifices, on any other account than as they were symbolical of some holy sacrifice, really propitiatory, and acceptable in his sight; and to think to please God by an external, without an internal service, or by any offering, without special reference to Jesus Christ!

2 Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow; and it shall be unto me as Ariel.

Notwithstanding of these outward expressions of respect, God declares, that he would distress, or, as the Hebrew word denotes, he would hem in Jerusalem on every side, so that the city should be entirely overpowered by its enemies; and, by means of the sword, famine, and pestilence, its inhabitants were to be reduced to the greatest straits, and to sustain the most complicated affliction.—*And there shall be heaviness and sorrow*, which are the natural consequences of great distress. The terrible calamities to which they were to be exposed, the severe reproaches with which they were to be loaded, the extreme disgrace with which they were to be treated, and the moving spectacles that were every where to be exhibited, would all unite, to augment their vexation and grief. The prophet Jeremiah, therefore, introduces the citizens of Zion, deploring the miseries of their condition, in these pathetic terms: ‘He poured out his fury like fire. The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation *.’—*And it shall be unto me as Ariel*; even as the hearth of the great altar of burnt-offerings, whereupon the sacrifices were consumed. The slaughter of the immense number of

* Lam. ii. 4, 5.

victims which were there offered unto God, afforded a symbolical representation of the vast multitudes of wicked, hypocritical, and incorrigible Jews, who were to be slain in the city of David, by the hands of their enemies, when the fire of divine wrath broke out against them. Then the human sacrifices, which were to be made from among them, by the sword of their adversaries, were, in number, to be like the multitude of living creatures that had been slain, for offerings to the Most High. This, I suppose, is the import of the peculiar expression now before us; which suggests the useful reflection, that people's punishment shall be proportioned to the sins they have committed.

3 And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee.

In this and the following verse, the preceding prediction is illustrated and explained. The prophet had foretold, that Jerusalem was to be distressed, and encompassed by enemies; and now he more particularly points out, the several steps by which they would carry on their hostile operations.—*And I will camp against thee round about.* The armies which God was to send against that city, were first to surround it, and to encamp against it on every side, that they might the more effectually accomplish the end they had in view.—It is next added, *I will lay siege against thee with a mount.* They were to raise ramparts, or bulwarks, from whence they might annoy the secure inhabitants, who trusted to the strength of their fortifications.—*And I will raise forts against thee;* towers and fortresses, by which they might be assisted in successfully assaulting the city, and attacking it at once, from different quarters. All these operations, notwithstanding they were to be carried into execution by the adversaries of Jerusalem, God appropriates

to himself. The Assyrians and Romans, who were to be the active instruments of performing this service, are not so much as mentioned. The whole work is attributed to Jehovah, who, by claiming it as his peculiar prerogative, inculcates the important truth, which is every where implicitly or expressly affirmed in scripture, That all events, whether prosperous or adverse, depend entirely upon God. Without him, neither Chaldeans nor Romans could have effectuated any thing. He forms the light, and creates darkness: he makes peace, and creates evil. I, the Lord (saith he), do all these things.—The various efforts made by the enemies of Jerusalem, were to be accompanied with success, as is plainly intimated in verse

4 And thou shalt be brought down, *and* shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust.

These words sufficiently intimate, that the inhabitants of Jerusalem were to be so greatly distressed by their enemies, that they would hide themselves in caves and subterraneous places, and therefore they might be said to speak out of the ground. The expression plainly alludes to the practice of wizards, and of those who had familiar spirits, that were accustomed to deliver their answers to the deluded people who consulted them, in a low hoarse tone of voice. In this manner, the distressed citizens of Jerusalem, reduced to the greatest straits, conversing with each other, and supplicating mercy from victorious enemies, were to speak with a feeble and rough voice. In the time of prosperity, they were haughty and insolent: ‘They lifted up their horn on high, and spake with a stiff neck*.’ But as people’s

* Psal. lxxv. 5.

voice often rises and falls with their spirits, strength, and other circumstances, so the strength of the inhabitants of Jerusalem being exhausted, and their minds enfeebled, they were to speak, not with vigour and elevation of voice, but in the weak and pitiful manner which is largely described in the words before us.

The prophecy contained in this and the three preceding verses, was in some measure fulfilled, not long after its delivery, by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who laid siege to Jerusalem. Though the prophet doubtless had some respect to that event, yet it is certain, from the history he has given of it, that he looked beyond that period, to another and more dreadful calamity. The Assyrian forces under Sennacherib, notwithstanding they invested that city, do not appear to have surrounded it on every side, to have cast a trench about it, nor to have built towers, from whence they might annoy the inhabitants. The siege of the city by the Chaldeans, though not attended with all the circumstances here mentioned, more fully accomplished these predictions; whilst the assault and conquest of the city by the Romans, fulfilled them in every article, as might be shewn from the history of Josephus, who relates the exact completion of the prophecy. Those who wish to compare it with the corresponding events to which it alluded, may consult Josephus' History of the Wars of the Jews, book vii. chap. xvi. xvii. and xx. That historian particularly mentions, that Titus built a wall about the city Jerusalem, of thirty-nine furlongs in length, with thirteen forts in it; by means of which, the people were pent up in the city, famished, and reduced to inexpressible distress. This dreadful calamity, the total overthrow of the city and temple, that belonged to those who, for a long period, were honoured with the character of the people of God, must be attributed, as the scriptures affirm, to their sins against the holy One of Israel. The prophet Jeremiah expressly declares, that the calamities which befel them,

were inflicted, ‘because their land was filled with sin against the holy One of Israel*.’ And the apostle Paul clearly states the matter in the following words: ‘Because they killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and persecuted the apostles, therefore the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost †.’—This information conveys to us a lesson, which we ought never to forget; namely, that after God hath for a long time admonished people of their sin and danger, and invited them to throw down the weapons of their rebellion, and to be at peace with him, if they still persist in their trespasses, he will execute upon them his awful righteous vengeance. Diligently attend to this important truth, and live under its practical influence.

5 Moreover, the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones *shall be* as chaff that passeth away; yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly.

This and the sixth verse, contains an admirable description of the destruction of Sennacherib’s army, that besieged Jerusalem. It is adorned by a variety of beautiful images, intended to shew the greatness and suddenness of that dreadful event, and the means whereby it was to be effected. The vast multitude, and the very sudden overthrow of the Assyrians, who are denominated strangers, and terrible ones, is illustrated by two similitudes. First, They were, in numbers, to be as the small dust. The dust of the earth, and the sand of the sea, are employed in scripture, to denote great numbers of people. The promise that God gave to Abraham, of a numerous posterity, was expressed in these words: ‘I will multiply thy seed as the dust of the earth ‡.’ Concerning that great people, Balaam thus spake: ‘Who can count the dust of Jacob, and

* Jer. li. 5.

† 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.

‡ Gen. xiii. 16.

‘ the number of the fourth part of Israel * ?’ And in this verse, it is foretold, that the multitude of their strangers shall be like the small dust, which cannot be numbered.—Secondly, These terrible ones are compared to the chaff that passeth away before the wind, no person knows where, and which cannot be again gathered together. All human power, however great and collected, is as unable to resist the judgments of God, as the chaff is to oppose the tempest. Wicked men may flatter themselves with the thoughts of their importance and strength; but the truth is, however terrible they may appear, they shall flee away as the chaff driven by the wind.—*Yea, it shall be at an instant suddenly.* The event of which the prophet speaks, is, I suppose, the overthrow of Sennacherib’s army, which invested Jerusalem. This destruction, he foretels, was to be at an instant suddenly, without any previous intimation: it was to be executed with violence, all at once, and not to be a work of any continuance. In this hasty and unexpected manner, the first-born in all the land of Egypt were slain; and the multitude of the Assyrian army was cut off by the angel of the Lord, who, in one night, slew 185,000 of them.

6 Thou shalt be visited of the LORD of hosts with thunder, and with earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire.

The prophet proceeds, in this verse, to declare in what manner the predicted awful judgment was to be executed.—The visitation of the Lord of hosts, here threatened, is unquestionably a visitation in righteousness and wrath, that he might punish the Assyrians for their pride, their daring presumption, and other iniquities. It was to be accompanied with

* Numb. xxiii. 10.

thunder, the dreadful voice of God's excellency, whereby he would manifest his majesty, power, and presence, and excite in men profound reverence and submission. Terrible judgments, that have been inflicted upon the enemies of God's people, have been, in many instances, attended with the thunder of his power. 'When Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven, the Lord sent thunder and hail upon the Egyptians*.' When the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel, the Lord thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines, and discomfited them †.' When David obtained complete victory over his enemies, 'the Lord thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice ‡.' In like manner, when the Lord visited the multitude of the terrible ones, it was with thunder—*And with earthquake.* This was another dreadful effect of the awful presence, and divine displeasure of the Almighty; another tremendous judgment, wherewith the inveterate enemies of his people were to be visited, and many of them to be destroyed.—*And with great noise,* proceeding from the thunder rolling along the heavens, the shaking of the earth, and the very alarming consequences wherewith these events were to be attended.—*With storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire.* Universal nature is represented as feeling the effects of its Sovereign's displeasure; and all the elements are in motion, to assist in the execution of those terrible things in righteousness, which men looked not for. The thunder utters its tremendous voice; the lightnings burst forth from the clouds, and run along the ground; the earth shakes to its foundations, and the stormy tempest flies, to be the executioners of almighty vengeance. These were probably the means employed by the angel of the Lord, in that terrible slaughter which he made in the Assyrian camp.—God uses whatever instruments

* Exod. ix. 23.

† 1 Sam. vii. 10.

‡ Psal. xviii. 13.

he fees proper, in fulfilling his pleasure: all the creatures are his servants; and when he sends forth his commandment upon earth, his word runneth very swiftly. He does not employ them, because he cannot work so easily or effectually without them: but to shew, that they are his servants, and entirely at his disposal; and that he can make them either the ministers of mercy, or of judgment, as seemeth good in his sight.

7 ¶ And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night-vision.

In this and the eighth verse, the prophet beautifully describes, in an elegant parable, the miserable condition, and certain disappointment, that shall attend the enemies of God's people, in their foolish attempts to destroy his inheritance.—The city Jerusalem, intended by the name Ariel, was a type of the church of God in following ages; and under this figurative description, it is often mentioned in the prophetic writings. Notwithstanding the hazardous and unsuccessful attempt of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, against that city, and the terrible visitation made upon his army, multitudes of many nations would yet presume to fight against her, and her munition, the Almighty, who is the refuge and fortress of his people. What then shall be their fate? Shall the enemies of that city, or rather of the church, which it prefigured, who may, in after-times, endeavour to overthrow it, and to realize their delusive dreams of conquest and riches, shall they escape with impunity? In reply, it is affirmed, that *they shall be as a dream of a night-vision*. Expressions of this kind frequently occur in the sacred writings, wherein one thing is put for another; the cause for the effect, the subject for the adjunct, the circumstance or quality belonging to it.

You

You will find a striking instance in the parable, where our Lord saith, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls*.' Though the resemblance is stated, as if existing between the kingdom of heaven and the merchant, yet the comparison is intended to be made chiefly between the kingdom of heaven, which is possessed of unrivalled worth and excellence, and a pearl of immense value, which in order to purchase, the merchant sold all that he had. In like manner, when, in this prophecy, it is declared, that the numerous enemies of the people of God shall be as a dream of a night-vision, the meaning is, that they shall be reduced to a condition resembling that of a person who dreameth. All the imaginary schemes, and foolish projects, that they have formed, shall suddenly vanish, and be certainly frustrated. The visionary scenes, and delusive hopes, with which they have amused themselves, and pursued with the greatest avidity, shall flee away as a vision which one thought that he saw in his sleep, and that quickly disappears on his being awakened.

8 It shall even be as when a hungry *man* dreameth, and behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty *man* dreameth, and behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and behold, *he is faint*, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be that fight against mount Zion.

The subject is continued, and is finely illustrated by a beautiful similitude.—The hungry and thirsty man, spoken of in this parable, represents the multitude of them who fight against Zion, who are devoid of every thing that is truly good, dissatisfied with what they enjoy, and eagerly solicitous to gratify their keen desires of devouring the people of the

* Matth. xiii. 45.

Most High. Displeas'd with what they possess, invidious of the happier condition of God's servants, they are extremely anxious to have their lust after conquest and opulence indulg'd, and to attain the enjoyment of those objects which are suited to gratify their vicious appetites.—*This hungry man dreameth, and behold, he eateth, &c.* He imagines, that he is in circumstances suited to his wishes, that he hath plenty of excellent food to satisfy his hunger. The thirsty man thinks, that he hath abundance of refreshing drink to quench his thirst. Each of them, pleas'd for a little with this agreeable deception, exhibits a just image of the adversaries of the church, who are exceedingly fond to enjoy the objects of their wishes; and, for a season, entertain the delusive hopes, that they shall certainly possess them.—*But he awaketh, and his soul is empty, &c.* The awakening of the person that dreamed, from his illusion, to perceive his mistake, and to feel his disappointment, presents a lively emblem of the enemies of God's people, who, employ'd in the imaginary gratification of their appetites, soon find, in their sad experience, that the scene with which they were pleas'd, had no existence but in their own fancies; that they have been disquieted in vain, and grasping at shadows. After having exulted for a while in visionary projects, they are rack'd with anxiety, and fill'd with disappointment.—*So shall the multitude of all the nations be, &c.* The poor man that dreameth of gold, when he awaketh, his purse is empty: the prisoner that dreameth of liberty, when he awaketh, findeth himself in confinement: the hungry man who dreameth that he eateth, when he awaketh, his soul is empty: the thirsty man who dreameth that he drinketh, when he awaketh, his soul is faint. Persons in these several circumstances, afford a just representation of the miserable disappointed condition of wicked men, who act in hostility against the people of God. They often imagine a vain thing; they de-
vise

vise foolish devices; they take counsel against the Lord, and against his Anointed: but they soon find to their astonishment, that all their projects were only so many delusive images, which are quickly effaced, like characters drawn upon the sand; and soon disappear, like a dream or night-vision, leaving no traces behind them.

By this short and elegant parable, we are taught the unsatisfying and transitory nature of the prosperity enjoyed by wicked men. It is only a shadow, that soon passeth away, of what is substantial and desirable. The imaginary joys that it excited, are quickly succeeded by real sorrows, and disagreeable impressions resulting from blasted hopes. Disappointed expectations often give rise to as great distress, as the loss of what we actually enjoyed. Men, after they have discovered their mistake, become miserable, in proportion to the happiness they thought that they had attained. How beautifully, how forcibly, is this important truth inculcated, by the very striking similitude which we have been considering! Such a state of delusion is the state of the enemies of God's people, so vain, so incoherent, so fleeting, are their foolish projects and designs; and thus uncertain is their prosperous condition.—This parable was remarkably verified in the Chaldeans and Romans, who fought against mount Zion, and laboured to overturn the Jewish state, city, and temple. Such was the insolent language which they uttered against Jerusalem: ‘Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the people; she is turned unto me; I shall be replenished, now she is laid waste*. Where is the Lord thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets†.’ Whilst they dreamed of victory, all their expectations were frustrated; and Jerusalem was found to be a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it

* Ezek. xxvi. 2.

† Micah vii. 10.

‘ shall

‘ shall be cut to pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it *.’ The Chaldeans, after having destroyed Jerusalem, saw the church of God translated into their own country, flourishing even in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, not a few becoming profelytes to the Jewish religion. The Romans likewise, who triumphed in having overthrown Jerusalem, were soon vanquished by the apostles and evangelists, by whom many of them were brought to the faith and obedience of the gospel of Christ.

9 ¶ Stay yourselves and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.

Our prophet, having foretold the temporal calamities that were to befall the inhabitants of Jerusalem, on account of their hypocrisy, pride, and other sins, proceeds to denounce against them, the spiritual judgments with which they were to be visited.—To this very alarming subject, he calls their attention, in these words, *Stay yourselves and wonder*. Make a solemn pause, and seriously contemplate the direful effects of God’s righteous displeasure manifested against you. Think it not sufficient, that you cursorily survey them; but fix your intense meditation on this important topic: diligently consider the causes which have contributed to bring upon you the wrath of the Almighty, and the terrible consequences with which it shall be attended.—Wonder and be astonished, as you justly may, at your extreme folly and insensibility, notwithstanding the many friendly admonitions that you have received.—*Cry ye out, and cry*, to express your astonishment at your past conduct; or, as the Hebrew words are rendered, in the margin of some Bibles, ‘ Take your pleasure, and riot.’ Go on,

* Zech. xii. 3.

as I foresee, by the spirit of prophecy, you will do, indulging yourselves in dissipation and luxury, in rioting and drunkenness, until your destruction, as a people, is accomplished.—*They are drunken, but not with wine, &c.* The prophet elegantly changes the form of speech, from the second to the third person; and explicitly declares, that both teachers, and those who were taught, were actually in the fatal condition which he describes. The intoxication here spoken of, and the effects attributed to it, did not arise from what is literally called wine, and strong drink; but from new and dangerous doctrines, which they had largely imbibed, and that made them to err from the straight path of God's commandments. The noxious effects proceeding from these pernicious tenets, made them, like drunk persons, speak much to their own commendation, contemn others, become vain, proud, and self-confident; and so stupified their judgments, that they could not discern truth from falsehood, or the way of duty from the ways of sin.

10 For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered.

The reason why the Jewish people were to resemble persons in a state of intoxication, is, in this verse, particularly specified.—*For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep.*—The awful judgment here mentioned, is expressly attributed to Jehovah, who, in perfect consistency with his consummate rectitude, goodness, and justice, inflicted it upon the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. God is equally righteous, when he sends spiritual, as when he executes temporal judgments, upon those who have exposed themselves to his dread displeasure. When lecturing from chap. vi. 10. of this prophecy, I touched upon this delicate subject, which requires to be treated
with

with great caution and circumspection, lest we offend God, and injure the truth. Certain it is, that he, all whose works are perfect, doth not communicate any wrong propensity to the minds of those who are in this manner punished. He doth not convey to them any bad principles, or evil inclinations; which all proceed from themselves, and not from God; who cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. He neither requires, persuades, nor approves any thing, that hath the least tendency to render people spiritually blind and insensible; but, on the contrary, he condemns and threatens those who bring themselves, or others, into this deplorable condition. The Lord is indeed said in scripture, to harden mens hearts, to blind their eyes, to give them over to a reprobate mind, to send them strong delusion; and, in the verse before us, to pour out the spirit of deep sleep. All that I suppose is ascribed to Jehovah, in these and similar expressions, is, that, as the just punishment of sin, he withholds from incorrigible transgressors, the blessings which they have forfeited and despised. He doth not soften and meliorate their hearts; he doth not open the eyes of their understandings; he doth not purify their minds from the pollution they have contracted; he doth not prevent them from being deceived by deceitful lusts. There are expressions used both in the Old and New Testaments, which seem to authorize us to go a step farther. Joseph told his brethren, who sold him into Egypt, that it was not them, but God, who sent him thither *. The apostle Peter declares, that Jesus Christ was delivered into the hands of his enemies, and to the death of the cross, by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; who is affirmed, to have actually delivered him up for us all. From these, and many other passages of the sacred oracles, we are warranted to conclude, that nothing happens

* Gen. xlv. 20.

without the knowledge of God, or against his will, who is omniscient and omnipotent; that when judgments befall individuals or societies, they come by divine permission, in consequence of God having given them up to their own hearts lusts, and having suffered them to walk in their own ways. I will not enlarge: I wish to tread lightly on this delicate and dangerous ground, on which not a few have gone much too far, and have not been able to extricate themselves from the difficulties wherein they were involved.

The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, &c. Several kinds of bad, as well as good spirits, are mentioned in the word of God: such as, a spirit of lying, or lying spirit; the spirit of uncleanness, or the unclean spirit; a spirit of perverseness, or a perverse spirit; the spirit of error, or an erring spirit: and here the spirit of deep sleep, is said to be poured out on the Jewish people. In this condition, the eyes of their minds were closed in ignorance, even as the bodily eyes are shut in darkness, when we are asleep: they were immersed in a state of gross insensibility, of indolence and inactivity: they remained unaffected with those objects which ought to have made the deepest impressions upon their minds, whilst the faculties of their souls were suspended from performing aright their spiritual functions. They were occupied in delusive dreams, and amused with false hopes, fears, and pursuits, that had no existence but in their own imaginations, from which they were to be awakened by terrible calamities.—These spiritual judgments were to extend to the prophets, whose business it was to instruct the people; and to their rulers, who were employed in managing the affairs of the state.—*The seers hath he covered.* The prophets were, in ancient times, called Seers*, because they foresaw, through the spirit of prophecy, many of the prosperous and calamitous events which were to be-

* See 1 Sam. ix. 9.

fal the church, the knowledge of which was communicated to them by means of visions they received from God. These men were to be involved in ignorance and obscurity; and consequently, could not foretel things that were to happen in distant future periods.—The accomplishment of this prediction, of which Isaiah witnessed the commencement among his countrymen, took place in the days of the Messiah and his apostles. According to the prophecies and promises made to the fathers, Jesus Christ appeared in this world, in a manner quite different from the preconceived prejudices of the Jewish doctors and people, who had greatly corrupted the word of God; and therefore they set themselves to oppose him, and his doctrine. They heard his divine instructions, replete with wisdom, and delivered with incomparable eloquence, perspicuity, and authority. They beheld the untainted holiness of his life, and the wonderful works whereby his glory was illustriously displayed; but contrasting them with his mean parentage, his humble exterior condition, and the expectations they entertained respecting the manifestation of the kingdom of God, they were filled with disappointment, pride, envy, and prejudice. They stayed and wondered; they erred, like men that are drunk; they blasphemed the rock of salvation; they treated the holy Spirit with contempt, and persisted in rejecting the truth. The spirit of slumber, from the Lord of hosts, seized not only the Jewish people, but likewise their priests, teachers, and scribes, so that they became proof against conviction; and thus was fulfilled the tremendous spiritual judgment which is here threatened.

11 And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book *that is sealed*, which *men* deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I cannot, for it *is sealed*.

A general

A general incapacity of the Jewish nation to understand the word of God, especially the prophetic part of it, was to be the lamentable consequence of the above-mentioned spiritual judgments.—*And the vision of all.* God spake unto the fathers by the prophets, at sundry times, and in divers manners; and, among other ways, he spake to them by visions. The prophets, and Isaiah in particular, were favoured with visions from God, in which, by certain similitudes, they had represented, either to their bodily sight, or to the eyes of their minds, future events, that were at a lesser or greater distance. The prophecy therefore, which we are now considering, was called the Vision of Isaiah, because, by means of visions, many of the predictions which he delivered, were communicated to him. So frequently, in ancient times, did God adopt this method of discovering his mind to his servants, that the whole prophetic writings were sometimes styled Visions. By the vision of all then may be intended, all the prophecies of the Old Testament, which foretold the appearance of the great Messiah; who was to be cut off, to put an end to sin, to finish transgression, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness—which predicted his subsequent exaltation and glory, the plentiful effusion of the holy Spirit upon all flesh, and the astonishing effects which were thereby to be produced—The success of the gospel, in the conversion of the nations, whereby large accessions were to be made to the church, which was to assume a new and more glorious form than in ancient times—The brighter manifestation of the love, the righteousness, and salvation of the Lord; the consequent holiness, consolation, and joy of the people of God; and the terrible revelation of his awful judgments against the incorrigible adversaries of his church. The visions relative to these, and all other subjects,

Is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed; or, as the Hebrew word signifies, of a letter that is properly

properly folded and sealed, which cannot be understood until it be opened. By this similitude, is expressed, the dreadful consequences of God's pouring out the spirit of deep sleep upon the Jewish people. The effect here mentioned, did not proceed from the obscurity of divine revelation, which was admirably suited to their circumstances, and sufficiently clear and intelligible to those who had their senses exercised to discern good and evil. The true reason of their unacquaintedness with the meaning of the sacred books, was, their eyes were closed. Their minds were darkened by wilful ignorance, and inveterate prejudices: they would not open their eyes, that they might see; they would not come to the light, lest their deeds might be made manifest; nor would they hear with their ears, that they might understand. They would not turn to the Lord, that the vail which was upon their hearts might be taken away; and, therefore, it was not given them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Though God had spoken and written to them the great things of his law, they esteemed them as a strange thing, in which they had little concern. They read the law of the Lord; they heard Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, and the other prophets of God, deliver the most important messages with which they were intrusted; but they understood not their true meaning and design. Devoid of the spirit of wisdom and revelation, and under the influence of the spirit of slumber, they received not the things of the Spirit of God: they were foolishness unto them; neither could they know them, because they are spiritually discerned. The key of knowledge having been taken away, they could not perceive the import of the sublime truths contained in the word of God, concerning the righteousness of faith, the absolute necessity of divine grace, the great deliverance to be obtained by the Messiah, the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God, and the calling of the Gentiles to participate in the privileges of the church of Christ,

to which that key was designed to admit them. In opposition to these important doctrines, they fought to obtain righteousness by the works of the law; they neglected inward purity of heart; they endeavoured to subvert the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and strenuously exerted their utmost efforts to hinder the Gentiles from being admitted fellow-heirs with the believing Jews.—This unhappy condition was not peculiar to the men of Judah; to many among us, the vision of all still continues, as the words of a book that is sealed. Notwithstanding they read and hear the word of God, they remain strangers to its spiritual import, and transforming efficacy. Like the men who journeyed with Saul of Tarsus, they see a great light, but perceive not from whom it proceeds; they hear a voice, but not the voice of him that speaketh from heaven. Let us earnestly pray, that God may be pleased to open their eyes, and awake them to righteousness, that they may behold wondrous things out of his law.

Which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, &c. So great was to be the ignorance which prevailed in the land of Judah, at the time to which this prophecy looked forward, that both learned and unlearned, persons of every description, under different pretexts, declined to study and explain the writings of the Old Testament. A striking proof of the truth of this remark is here mentioned. This sacred book was delivered first to one that is learned, a man of excellent natural abilities, and considerable erudition, who, having got good education, and improved in acquaintance with literature and science, hath acquired much useful and ornamental knowledge. Such an accomplished scholar might be supposed well qualified for the task here assigned him. To him, therefore, the vision of all is delivered, with this request—*Read this, I pray thee.* Attentively peruse this book, for your own instruction, and for the benefit of those who are desirous to understand its contents. The advantages

vantages which your learning give you over those who are illiterate, will enable you to comply with this requisition, so as to be profitable to yourself and other people.—To this request, the learned man replies, *I cannot*. I understand the language in which it is written, but not the subject of which it treats; and therefore I cannot make you acquainted with its real meaning. I plead my inability to explain what is written, as an excuse for refusing to grant a favour, which is not in my power to bestow.—That he might not be thought to decline the service assigned him without sufficient reason, he immediately adds, *For it is sealed*. In scripture-language, a book is said to be sealed, when the subject of which it treats, is involved in obscurity and mystery; when the sense is so recondite, that it is not easily understood, and very imperfectly known. This seems to be the meaning of the order given to the prophet Daniel, to shut up the words, and to seal the book, even to the time of the end*; and of the command delivered to the apostle John, to seal up those things that were uttered by the seven thunders, and not to write them †. The import of the excuse offered by the learned man, for not reading and explaining the book delivered to him, is simply this: The visions which it contains, are written in such an obscure manner, and the subjects treated of, are so intricate, that he thought they were not intelligible to those who were most esteemed for knowledge and erudition.—Human nature, my brethren, is the same in all ages; and therefore the same reason is still given by many, why they do not understand the word of God. They plead its obscurity, as the reason why they are unacquainted with the important discoveries which it contains. Adepts in human science alledge, that were it not dark and mysterious, they could easily know its meaning. Thus they impiously throw the blame of their ignorance of divine

* Dan. xii. 9.

† Rev. x. 4.

truths upon the scriptures, which is really owing to their own blindness, and want of spiritual discernment. As flesh and blood cannot reveal them, so extensive learning cannot give the saving knowledge of them. Let us beware of charging God foolishly, in whom there is no unrighteousness; and of finding fault with his oracles, which are perfect. Sensible that the word of God is a sealed book to people of every description, until he is pleased to open their understandings, let us humbly lament before him the blindness of our minds, which prevents sacred truths from irradiating and purifying our souls, and reforming our lives: let us earnestly beg of him, to accompany them with the grace of the holy Spirit, that we may perceive their import, and experience their sanctifying influence.

12 And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.

He that is learned, having acknowledged his inability to read and explain the prophetic scriptures, the same request which was made to him, is presented to the unlearned, who never enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education; whose natural abilities have not been cultivated and improved, by the instructions of men eminent for literature and science.—To him the book is next delivered, *saying, Read this, I pray thee*, with understanding, and interpret the meaning of what is therein written. Many things comprehended in this book, are abstruse, and require to be explained and understood, in order to derive real benefit from them; and therefore to you I apply for assistance.—To this demand, the following short reply is made: *I am not learned*. I pretend not to understand the law and the prophets, and to explain the predictions, doctrines, and precepts, which they contain. I judge it unnecessary to be acquainted with
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every part of the scriptures. I leave the study of the prophecies to the learned, whose business is to teach, and to shew those things which are noted in the scriptures of truth*. Indifferent as to abstruse matters, and solicitous to enjoy ease and tranquillity of mind, I wish not to perplex myself with difficulties: I therefore decline to comply with the prayer of your petition. Perhaps there is not any book which is more read, and less understood, than the Bible. What frivolous excuses are pled for ignorance of the word of God, and the precious truths which are therein revealed. Alas! they continue still to be suggested by not a few, in one form or other, if possible, to extenuate that culpable negligence which hinders from attentively searching the prophecies of this book.— Detest such pitiful shifts and evasions. Frequently read, and endeavour distinctly to understand them. Be not ashamed of any part of your holy profession; but reduce to practice every command of God, whether it be unfashionable, or in the good graces of the world. Allow not any thing to prevent you from being intimately acquainted with the whole word of God. Understanding is a well-spring of life to him that hath it; but the instruction of fools is nothing but folly. Carefully avoid falling into the deplorable condition of the Jewish nation, at the period wherein this prophecy was fulfilled, when neither the learned, nor the illiterate, were acquainted with the spiritual meaning of the lively oracles of God that were committed unto them, and so could not read them with benefit.

13 ¶ Wherefore the LORD said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men.

* Dan. x. 19. 21.

After a solemn preface, in which he affirms, that what he now says, was delivered by divine command, our prophet proceeds to delineate another prominent feature in the character of the Jewish people, which was peculiarly odious and offensive to God. In proof of this remark, we observe, that the Lord, when he spake to Isaiah what he here relates, called them not his, but this people. In this manner, he points them out as utterly unworthy of the intimate relation to him into which they had been admitted. Notwithstanding they were the posterity of Abraham, his friend; of Isaac, whom he loved; of Jacob, whom he surnamed Israel; and of their progenitors, whom he brought forth out of the land of Egypt—though he had dealt with them as he never dealt with any other nation, honouring them with the character of his people; though he gave them his ordinances, statutes, and laws; and sent among them his prophets, rising up early, and sitting up late, to instruct them; yet, by their ignorance, hypocrisy, and superstition, they provoked him to disown his connection with them.—Having delineated, in strong colours, their gross ignorance, he now represents their base hypocrisy, which he thus emphatically describes:

This people draw near unto me with their mouth, &c. To draw near to God, in the language of scripture, denotes the various acts of adoration and worship, whereby his people approach his sacred presence, and enjoy delightful communion with him. To draw near to God with the mouth, and to honour him with the lips, is to express before him, profound veneration of his infinite majesty, firm trust in his kind providence, unsuspecting confidence in his mercy, and unlimited submission to his blessed will. That these acts of worship may be suited to his spiritual nature, to whom they are presented; that they may prove agreeable to his will, and meet his acceptance; along with these external professions of honour and respect, the internal homage of holy hearts must be offered, corresponding

sponding to what is expressed by the mouth and the lips. When, in the performance of the exterior part of devotion, persons are destitute of the interior emotions of soul, they are chargeable with detestable hypocrisy, and the most odious dissimulation in the service of God. By the organs of speech, and the gestures they assume, they profess to honour the Most High; whilst, at the same time, their hearts are devoid of those devout dispositions which they pretend to express. They feel not that inward reverence, esteem, and gratitude, which they verbally acknowledge that they entertain in their minds.—The people therefore, who are here reprov'd, are said to *have removed their heart from me*; i. e. from God, in whose name our prophet brings this charge against them. By the uncontrolled operations of their carnal minds, by heedless inattention to their spirits, when professedly approaching unto God, their minds became more and more alienated from him. Their hearts and affections, instead of terminating upon God, were turned away to other objects, totally unconnected with the employments wherein they were engaged. Their thoughts, far from being concentrated in God, whom they honoured with their lips, were occupied on things either expressly prohibited, or entirely foreign to the solemn services which ought to have engrossed their whole attention.

The Jewish people, among whom Isaiah exercised his office, were doubtless, in the first instance, accused of having been criminal in this respect. Though the words were primarily addressed to them, and afforded an exact description of their conduct, they looked forward to the Jews in following ages; and were truly characteristic of the Pharisees, in the time of our Saviour's ministry, to whom he expressly applied them. Having demonstrated, that they made void the commandments of God by their traditions, he quoted the verse now before us. Ye hypocrites, who make high pretensions to distinguished eminence
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in holiness, and yet have the audacity to set aside a divine command; who are displeas'd with the disciples, for not obeying the authority of the elders, and yet scruple not to condemn the precepts of Jehovah. Ye plainly discover much more respect to the authority of men, than to the commands of God: ye shew more sollicitude about the observation of external rites, than internal sanctity of heart; and are more concerned to obtain the praise of men, than the honour that cometh from God. Ye regularly attend on the ordinances of divine appointment, wherein ye profess'dly approach unto God; ye acknowledge him to be the only living and true God, your Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor; and present before him the sacrifices which he hath required. Notwithstanding, your hearts are far from God: even when ye come before him as his people, they go out after their covetousness; indifferent as to enjoying the divine presence, and communion with your Father in heaven, ye neither fear nor love him, nor delight in his service. Strangers to the life and power of godliness, ye have no higher aim, than to maintain its form, and to acquire the applause of men. 'Well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me*.'

Are people of this description become extinct in the Christian church? Are there not still a generation who are the followers of these hypocritical Pharisees, who present before God their bodies, the calves of their lips, whilst they withhold from him the homage of their hearts? Are there not among us, those who worship God in another way than he hath appointed in his word, who present before him no more than the images of the living sacrifices which he requires; sometimes so unlike the beautiful un-

* Matth. xv. 7, 8.

mained original, that the imposition is easily discovered; and, at other times, in such attitudes and habits, as nearly resemble that true devotion which they artfully endeavour to imitate? They seem to men, to fast, to pray, to give alms, to hear the word of God, and to praise his name; but the heavenly Father, who seeth in secret, is perfectly acquainted with all their hypocrisy and deceit. They come unto God, as did the Jews of old, and sit before him as his people: they hear his words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.— Would you then, my friends, avoid this odious dissimulation in the service of God? beware of gratifying your corrupt dispositions, which, by indulgence, will gather strength, and occupy your thoughts, even when you are employed in divine worship. Take heed that you do not give way to that natural levity and inconstancy of mind, which insensibly steals away the heart from God, and is apt to encroach on the sacred hours consecrated to acts of devotion: and earnestly supplicate the Hearer of prayer, to grant you that fixedness of heart, and that truth in the inward parts, with which he is delighted.

And their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men. The fear of God, which is a powerful principle implanted in the hearts of his people, consists in a holy reverential awe of his infinite majesty, consummate excellencies, and supreme dominion, accompanied with a solicitous concern to please him, and to submit to all his dispensations. It is founded upon his absolute sovereignty over us, and our entire dependence upon him. Those who are best acquainted with the perfections and glory of Jéhovah, always entertain the most profound veneration for his incomparable dignity; and express their surprise, that there are any destitute of this becoming temper. In the song of Moses, and of the Lamb, are found these remarkable words: ‘ Who shall not fear thee, O
‘ Lord,

‘ Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art ‘ holy.’ Men however, who know not God, are devoid of this gracious disposition, until they somehow or other acquire it, either by the influence of the Spirit of God, or by the precept of men. The fear of God, which is here chiefly intended, must not be limited to this blessed inward principle; but extended to its genuine outward expressions, in the several duties of divine worship, whereby men testify their respect and reverence for the Almighty. In this sense, Jesus Christ explains this precept in the law, ‘ Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him* :— ‘ Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him ‘ only shalt thou serve.’ And this must be its meaning in the words under consideration, where it signifies the various parts of sacred worship, whereby the supreme majesty and infinite goodness of Jehovah is acknowledged. This fear of the Lord is taught by the precept of men, when people perform the solemn service of God, more from regard to human than divine authority; more from regard to the customs and applause of men, than from delight in approaching unto God, and enjoying his approbation. This is not the pure homage that God requires, and which he graciously accepts; but a mere, hypocritical, unavailing pretence.—Fear toward God comes likewise under this description, when men presume to prescribe in matters relative to the worship of Jehovah, and require the observance of rites of their own devising, without attending to the word of God. This presumptuous arrogance seems to be here pointed at, as appears from the interpretation given of the words by Jesus Christ, in the answer he returned to the Scribes and Pharisees: ‘ Howbeit (saith he), in ‘ vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines ‘ the commandments of men. For, laying aside the ‘ commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of

* Deut. vi. 13.

‘men *.’ They prayed in the synagogues; they read and expounded the law of God, and the prophets; they punctually attended upon the ordinances of divine institution, and presented the sacrifices that were commanded to be offered in the law. Notwithstanding, these frequent pompous services were in vain, accompanied with no valuable consequences; they proceeded from wrong principles, and were directed to wrong purposes, so that they did not answer the ends of their appointment: especially as the persons against whom this charge was brought by our Saviour, substituted the doctrines and traditions of men in place of the truths and commandments of the Lord.

Such was the corrupt degenerate state of the Jewish church in the days of our prophet, which became still more depraved in the time of our Lord’s personal ministry, when, as we have seen, he particularly applied this character to the Scribes and Pharisees, to whom it justly belonged. I am sorry to add, that persons of the above description, are still to be found in the Christian church. Their fear toward God is taught them, not by the holy Spirit, but by the precepts of magistrates, parents, and masters. They worship God, not from love to his amiable excellencies, and from obedience to his supreme authority, but out of compliance to prevailing custom, and regard to the commands of their superiors. Take heed then, my friends, that your fear and worship of God proceed not from the precept of men, but from a gracious principle implanted in your hearts, extending its happy influence through every part of his service. Remember, that God, who is a Spirit, requires to be worshipped in spirit and in truth; and that would you find benefit and comfort in drawing near to him, you must approach him with your whole hearts, else you shall have reason to dread the awful threatening contained in verse

* Mark vii. 7, 8.

14 Therefore behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work amongst this people, *even* a marvellous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hid.

The Lord, by our prophet, here calls upon men, seriously to consider the wonderful judgment which he was about to inflict on this people, on account of their abominable hypocrisy and superstition. It was to be of such an extraordinary nature, and attended with such uncommon circumstances, as might justly excite admiration and surprise. Indeed, the punishment wherewith God visited the Jewish nation, their priests and doctors, when he poured out upon them the spirit of deep sleep, was truly astonishing—whether we consider the judicial act of the supreme Judge, who, in perfect consistency with his infinite purity and rectitude, permitted their minds to be blinded, and their hearts to be hardened; or the strange judgment executed upon this people, who were dispersed over the face of the earth, exposed to the contempt of all nations, and to this day are groaning under the curses to which they were consigned by the law of Moses. Nevertheless, they tenaciously adhere to the religion of their fathers, prescribed in that law, and enforced by the prophets, which they read with sacred veneration. Notwithstanding they frequently and publicly read the books of the Old Testament, even the learned among them, do not understand them; and therefore they have turned all their attention, for many ages, to foolish traditions, from which they cannot derive spiritual wisdom. A very few excepted, they continue in a state of spiritual blindness and insensibility. After having been expelled for a long period from their own land, and seen the wonderful progress of the kingdom of Christ through the world, the conversion of the Gentiles to the service of the God of Abraham, and many of the prophecies

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in the Old Testament clearly fulfilled, they continue in unbelief, blinded with prejudices. In reviewing this wonderful subject, we may justly exclaim, with the apostle Paul, ‘ O the depth of the riches both of
 ‘ the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearch-
 ‘ able are his judgments, and his ways past finding
 ‘ out *!’ No man wonders to see some people without wisdom, who were never possessed of it; but to see wise and prudent persons, who were admired for their knowledge and sagacity, destitute of understanding, is truly surprising. This is the marvellous work which we are here invited to contemplate.

For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, &c. The persons who are spoken of, were the wise and prudent in their own eyes, who were generally esteemed by others on account of knowledge and discretion, and resorted to by the multitude for instruction and advice. The wisdom and understanding of such men, according to this prediction, shall perish and be hid; or, as the Hebrew word signifies, shall vanish or disappear, like the cloud which, in the drought of summer, promised a refreshing shower. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools: having employed their powers and influence, not in studying the word of God, and in faithfully performing his service, but in devising and introducing into his worship the most absurd superstitions, God declares, by his servant, that he would deprive them of those talents which they had perverted and abused.—This threatening was remarkably verified in the Scribes and Pharisees, about the time of our Lord’s manifestation in the flesh; who, when the disciples reported to him the success that attended their ministry, rejoiced in spirit, and said, ‘ I thank thee, O Father, Lord of
 ‘ heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things
 ‘ from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them
 ‘ unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good

* Rom. xi. 33.

‘ in thy fight *.’ And the apostle Paul, speaking of the preaching of the cross, which is foolishness to them that perish, affirms, that this scripture is thereby fulfilled: ‘ For (saith he) it is written, I will destroy ‘ the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing ‘ the understanding of the prudent †.’ By the application which he makes of these words, he plainly intimates, that they are accomplished in all those who reject and contemn the gospel as foolishness, because they cannot comprehend the sublime doctrines which it reveals.—Behold then, my brethren, this marvellous work of God, which passes unnoticed by the unthinking multitude. You may fix on many subjects of contemplation which are more pleasing, but there are few or none that may be more instructive and useful. How awful do the divine power and righteousness appear, in performing this wonder in so many striking instances, which loudly proclaim the truth of the word of God, and the equity of divine dispensations! Let us beware lest we expose ourselves to the awful doom which is here denounced. Afraid lest we fall under this spiritual judgment, let us earnestly implore of God, that he may divest us of pride, self-conceit, and the prejudices we may have imbibed against any of the truths of his word; that he may illuminate our minds, and dispose us to attend diligently to his wonderful works, both of mercy and judgment.

15 Wo unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?

In these words, misery and wo are denounced against those who secretly perpetrate the most enormous crimes, and artfully endeavour to conceal them

* Matth. xi. 25, 26.

† 1 Cor. i. 19.

from God.—Their character is thus emphatically described: *Them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, &c.* The counsel which they foolishly essayed to conceal from the omniscient Jehovah, included the wicked projects which they had deliberately formed, that they might be carried into execution at the most proper seasons. ‘Every purpose (saith the wise man) is established by counsel;’ and ought to be the result of mature consideration and good advice, otherwise it is not likely to be confirmed and settled. What is begun in folly, and without proper regard to God, shall issue in shame and disappointment. The reverse of this proposition was adopted by the persons spoken of, who atheistically and absurdly sought deep to hide their vicious designs from the Lord, before whom all things are open and naked. Notwithstanding the convictions they felt, of their hearts and ways being well known to God, they tried to soothe their uneasy minds, by supposing, that he was not privy to their thoughts and schemes. They entertained delusive hopes that this was possible, else they would not have sought to conceal their counsels from his eyes, which penetrate the most secret recesses of the human heart. Though they thus acted under the influence of a false imagination, they would have proclaimed still greater folly, had they tried to conduct themselves in this manner, when convinced of its absurdity and impossibility. Saith the proverb, ‘The counsels of the wicked are deceit:’ and in nothing does their fallacy appear more remarkable, than in the vain imagination, that any thing, even the most secret thought, can be concealed from God, who searches the hearts, and tries the reins of the children of men.

And their works are, in the dark, &c. They practised wickedness in the most secret and covered manner. The flagrant enormities which they committed, could not bear the light; and therefore sought the shade of obscurity, where they could not be seen by the eyes of mortals. Many transgressions prohibited

in the law of God, are so extremely odious, that they cannot endure the light; and, on that account, are frequently done in the dark. They that be drunken, are drunken in the night; then the thief and the robber dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the day-time; and the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, as best adapted for the execution of his insidious designs. Such enormous sins are emphatically denominated in scripture, works of darkness, because they proceed from the darkness of ignorance, from those who love darkness rather than light, and lead down to the abodes of everlasting misery and wo.—*They say, Who seeth us? &c.* They flatter themselves, that they are not only beyond the reach of human observation, but excluded from the view of the omniscient God. Like the wicked of whom the royal prophet speaks, ‘they say, The Lord shall not see; neither shall the God of Jacob regard it*.’ They consider not, that the darkness hideth not from him; but the night shineth as the day: that the darkness and the light are both alike unto him: that there is no darkness, or shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.—The wo which is denounced against persons of this description, was remarkably inflicted in that period of the church, to which this prophecy had a peculiar reference, wherein the Jewish priests and rulers, under the most artful disguise and vile hypocrisy, endeavoured to cover their counsels and actions. Notwithstanding, they found by experience, the extreme folly of all their concealed deep-laid designs, and that there is no wisdom or counsel against the Lord. Warned by their example, let us, in every enterprize in which we engage, ask direction of God: let us come to the light, that our deeds may be made manifest; and endeavour so to live, as those who are conscious, that the Lord seeth and knoweth us.

* Psal. xciv. 7.

16 Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potters clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?

The absurdity of the wicked principles and practices mentioned in the preceding verse, is here represented in figurative language; and illustrated by a beautiful similitude, taken from the work of the potter.—Light pieces of furniture, and particularly dishes of any sort, when nicely cleaned, are turned upside down, that the dust, or any thing dirty, that adheres to them, may be entirely taken away. In allusion to this well known practice, God declared, ‘ I will wipe Jerusalem, as a man wipeth a dish, ‘ wiping and turning it upside down *.’ If our prophet refers to this custom, the words import, that the great pains taken by the persons spoken of, to make clean the outside of the cup and platter, should prove of no avail, and be attended with no permanent good effects. Things are said to be turned upside down, when their situation is reversed, and their appearance totally altered. In this sense, the expression is used by Isaiah, in the following prediction: ‘ The Lord maketh the earth empty and waste, and turn-
‘ eth it upside down.’ If the allusion is to this circumstance, the phrase denotes, that those who were the subjects of this prophecy, were to assume a new and different appearance from what they had formerly done, and that they were to be deprived of those thin disguises under which they had been concealed. Things are also said to be turned upside down, when their proper order is inverted, and they are reduced to a state of anarchy and confusion. This is the meaning of the words, in the charge brought against the apostles of Jesus Christ by their

* 2 Kings xxi. 13.

enemies, of turning the world upside down. If the expression is used in this sense, it significantly describes the perverse conduct of those who presume to invert the beautiful order that God hath established; who place a dead idol in the room of the living God, and the traditions of men in room of his commandments; who substitute external shew in place of internal purity; who put light for darkness, and darkness for light; good for evil, and evil for good. All these inversions, our prophet declares, shall be esteemed as the potter's clay, the form and shape of which is easily and quickly altered, and is changed at the pleasure of the potter. In like manner, the Almighty was entirely to abolish the corrupt systems that were presumptuously adopted, and to make the devices of the people of none effect.—The inconsistency of the conduct which is here reprobated, is next exhibited by a striking similitude.

For shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not, &c. Wicked men, who endeavour to cover their designs from God, practically declare, that they believe not his omniscience; and so virtually deny, that he is truly God, and that he is their Maker. To act in this manner, is as inconsistent and absurd, as if a piece of work should say to him that made it, He made me not: he had no understanding. It is contrary to the principles of sound reason, and the nature of things, to deny the ubiquity of the divine presence, and to refuse to acknowledge God as our Creator; or to pretend to hide any thing from him that knoweth our thoughts afar off. All that we have, depends upon his pleasure: all that we do, is performed under his inspection, who will not fail to discover the perversity and falsehood of such corrupt reasonings as are here reprov'd. God being the first cause of all things, it is impossible that any creature can devise, understand, or execute the most secret scheme, without the knowledge of his Maker.

‘ Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye
‘ fools,

‘fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity *.’—Let us learn to acknowledge with humility the divine sovereignty, and our entire dependence upon God. Let us beware of inverting the order he hath established, and of calling in question our infinite obligations to him, for life, and breath, and all things. He is our Creator, and we are his creatures: he is our Lord, and we are his subjects: it is therefore just, that we obey his authority; and, upon all occasions, manifest our constant dependence upon his power, goodness, and faithfulness.

17 *Is* it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?

To the foregoing prophecies is subjoined the remarkable prediction I have now read, relative to the call of the Gentiles into the church of God, in place of the Jews.—The time in which this great event was to come to pass, is here spoken of, as a very little while, after this prophecy was delivered. Though, from that period, above seven hundred years elapsed ere the son of God was manifested in the flesh, and this memorable event did not take place until a considerable time after his appearance on earth, it is notwithstanding foretold to happen in a very little while. However long the period may appear to human view, between the delivery and accomplishment of this promise, yet, in the sight of the eternal Jehovah, with whom a thousand years are but as one day, it seemed but a very little while. Our Lord’s second coming, predicted above seventeen hundred years ago, is foretold in similar terms with these now before us: ‘Yet

* Psal. xciv. 8, 9. 11.

‘ a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry *.’ At the expiration of the time fixed,

Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, &c. The condition of both places shall be entirely reversed. Among the mountains of Palestine, the most remarkable and the most celebrated, in the sacred writings, was mount Lebanon. This goodly mountain, situated on the borders of the land of Canaan toward the north, was remarkable for its height, magnificence, and the abundance of excellent cedars which adorned its summit, exhibiting a truly noble and majestic appearance. It is evident, from the connection in which this prediction stands, that Lebanon is not literally, but figuratively to be understood in this verse. From what follows, the prophet seems plainly to have had in view, a spiritual change and conversion, which was to be accomplished upon those who are intended by this bold figurative expression. The change which he foretels was to be effected, in consequence of the Spirit being abundantly poured out from on high, as we learn from chap. xxxii. 15. of this prophecy, and the predicted conversion, was to be accompanied with happy spiritual consequences. The stately extensive forest with which mount Lebanon was covered, may denote, in the prophetic style, the large and powerful kingdoms of the Gentiles, which, for long time, continued in their natural uncultivated condition; some of which had grown up to great eminence, and were highly elevated, in respect of grandeur, strength, and influence. These were to be turned into a fruitful field. Every high thing, that exalted itself against the knowledge and obedience of God, was to be laid low: whatsoever hurt, or offended, was to be rooted out; and the fallow ground was to be broken up, by the ministry of the gospel. Multitudes were to be admitted within the hedge of the divine protection, and

* Heb. x. 37.

encompassed by the divine favour: they were to have sown among them the precious seed of the word of God, which was to be watered by the dew of heaven. In consequence whereof, they were to become fruitful in holiness and righteousness; and to resemble a fruitful field, or the garden of the Lord, wherein he delights.

And the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest. The Hebrew word *Carmel*, here translated *a fruitful field*, was the name of a very rich and fertile mountain in Judea, abounding with excellent vines, olive-trees, and delicious fruits, covered in part with luxuriant pasture, and the best of corn. So excellent and valuable were its productions, that, among the Jews, whatever possessed much fertility, wealth, and beauty, was called Carmel. This famous mountain exhibited a striking emblem of the Jewish church, which was often spoken of as a fruitful field, having been cultivated under the peculiar direction and care of God himself, who committed unto them his lively oracles, and refreshed them with the dew of his blessing. Having conferred upon them the most important privileges, whereby they were distinguished from other nations, they brought forth those precious fruits which were honourable to God, and ornamental to themselves.—Concerning this fruitful field, our prophet foretold, that it shall be esteemed as a forest, which consists of a confused irregular multitude of trees, destitute of order and of fruit. The Jewish church, deprived of the vigilant care of Jehovah, and the salutary institutions wherewith they had been long favoured, together with the communications of divine grace whereby they had been enriched, were to be reduced to a wild disorderly state, in which they were not to yield fruit unto God. Devoid of faith in the true Messiah, and deserted of God, who, in times past, had conferred upon them many signal advantages, they soon became like a widely scattered barren forest. This prediction is of similar import with that delivered
to

to the Jews by Jesus Christ himself, Matth. xxi. 13.
 ‘ Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God
 ‘ shall be taken from you, and given to a nation
 ‘ bringing forth the fruits thereof.’ This great event,
 which is conspicuous to the view of all, hath verified
 the prediction so exactly, as to require no illustration.
 Take heed then, brethren, lest, by the abuse of the
 privileges which you enjoy with the gospel, and the
 rejection of the compassionate Redeemer, you provoke
 the Most High to divest you of them; and to confer
 them upon those who will be more fruitful, and
 more thankful.

18 ¶ And in that day shall the deaf hear the
 words of the book, and the eyes of the blind
 shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness.

The happy consequences of the Gentiles being called
 into the church of God, are next foretold in this and
 the following verses.—*And in that day*; in that re-
 markable season, wherein the wonderful revolution
 above predicted, shall be accomplished, *the deaf shall*
hear the words of the book: so called, by way of emi-
 nence, to intimate its superior excellence to every
 other book. The book, which contains the vision of
 all, mentioned in verse 11th; the book of the Lord,
 which is required to be sought out, and read, in
 chap. xxxiv. 16. of this prophecy, is doubtless that
 which is here meant. At the time to which this pre-
 diction refers, it was both literally and figuratively
 fulfilled; and, by considering its accomplishment, we
 may ascertain its true import. Among the many mi-
 raculous cures wrought by Jesus Christ and his
 apostles, those who were destitute of the sense of hear-
 ing, had their ears unstopped, and were made to hear
 the word of God. The answer, therefore, which our
 Lord returned to the inquiry of John the Baptist, re-
 specting his being the promised Messiah, runs thus:
 ‘ Go, and shew John again these things which ye do
 ‘ hear

‘hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them.’ These were the wonderful works which, according to the predictions of our prophet, God would perform, when he was to come and save us. Then was this prophecy literally accomplished: and not long after, it was verified in a spiritual sense, when those who, having ears, heard not, neither did understand, through ignorance, prejudice, and carnal affections; were deaf to the gracious calls of God’s providence, word, and Spirit, and remained indifferent to his holy commands, his awful threatenings, and precious promises, had their ears opened to the instructions of wisdom. Notwithstanding they did not answer, when God called upon them; though they did not hear, when he spake to them in the most alluring manner; though they did not regard, when God stretched out his hands to them, and condescended to say, In returning and rest shall ye be saved: yet God, in sovereign mercy, was pleased to unstop their ears, to make them attend diligently to the things spoken concerning salvation, to incline their ears to hearken diligently, and to come unto him, that their souls might live. In this manner, were the deaf made to hear the words of this book.

And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, &c. At the same time, and in the same manner, that the preceding article was fulfilled, the one now before us received its accomplishment. Not a few of the blind, who were destitute of bodily sight, had their eyes opened by Jesus Christ, and his apostles, to whom he gave power to work this, as well as many other stupendous miracles. Some instances truly astonishing are mentioned by the inspired writers of the New Testament, by which, with many more passed over in silence, this prediction was literally fulfilled. Besides, like the former, it receives a spiritual completion, when

when men, whom the god of this world hath blinded, and whose understandings are darkened through the ignorance that is in them, have the eyes of their minds opened to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ. When God opens the ears, he likewise opens the eyes of sinners, to see the many wonders contained in his law and gospel, and his glory therein revealed. He dispels the clouds of ignorance in which they were involved: he removes the veil of corrupt prejudices, and sensual affections, which blinded their eyes: he gives them to see their need of the Saviour, and to discern their true interest, duty, and happiness. In consequence whereof, they who were spiritually blind, and never beheld any beauty or excellence in divine objects, are made to see out of that obscurity and darkness in which they had been enveloped. Being made light in the Lord, they walk as children of light; and thus this prediction is fulfilled in its spiritual sense.—How wonderful, how important, the change foretold in this verse! The most polished nations in the world, who cultivated the most useful arts, have discovered their ignorance and blindness, with respect to spiritual and divine objects. For the improvement of language, they invented grammar and rhetoric; for the assistance of reason, they introduced logic; for soothing the passions, they devised philosophy; for the benefit of society, they framed laws; and for removing various bodily distempers, they prescribed remedies: but how to cure their spiritual disorders, they were totally unacquainted, and defective in the extreme. This affecting consideration ought to induce us highly to prize and improve that revelation, which contains promises of such inestimable benefits as these we have now been explaining. May you who have hitherto been deaf to the awful alarms of wrath sounded from mount Sinai, and the kind invitations of grace sent from mount Sion, be made to hear the voice of the Son of God,
and

and live! May you who have been blind to the dreadful horrors, and glorious beauties, exhibited in this book, have your eyes opened to see them, that to-day you may experience this scripture fulfilled in your ears!

19 The meek also shall increase *their* joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the holy One of Israel.

These words point out another happy effect that was to accompany the conversion of the Gentiles.—The persons whom our prophet first mentions, are *the meek*. Though every divine grace be essential, in some measure, to the Christian character, there are some graces which are in a special manner requisite, and peculiarly amiable, in the followers of the Son of God. Of this class, are those which are intimately connected with the divine attributes, eminently manifested in the redemption obtained by Jesus Christ; which were wonderfully exemplified in his life and death; which are most suited to the design he had in view to accomplish, and the endearing relation to God to which we are advanced. Among these, meekness holds a distinguished place: and by this lovely temper, the people of God are frequently denominated. This remark is so obvious to an attentive reader of the Bible, that it is unnecessary to adduce proofs and illustrations. It may be of more importance here to observe, that the meek have learned of Jesus Christ, to be meek and lowly in heart; and that this choice fruit of his Spirit discovers itself, in their temper toward God, in their conduct toward their brethren, and their deportment as it respects themselves.—To the authority of God expressed in his word, they yield a cheerful submission and obedience. Diffident of themselves, and sensible of their need of divine instruction, they diligently study to learn more and more of the mind of God, and heartily

tilly acquiesce in the intimations he is pleased to give them of his blessed will. Laying apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, they receive with meekness, modesty, and humility, the ingrafted word, which is able to save their souls*. To the dispensations of his providence, they yield with placid resignation. Convinced that the Lord is righteous in all his ways, however adverse and afflictive they may appear for the present, they submit, without murmuring or fretfulness, to whatsoever he is pleased to appoint. With corresponding dispositions of mind, they adopt the language of the excellent worthies mentioned in scripture, saying, ‘The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord †. ‘The will of the Lord be done ‡.’——To their brethren, even to all men, they shew meekness. Not easily provoked to rash anger, to severe censure, to fruitless contention, or sinful revenge, which ruffles the temper, and tempts to retaliate, they patiently bear the indignities and injuries that are done to them. In all their transactions, they avoid, with caution, giving just ground of offence to persons of any description; and carefully endeavour, upon all occasions, to repress the risings of resentment. When required to give a reason of the faith and hope that is in them, they do it with meekness and fear; when called to instruct those who oppose themselves, they act in the same manner, if peradventure God will give them repentance, to the acknowledgment of the truth.——With respect to themselves, meekness teaches them, the important lessons of moderating their desires, of ruling their spirits, and subduing their passions, according to the precepts contained in the word of God. It disposes to the humble self-denied performance of the various duties incumbent upon them, in their several stations and relations, that, in all lowliness and meekness, they may walk worthy of the vo-

* James i. 21.

† Job i. 21.

‡ Acts xxi. 14.

cation wherewith they are called.—Persons of this description,

Shall joy in the Lord. Joy is that pleasant affection which arises in the mind, from the agreeable prospect, or actual possession, of some substantial or desirable benefits. Sorrow enfeebles the soul, contracts the heart, and depresses the spirits; whereas joy invigorates the mind, expands and enlivens the intellectual powers. A merry heart does good like a medicine. There are two kinds of joy: the one is earthly, and arises from the hope or the enjoyment of the good things of this world; the other, which is heavenly, results from the prospect or possession of spiritual and eternal blessings. The former is natural to us, as we are the posterity of the first Adam, who was of this earth, and earthy; and springs from the objects that are suited to our earthly bodies. The latter is peculiar to those who are connected with the second Adam, the Lord from heaven; and proceeds from celestial objects, suited to our renovated powers. The former is extremely precarious and short-lived. The latter is sublime, permanent, satisfying, and increasing. The former must not be altogether excluded: for it is written, ‘The meek shall inherit the earth;’ and it is highly becoming, that they rejoice in that inheritance, which is the gift of our heavenly Father. The latter, however, is chiefly intended, even that sacred joy, which is the fruit of the Spirit, that flows from peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, delight in the ways of his commandments, and the animating view of eternal glory. It is emphatically denominated, joy in the holy Ghost; and terminates in the Lord Jehovah, whose infinite glory is displayed in his works, whose supreme authority is expressed in his commands, and whose everlasting faithfulness is pledged in his promises. His sacred name is therefore frequently prefixed in scripture, to the account given of the works that he hath done, to the precepts that he hath delivered, and the promises that he hath

made; and subjoined to those devout affections which have a special reference to him.—The meek shall joy in the glorious perfections, and universal dominion of Jehovah the Father, who is their all-sufficient portion, the eternal source from whence they derive temporal, spiritual, and eternal blessings. They shall rejoice in the essential glory, the profound humiliation, the divine doctrines, and perfect atonement of Jehovah the Son, in his complete victory obtained over their enemies, and his high exaltation to the right hand of the eternal majesty. They shall joy in Jehovah the Holy Ghost, as their Sanctifier, Guide, and Comforter, who subdues their iniquities, who renews their natures, who leads them unto all truth, who strengthens them with all might, and administers to them consolation in all their distresses.—According to the prediction before us,

The meek shall increase their joy in the Lord. When the gospel of God comes unto men with power, and furnishes them with a meek and quiet spirit, they never fail to experience some degree of joy. Accordingly we read, in the Acts of the Apostles, that those who were added unto the church, gladly received the word, that contains good tidings of great joy. It is recorded, in the account given of the conversion of Zaccheus, that, after our Lord called him, he came down, and received him joyfully. In the history of the jailer's conversion, it is said, that he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. These remarks perfectly accord with what our Lord hath affirmed, that when a man hath found the treasure hid in a field (by which similitude the kingdom of heaven is meant), for joy thereof, he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. This joy, however, is comparatively little at its commencement, in respect of what it afterward gradually advances to. The joy attained by the meek of the earth, is progressive; and though in the beginning it be small, yet in the latter end it shall greatly increase, and be like the path of the

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the just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. In the New Testament therefore, where the promises recorded in the Old, are often improved for direction in duty, the saints are required to grow in grace, to increase more and more in all the fruits of righteousness; of which, joy is one happy effect. In obedience to such precepts, they go from one degree of grace and strength unto another, until they arrive before God, perfect in Zion; and in proportion as they make progress in other graces and duties, their joy in the Lord increases. As they grow in subjection to the divine authority, in resignation to the divine disposals, in bearing provocations from men, and in regulating their temper by the word of God, their joy in the Lord, as here promised, shall be progressively augmented, until it become joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

And the poor among men shall rejoice in the holy One of Israel. Man being constituted of soul and body, he may be said to be rich or poor, in reference to either his bodily or spiritual interests. He is outwardly poor, respecting things that relate to this present life, when he hath no more than barely answers his temporal necessities, and is in great measure destitute of means requisite to supply his wants. This class of people, to whom our Lord saith, the gospel is preached, are not here chiefly intended; for many of them, in the midst of their poverty, have proud and stubborn hearts, altogether unprepared for rejoicing in the holy One of Israel. The persons whom our prophet had principally in view, are the spiritually poor, who are deeply sensible of their inward necessities, and their need of the true riches; who are importunate with God, and diligent in the use of appointed means, to get their wants relieved. In few words, they are the meek, the humble and lowly in heart, the self-denied, who constantly depend upon God for all that they enjoy, and hope to receive. But as this character is similar to the one mentioned
in

in the preceding article, it is unnecessary to enlarge.— Concerning persons of this description, it is foretold,

They shall rejoice in the holy One of Israel. Though the form of expression be varied, the person, in whom the poor among men rejoice, is the same Lord, in whom the meek place their chiefest joy. Notwithstanding that in the eternal Godhead subsists, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, yet these three are One, the holy One of Israel; who instructed that people, that the Lord their God is one Lord*. He is perfectly holy, the living source and pattern of all the holiness possessed by his people, in every age of the world; and therefore he justly merits this designation.—Having spoken of the character here ascribed to God, when lecturing from chap. xii. of this prophecy, I shall conclude the illustration of this verse, by requesting, that you endeavour to acquire these amiable tempers of meekness and poverty of spirit. For this purpose, cautiously avoid every thing inconsistent with these lovely dispositions. Diligently improve every mean, whereby they may be attained and improved. As these divine graces are fruits of the Spirit, and the effects of his blessed operation, continue instant in prayer to the God of all grace, that he may beautify you with these amiable tempers. Frequently contemplate their powerful influence, exhibited in the life and sufferings of Jesus Christ, until you learn of him, to be meek and lowly in heart. Then may you hope, that God will guide you in judgment, and teach you his way; that you shall inherit the earth, and be preserved in the undisturbed possession of your inheritance; that the kingdom of heaven shall be your portion; and that you shall increase your joy in the Lord.

20 For the terrible one is brought to nought, and the scorner is consumed, and all that watch for iniquity are cut off.

* See Deut. vi. 4.

In this and the 21st verse, our prophet foretels another effect that was to accompany the ministry of the gospel; namely, the punishment of the enemies of the church, whom he particularly describes.—*For the terrible one is brought to nought.* Men who are tyrannical, rapacious, and cruel, appear formidable and terrible to those who dread their power, and are afraid of becoming a prey to them. The Chaldeans, who were a strong martial people, are described, by the prophet Habakkuk, as a terrible nation. By the terrible one, may be here meant, the fierce and haughty persecutors of the disciples of Jesus Christ; such as Herod, Agrippa, and others, who stretched forth their hands to vex the church.—*And the scorner is consumed.* The scorner may denote, the proud and arrogant, who cause strife and contention; who make a mock of sin, and the threatenings denounced against transgressors; who deride and contemn the word and servants of God. Of this sort, were those blasphemous scoffers, who traduced the apostles of Jesus Christ, when filled with the Spirit, as drunk with new wine, and ridiculed the doctrines which they taught.—*And all that watch for iniquity are cut off.* Such were the Scribes and Pharisees, the chief priests and elders of the Jewish people; among whom were Annas and Caiaphas, who consulted together how they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him*. Such also were those who convened early and late, and with the utmost vigilance waited for an opportunity, that they might get him condemned to the punishment of the cross.—Concerning persons of the above descriptions, it is affirmed, *They are brought to nought—they are consumed—they are cut off.* The expressions, which are of similar import, are all in the present tense, and diversified, to intimate the greatness, the extent, and certain approach of the predicted events, which were accomplished in their season.

* Matth. xxvi. 3, 4.

21 That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought.

The subject introduced in the preceding verse, is here amplified and illustrated.—The persons of whom the prophet speaks, were those *that make a man an offender for a word*. Instigated by hatred, envy, and other malevolent dispositions, they watched for opportunities of accusing a man, however good and righteous, under the slightest pretence, even for the smallest unguarded expression, that, if possible, it might be made the ground of his condemnation. Such were the persecutors of Stephen; who, when they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake, suborned men who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. After which, they thrust him out of the city, and stoned him to death*.—*And lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate*. The gate of the city was the place, in ancient times, where those who were invested with authority, dispensed judgment and justice among the people, and where the servants of God reprov'd and instructed them. For persons especially of this last character, the men of whom our prophet speaks, laid snares, that they might entangle and apprehend them, as dangerous members of society, and obnoxious to men in power. Such were the violent men from whom the prophet David requested, that he might be kept; who, he says, purpos'd to overthrow his goings, spread a net for him by the way-side, and set gins†. Such were the insidious Pharisees and Sadducees, who persecuted the apostle Paul, formed a conspiracy against his life, and bound themselves under a curse, that they would neither eat nor drink

* Acts vi. 14.

† Psal. cxl. 5.

till they had killed him*.—*And turn aside the just for a thing of nought.* They endeavoured, by various means, to turn aside holy and upright men from the good ways of the Lord: they represented them in an odious light, and tried to pervert their righteous cause. This conduct received considerable aggravation from its serving no valuable purpose, and being attended with no real advantage to those who were thus employed. Of this description, were the violent treacherous persons among the Jews, who pleased not God, and were contrary to all men; who persecuted not only their own prophets, but likewise Jesus Christ, and his holy apostles. These, all these dangerous enemies of the church of Christ, were brought to nought, consumed, and cut off, according to this prediction, at the period wherein the Romans overturned the Jewish church and state.—Learn then the certain desolation and overthrow of the enemies of God's people, who, by various ways, endeavour to annoy and persecute them. Upon those who obstinately persist in such criminal conduct, God, in righteousness, will execute the punishment here denounced. Notwithstanding he sent his Son to die for us, while we were yet enemies, yet those who refuse to believe in him, who contemn and reject him, shall surely perish. His abused goodness will cause his wrath to burn, and his incorrigible adversaries shall be made to feel his righteous vengeance.

22 Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale.

Another consequence which was to result from the calling of the Gentiles, to participate in the benefits of divine grace, is predicted in this and the two fol-

* Acts xxiii. 6. *et seq.*

lowing verses ; namely, the happy increase of that spiritual Israel, in whom the image of the patriarch Jacob was to shine forth.—Our prophet, when he introduces any new subject, of peculiar excellence and importance, commonly begins with some solemn preface, suited to the topic of discourse. This remark is verified in the verse before us, where the particular branch of the prophecy we are now to consider, commences with these emphatical words: *Therefore thus saith the Lord, who redeemed Abraham.* God brought him forth from Ur, of the Chaldees, from among an idolatrous people, and conferred upon him many important benefits. He rescued him out of the hands of his spiritual enemies ; he delivered him from the curse of the law ; he blessed him, and made him a blessing ; he dignified him with the honourable name of the Father of the faithful, and the Friend of God. As the meek and poor among men, converted to the faith of Jesus Christ, were to be conducted, under the special care of divine providence, out of the land of Judea, that they might carry the divine lamp of the gospel unto all nations, that the promises made to Abraham might be accomplished, it is with peculiar propriety that God is here designed, the Redeemer of that renowned patriarch.—The prediction itself relates to the house of Jacob : not his natural descendants, many of whom had just cause to be ashamed ; but to his spiritual posterity, who, like him, were eminently possessed of the spirit of grace and supplication—who were Israelites indeed, in whom there was no guile ; the generation of them that seek the face of the God of Jacob, who receive from him the blessing, and righteousness from the God of salvation. This house was composed of those who were Jews inwardly, whose circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men, but of God *.—Of them it is foretold,

* Rom. ii. 29.

Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face wax pale. At the period to which this prediction referred, his spiritual children were not to have any reason to be ashamed or afraid. Shame commonly reddens the face; fear divests it of its vivid colour, and makes it look pale. The expression may import, that the causes which had formerly operated to their disgrace and reproach, and had excited many anxious fears, were to be removed. Delivered from those uneasy circumstances which contributed to distress them, and raised superior to their enemies, they were not to be confounded by unexpected disappointments, nor intimidated by the opposition or contempt they might meet with. In the exercise of humble confidence, and holy fortitude, they were to be diligently and successfully employed in the service of God.—Happy state! Shame and fear enfeeble the active powers of the mind, and hinder the vigorous performance of any arduous enterprise; whereas confidence and courage, in adhering to the gospel of Christ, are accompanied with serenity and tranquillity of soul. Arm yourselves then, brethren, with the same mind: pursue your Christian warfare with undaunted intrepidity; and solicitously avoid every thing that might excite the uneasy passions of shame and fear.

23 But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.

The agreeable event is here foretold, that was to cut off all the occasions of reproach and dismay, which, in other periods, had been strongly felt by the church of God.—The person of whom our prophet speaks, is Jacob, who represented his spiritual posterity, that resemble him in spirit and practice; and in whom he may be said to live, as parents do in their children.

The children, whom he seeth in the midst of him, or of his house, are discriminated from all other people by this peculiar benefit, whereby God renews them after his image, and forms them for his glory. That they may come under this description in the full sense of the words, he regenerates them by his grace, and creates them in Christ Jesus unto good works. This constitutes an essential ingredient in the character of the people of God, who are all righteous; concerning whom God thus speaks, ‘They are the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified *.’ From all which, we learn, that the persons whom Jacob was to see in the midst of him, are his spiritual offspring, converts to God from among the Gentiles, who were to be admitted into the church of God, that they might participate in the distinguishing privileges of his peculiar people.—On beholding this delightful sight, *they shall sanctify my name.* They shall maintain a reverential awe of the divine majesty, a profound respect for his glorious characters and divine excellencies; they shall approach him, in his ordinances, with suitable holy dispositions of soul; they shall humbly submit to the dispensations of his providence, and perform his service with fidelity and diligence. With elevated apprehensions of his glory, they shall celebrate his attributes, displayed in the wonderful work of man’s redemption by his own Son, and the no less astonishing work of their renovation by the grace of the holy Spirit. They shall honour him by a holy and well-ordered conversation; and express the sense that they entertain of the purity of his nature, by the sanctity of their lives.—*And sanctify the holy One of Jacob;* who hath richly manifested his infinite holiness, in his works, and in his word; and who hath set them apart for himself, that they may shew forth his praise.—*And shall fear the God of Israel.* They

* Isaiah lx. 21.

shall revere his majesty; they shall adore his goodness, dread his displeasure, and admire the riches of his grace. On these topics I shall not enlarge, as they frequently recur in our progress through this prophecy. Such were the blessed effects which were to result from the great increase of the spiritual children of Jacob, at the time to which this prophecy looked forward.

24 They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine.

Another admirable effect which was to accompany the great event above predicted, was the conversion of the patrons of error and superstition, who opposed the gospel by false and delusive reasonings.—*They also that erred in spirit, &c.* who formed wrong apprehensions concerning the perfections, the providence, and ways of God, were to have their mistakes rectified respecting these important objects. They were to be instructed in the great mysteries of godliness, and to become acquainted with the principles of true wisdom and sound understanding.—*And they that murmured, &c.* Those who, under various pretexts, indulged in corrupt prejudices against the truth, and endeavoured, by evil surmises, to obstruct its progress, and subvert its influence, were to learn the salutary doctrines of the gospel, which make wise unto salvation; and, from the heart, to believe and obey them.—Such are the illustrious effects which, according to this prophecy, were to attend the conversion of the Gentiles. It received a partial accomplishment in the apostolic age of the church, and shall hereafter be more fully verified. Philosophers and pretenders to learning, who, after speculating upon various subjects, actually proved infidels and sceptics, were the men who chiefly opposed the doctrine of the gospel; and yet not a few of them, having

ing experienced its power, embraced Christianity, and became striking instances of the triumph of truth over error. The genuine posterity of Israel, those who were Israelites indeed, beheld these wonderful conquests at the commencement of the New-Testament dispensation; and having divested themselves of the shame and sorrow which they felt, on seeing the degenerate progeny of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they rejoiced at the glorious success of the gospel, and the increase of the spiritual posterity of the Father of the faithful. Let us consider the fulfilment which this prophecy hath already received, as the sure pledge of its future completion: and let us rejoice and be glad, in the pleasing prospect of the numerous accession which shall hereafter be made to the church of God; when ‘ he shall say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory *.’

* Isaiah xliii. 6, 7.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

WE now enter upon the third section of the second discourse, contained in the third book of Isaiah's Prophecies, wherein our prophet loudly declaims against the Ephraimites and Jews, for having neglected their duty toward God, the sole Protector of his people; and requested assistance from Egypt, against Assyria. He foretels the unhappy consequences of that measure; the future fortunes of the church, and their deliverance from powerful enemies, of which a remarkable instance and pledge was to be exhibited in the overthrow of the Assyrian army. He shews this perverse and degenerate people, who despised the divine protection and direction, and turned their attention to Egypt, whose favour and assistance they supplicated by ambassadors and presents, that the project they had formed, should not be accompanied with the wished-for success: on the contrary, it would expose its abettors to shame, reproach, and certain destruction. He informs them, that God, who is jealous of his glory, would not grant them deliverance, until, by true repentance, they penitently returned to him, humbly implored his assistance, and reposed their confidence in him alone; and that then he would not only defend them from enemies, but enrich them with temporal and spiritual blessings. He acquaints them also, that the Almighty was about to give an illustrious display of his power and righteousness, by destroying the forces of the haughty Assyrian monarch. From this short view of the subject, it is easy to see, that this discourse, like those which we have already considered, was intended to reprove, to instruct, to comfort and amend. Our prophet, who observed defection from God spring up, not only among the Ephraimites, but likewise among the Jews, great part of whom were addicted to hypocrisy, infidelity, and formality in the service

service of Jehovah, like a faithful minister of God, proclaimed war against these and other vices: he boldly attacked the crimes they committed; he combated their incredulity; he laid open their hypocrisy, and secret wicked devices, in order to reach conviction to their consciences, to reclaim them from sin, and bring them to true repentance. If, after all his efforts, united with those of his colleagues in office, they obstinately persisted in their transgressions, their posterity might enjoy, in the accomplishment of his predictions, a substantial proof, that a prophet of the Lord had been among them, and that their destruction was of themselves.—This discourse, which is composed of two parts, the former being intended for reproof, and the latter for consolation, is arranged in the following order. The prophet begins with reproving the Ephraimites, for soliciting assistance from Egypt, and foretels the unhappy issue of that foolish project, ver. 1.—7. He then administers a sharp reproof to the people of Judah, who, at that time, favoured the scheme adopted by their brethren, and denounces the judgments of God against both kingdoms, ver. 8.—18. The consolatory part of the discourse commences with an enumeration of the benefits to be conferred upon the church, after the predicted deliverance, ver. 19.—26. It concludes, with the awful judgment which was to be inflicted upon the Assyrians, and the terrible consequences wherewith it should be attended.—The prophecy recorded in this chapter, was probably delivered in the second or third year of Hezekiah's reign, about the time that Hoshea, the last king of the Ephraimites, sent an embassy into Egypt, with a view to form an alliance with that kingdom, and to implore assistance against Salmaneser, king of Assyria, against whom he had lately conspired, as you read, 2 Kings xvii. 3, 4.

CHAP. XXX.

WO to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin.

God, by the prophet, begins this discourse, by reprobating the device framed by the Ephraimites, of asking assistance from Egypt; a circumstance which forms the basis of the following prophecy.—The wo denounced against the persons described in this and the next verse, may be considered as including all those complicated calamities which demonstrate the divine indignation against sin, and which are inflicted upon the obstinate transgressors of the law of God. To claim the highest attention to these awful threatened miseries, the solemn words are used, *Saith the Lord*. The people upon whom this wo is pronounced, are the *rebellious children*. The Most High had conferred upon them many important privileges: he had dignified them with the honourable character of his children, whom he had nourished and brought up; he had condescended to instruct them; he had taken them under his gracious protection; he had liberally supplied their necessities; and thus were they laid under the strongest obligations to honour and obey him. Notwithstanding all this profusion of kindness, they proved rebellious. They withheld from him that esteem, reverence, and subjection, which he claimed as his unquestionable right: they burst asunder the bands whereby he had connected them with himself, and cast his cords from them, discovering their avowed practical contempt of his sacred authority, and the perversity of their disposition, by applying for assistance to Egypt rather than to God, who, for many ages, had been their Protector and Guardian.—Beware, my friends, of every thing
whereby

whereby you may incur this odious character, and expose yourselves to misery and wo. Entertain high and honourable thoughts of your heavenly Father; cordially submit to his righteous laws and dispensations; and place unshaken confidence in his wisdom, power, and faithfulness, who will not cast off his people, nor forsake his inheritance.

That take counsel, but not of me, &c. These rebellious children did not act rashly and precipitately, but prosecuted with coolness the designs which they formed, after mature deliberation and consultation with those whose opinion they valued. God however, who had been to them a Father and a Friend, they acknowledged not, though, in every condition, they stood in absolute need of his aid and conduct. They could not be ignorant, that asking assistance from Egypt, and forming alliance with that people, from whose power they had been miraculously delivered, by the stretched-out arm of Jehovah, must have been exceedingly offensive to him. Conscious that they were adopting measures which God highly disapproved, they declined to consult him on this occasion, and followed the dictates of their own corrupt minds. Thus they rejected his counsel; they contemned his authority, disregarded his providence, and presumptuously preferred human counsel and assistance to divine direction and defence.—Sensible of our own ignorance, weakness, and folly, and our inability to direct our steps, in every station and condition in life, let us acknowledge God in all our ways, and entreat that he will guide us by his counsel. Let us beseech him to preserve us from the ways of sin, and to conduct us in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.

And that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, &c. A covering is used to screen from the storm, to defend from danger, to preserve from shame and confusion of face. - The people of Ephraim beheld the storm thickening around them; danger stared them
in

in the face, whilst they dreaded the approach of disgrace and contempt. In this perilous situation, they looked out for assistance and protection: and after deliberating for some time, they fixed upon Egypt, as best adapted to be their defence; and under its wings, they purposed to take refuge. This covering was *not of God's spirit*. He had not provided it for them; he had not, by his word, or his servants the prophets, allowed or directed them to use it: on the contrary, they were expressly prohibited from having recourse to Egypt for aid or relief, in seasons of impending danger and distress. Nevertheless, they adopted this ill-fated measure.—*That they might add sin to sin*. Instead of turning to the Lord, in the time of threatening calamity, they trespassed against him yet more and more; and, to disobedience to his authority, they added the sin of despising his counsel. By acting in this manner, they contracted aggravated guilt, and exposed themselves to divine judgments.—Take heed then, especially in seasons of alarm, that you cover not yourselves with a covering, that is not of God's spirit. Of these, there are great variety, none of which can effectually secure you from approaching evil. Think not, that, in the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, you shall find safety under the covering of external reformation, which proceeds not from inward renovation of heart; or from acts of piety and devotion, that are not accompanied with the exercise of justice, mercy, and charity. Think not to find refuge in presumptuous hopes of divine mercy, if you persist in slighting and abusing it; or under a cloak of public religion, and fiery zeal against those who differ from you, whilst you remain indifferent to personal godliness. Endeavour to cover with that complete covering which God hath provided, and to have it effectually applied to you by his Spirit; then may you hope to be quiet from fear of evil.

2 That walk to go down into Egypt (and have not asked at my mouth), to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt.

These words describe more particularly, the sin committed by the rebellious children, against whom misery and wo were denounced in the preceding verse. Notwithstanding the oppression and bondage which their forefathers sustained in the land of Egypt, from which they were wonderfully rescued by the omnipotent arm of Jehovah, many of them, at different times, expressed desires of returning thither. Such was their confidence in an arm of flesh, and such their foolish attachment to the Egyptians, that, on several occasions, and particularly on the present emergency, they had recourse to them for assistance. They sent ambassadors to the king of Egypt, requesting his aid against the Assyrians, who came and besieged Samaria three years*. The messengers who were dispatched on that business, acting as the representatives of the Ephraimites, that people are said to have gone down to Egypt.—The design of this embassy is thus expressed: *To strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh.* Pharaoh, you know, was, in ancient times, the name of the kings of Egypt; whose strength consisted in their riches, their military forces, and particularly their cavalry, which, at this period, were renowned for their excellence, as well as their numbers.—*And to trust in the shadow of Egypt.* The expression may probably allude to the situation of that country, which is fortified by nature, on the north and south, by two extensive ridges of mountains, whose shade reached a considerable way over the valley-grounds; and therefore it was called, the land shadowing with wings. The shadow of Egypt must here denote, the protection and defence which the

* See 2 Kings xvii. 3. *et seq.*

people of Ephraim expected to receive from that kingdom, and upon which they depended for safety from the Assyrians.—The peculiar aggravation which attended this conduct, is stated in the middle of the verse :

And have not asked at my mouth. As men communicate their sentiments to one another by means of words, which proceed from the mouth, so to ask at one's mouth, is to ask his opinion or advice. The rebellious children, whose perverse disposition is here represented, did not inquire of God's servants, nor consult his word, that they might learn, if he approved of their application to Egypt for assistance, and if he would be pleased to accompany this measure with his blessing. This project, which was of their own devising, at all events they were determined to carry into execution ; and, on that account, they are sharply reprov'd and threatened. God had graciously promised to be their defence from all their enemies, if they would trust in him, and renounce every other confidence. It was therefore a heinous crime, deserving severe rebuke, to abandon their hopes of divine protection, and to seek aid from those who had oppress'd and afflicted their fathers.—After that people refuse to own their dependence upon God, and abuse the benefits they have received, they are justly withheld, and they are allowed to follow their infatuated counsels. Instead therefore of being surpris'd, when we observe men adopting measures that are imprudent and foolish, we ought rather to be humbled for their sin, of not acknowledging God, which probably gave occasion to such a display of folly. The direction which the all-wise God is pleas'd to afford to those who ask, and thankfully accept of his counsel, is altogether unmerited ; and those who slight and contemn it, cannot justly expect any thing else than shame and disappointment. ' If any
' of you lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who
' giveth

‘ giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not ;
 ‘ and it shall be given him *.’

3 Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt *your* confusion.

In this and the four following verses, our prophet foretels the miserable consequences that were to result from the confederacy which the posterity of Israel formed with the Egyptians, and the dependence which they placed upon them for help.—The Pharaohs, who were kings over Egypt, were anciently very powerful monarchs, and could have brought exceeding numerous armies into the field of battle. All their boasted strength, and expected protection, were to terminate in disappointment and confusion to the Ephraimites, who foolishly trusted in them for defence. This is so clearly expressed in the words before us, as to require little explanation : but the important truth they contain, we need much, if I mistake not, to have impressed upon our minds.—‘ Cursed
 ‘ is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh
 ‘ his arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord his
 ‘ God.’ They that trust in themselves, or in the wealth and power of other men, shall be ashamed and confounded : all of them shall go to confusion together. There is not a more certain way to disappointment and sorrow, than to trust in the creature for safety and assistance, as is abundantly evident from many passages of scripture, and particularly the one now under our consideration. Put not then your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. Trust in that almighty Jehovah alone, who is able to assist and save you. Rely wholly on the conduct of his infinite wisdom, the protection of his omnipotent arm, the riches of his sovereign mercy, and

* James i. 5.

the promises secured by his unchangeable veracity. Then may you adopt the words of our prophet; ‘ The Lord God will help me, therefore I shall not be confounded, and I know that I shall not be ashamed *.’

4 For his princes were at Zoan, and his ambassadors came to Hanes.

The ambassadors sent by Hoshea, king of Israel, on their arrival in Egypt, found the state of affairs in that kingdom extremely adverse to the design of their embassy; and soon perceived, that the business they were sent to negotiate, would not be attended with desired success. The princes, or great men, dispatched by the Israelitish monarch, arrived, according to this prediction, at Zoan; which was anciently a celebrated city in Lower Egypt, where the kings of Egypt had their residence, and kept their court with great magnificence. The other city, called Hanes, where the ambassadors arrived, is not mentioned by this name at least, in any other place of scripture that I know of. Commentators differ in opinion concerning it: but as it is of no great moment for you to be acquainted with their conjectures, I shall not trouble you with a detail of them. Dr. Lowth, in a Note upon this verse, observes, that six Manuscripts read the Hebrew word which signifies *in vain*. This translation gives a good sense to the passage, and may probably be the true reading; which denotes, not that the persons intrusted with the embassy from Ephraim, came to the city Hanes, but that they came to Zoan *in vain*, finding that it would not be attended with any important good effects.

5 They were all ashamed of a people *that* could not profit them, nor be an help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach.

* Isaiah l. 7.

This verse expresses, in strong terms, the ignominy and disgrace which accompanied this fruitless negotiation with Egypt.—After meeting probably with a cold reception from Pharaoh and his courtiers, the request of assistance, made by the ambassadors of the Israelites, was either plainly refused, for reasons I pretend not to explain; or they might be informed, that troops sufficient for their relief, could not be marched into their country so soon as they wished; or that they had reason to suspect, that the forces they might send to their aid against Assyria, might prove perfidious to the interests of Ephraim. Whatever answer was delivered on this occasion, the princes of Hoshea were ashamed and confounded, at the mortifying disappointment of their sanguine expectations. So far were the Egyptians from helping and profiting them in the time of their need, that they proved to them a shame and a reproach. The enemies of Israel would probably taunt them, as Rabshakeh, commander of the Assyrian army, upbraided the Jews: ‘Behold (said he) thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all that trust in him*.’

6 The burden of the beasts of the south: into the land of trouble and anguish, from whence *come* the young and old lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they will carry their riches upon the shoulders of young asses, and their treasures upon the bunches of camels, to a people *that* shall not profit *them*.

Our prophet, having foretold the disappointment and reproach which were to attend the embassy sent into Egypt by the king of Israel, proceeds, in this

* 2 Kings xviii. 21.

verse, to mention a circumstance that would greatly aggravate the folly and disgrace of the Ephraimites.—*The burden of beasts of the south* (supply if you please, to render the prediction more plain and intelligible) shall be carried *into the land of trouble and anguish*, &c. Along with the princes, there were sent into Egypt, according to the custom of the times, beasts, such as asses and camels, loaded with rich presents to Pharaoh and his courtiers, intended to conciliate favour, and to obtain succours from that powerful monarch. The animals employed in this service, are called beasts of the south, because they were most frequently used in southern countries; and particularly in Egypt, which was situated to the southward of Canaan: and is thus emphatically described in the next words, *Into a land of trouble and anguish*, &c. The Egyptians were terribly oppressed by the tyranny of their princes, who employed them in making those great works, which were intended either for the benefit or the ornament of the country, or to immortalize his name by whom they were projected or executed. Such were the temples, the pyramids, the labyrinths, and other astonishing monuments of antiquity, power, and grandeur, with which their kingdom abounded. The people of Egypt were likewise distressed by many afflictive evils and calamities, peculiar to that country, arising from the intense heat of the climate, the inundation of the Nile, and other causes. And in times of old, Egypt was a land of trouble and anguish to the progenitors of the Ephraimites; for there they were made to serve with rigour, and bitter anguish of soul*.—Our prophet farther describes it in these words, *From whence come the young and old lion*, &c. The lions made their dens among the reeds and rushes, which grew in great quantities, to a considerable height, in the marshy rich soil of that country. Vipers and serpents also nested among them in vast

* See Exod. vi. 8.

numbers; and from these circumstances, well known in Palestine, the land of Egypt received the prophetic description of which we have now seen the propriety.

They will carry their riches, &c. The ambassadors dispatched from Israel to Zoan, were to transport the riches and treasures which they carried along with them, upon young asses, and the bunches of camels, the beasts of burden that were most proper to go into Egypt. These useful animals were to carry the presents of silver and gold, by which the Ephraimites hoped to gain over the Egyptians to their assistance. Notwithstanding all the trouble and expences that this embassy must have cost, it was sent to a people who were not to be of any real benefit to those by whom it was projected and executed. Such was the perfidy of the Egyptians toward Israel, that the prophet Ezekiel was commanded to say, in the name of God, ‘ Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh, king of Egypt.—I have given thee for meat to the beasts of the field, and to the fowls of the heaven *.

7 For the Egyptians shall help in vain, and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this, Their strength is to sit still.

Any assistance that Egypt might afford the Ephraimites, was to prove ineffectual, according to this prophecy, for accomplishing any valuable end.—I am much pleased with the simple remark made by the pious Matthew Henry, on the first part of this verse, which may suffice for its illustration: “ Those (saith he) that trust in God, in his power, providence, and promises, are never made ashamed of their hope; but they that put their confidence in any creature, will, sooner or later, find it a reproach to them. God is true, and may be trusted; but every

* Ezek. xxix. 3. 5.

“ man is a liar, and must be suspected. The Creator is a rock of ages; the creature is a broken reed; we cannot expect too little from man, or too much from God.”—*Therefore I cried concerning this ineffectual assistance, which the Israelites might receive from Egypt. Isaiah reminds the rebellious people to whom he was sent, that he had lifted up his voice, and loudly remonstrated with them on this subject, that all concerned might know, that he was deeply interested in this affair, and that they ought diligently to attend to the message which he was intrusted to deliver by the Most High; of which this is the sum.—Their strength is to sit still.* The strength and safety of the Ephraimites would have been most effectually promoted, by abstaining from forbidden measures of procuring deliverance from threatened danger. By taking unlawful steps for their preservation, they would accelerate their ruin, and rather weaken than increase their strength. The design which they had in view, was not to be effectually promoted by going down to Egypt for help, and by forming alliance with Pharaoh. Their safety consisted in trusting in the Lord God of their fathers, and quietly waiting for his salvation, in the diligent use of appointed means.—This is indeed, my brethren, the best way to acquire strength for performing duty, and sustaining afflictions; for ‘except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain*. Wait then on the Lord; be of good courage; and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord †.’

8 ¶ Now go, write it before them in a table, and note it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever.

* Psal. cxxvii. 1.

† Psal. xxvii. 14.

The portion of our prophet's discourse on which we now enter, was probably directed, not only to the Ephraimites, but to the Jews, who favoured the scheme their brethren had projected. It commences, by reciting the order he received from God, to commit to writing what he was about to deliver in the hearing of this perfidious people, that so it might never be lost or forgotten, but be transmitted uncorrupted to latest posterity. Before the useful arts, which are highly ornamental to society, arrived at any degree of perfection, the ancients wrote, or engraved, in brass, lead, or stone; or upon the barks of trees, or skins of animals; and afterward on Egyptian papyrus, prepared for that purpose. Two methods of writing were in use in the days of Isaiah. The one was performed by an iron pen, or engraving instrument, upon writing-tables, made of brass, wood, or some other materials; which were sometimes covered over with wax, in which the letters were formed; and, at other times, they were cut into the metal or timber. In reference to this mode of writing, Job thus expressed his ardent wish: 'Oh that my words
' were now written! Oh that they were printed in a
' book! that they were graven with an iron pen and
' lead, in the rock for ever *!' The other was executed upon parchment, and skins of beasts, prepared for the purpose, which, being joined together, were rolled upon a piece of wood. In this manner, did Baruch, the scribe, write the words of the prophet Jeremiah, with ink, upon a roll of a book †. The command received by Isaiah, relative to the following article of his discourse, comprised both these modes of writing. He was required to write it upon a table, that it might be before the eyes of the people; and to note it in a book, that it might be preserved entire, for the instruction of future ages. It is therefore added,

* Job xix. 23, 24.

† See Jer. xxxvi.

That it may be for the time to come for ever and ever. The design of recording what follows, was, that the mark of infamy stamped upon the character of this rebellious treacherous people, might be indelible, and preserved in remembrance throughout all succeeding generations. It serves to shew posterity, in after-ages, the foolish vain counsels and practices adopted by the children of Israel—to demonstrate the divine equity and righteousness in the dispensations of providence, whereby they were severely punished for their perversity and wickedness—and to convince the professing people of God, in every period, of the extreme folly and danger of seeking and trusting to human aid, in neglect and contempt of divine assistance. Notwithstanding the unsuccessfulness of the Ephraimites, and the solemn admonitions of the prophets of the Lord, the Jews afterward adopted the same measures which proved destructive to their brethren. Zedekiah, king of Judah, unmindful of the engagements he entered into with the king of Babylon, broke the treaty he had made with the Chaldeans, depending upon the king of Egypt for that protection he was unable to grant*.—Blessed be God, that the Book of the Prophecies of Isaiah, wherein this prediction is noted, hath been transmitted to us, who live in these last days, in this island, afar off upon the sea; that they are in our hands, and that we have frequent opportunities of reading and hearing them explained! Thankful for the useful information, and sharp reproof, administered, in this passage, to those who place their confidence in an arm of flesh, let us wisely improve it, for the valuable purposes which it is well suited to promote.

9 That this *is* a rebellious people, lying children, children *that* will not hear the law of the LORD.

Our prophet proceeds to record what he was commanded to write, that it might be kept in perpetual

* See Jer. xxxvii.

preservation.—The character here given to the posterity of Israel, originated in their woful apostasy from God, their continued opposition to the divine authority, and frequent defections into idolatry, notwithstanding the admonitions they received from the servants of Jehovah. Persons are deemed rebellious, who traitorously take up arms against their lawful sovereign, who refuse subjection to the established laws of the kingdom, and endeavour to overthrow the constituted form of government which they were bound to support. In this manner, the people of which Isaiah speaks, incurred this character, by renouncing obedience to the laws promulgated among them by the Most High, by despising his ordinances, bursting asunder the sacred obligations whereby they were bound to his service, making light of his favours, subverting that government he had established among them, and polluting his inheritance. The clearest proofs of these assertions occur in the sacred history, in the writings of Moses and the prophets, and particularly in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Ye have been rebellious, said their renowned legislator, in his pathetic address to them before his death—‘ ye have been rebellious against the Lord, ‘ from the day that I knew you. Behold, while I am ‘ yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious ‘ against the Lord: and how much more after my ‘ death *,’ is not easy to say. And in the words before us, this odious character is expressly assigned to them.—To each of you, my friends, I say what God said to Ezekiel, ‘ Be not thou rebellious, like ‘ that rebellious house.’ Rebellion against a good prince, and wholesome laws, is a detestable crime, that is often severely punished. How much more abominable and dangerous is rebellion against the King of kings, and his most righteous laws! Throw down, then, those weapons whereby you have acted

* Deut. xxxi. 27.

in hostility against him, and cordially submit to the Lord of heaven and earth, that he may guide you by his counsel, govern you by his laws, and bless you with the accomplishment of his promises.

Lying children. Children they were, no doubt: and such was the peculiar affection of God toward them, such his tender care of them, that he vouchsafed to call himself their Father. ‘I am (saith he) a Father unto Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born.’ Among other privileges, he conferred upon them the adoption of children; so that they had both the name, and the right connected with it.—But, alas! they proved lying children, who practically denied their intimate relation to God, by refusing to yield him that unlimited obedience which they promised in the most solemn manner. They declared to Moses, in the most explicit terms, ‘All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do:’ and their words to his successor Joshua, were of similar import; ‘We will serve the Lord, for he is our God.’ Notwithstanding these repeated solemn declarations, they were often guilty of the most perverse disobedience. Having publicly affirmed what seemed to be their determined resolution, of yielding universal subjection unto God, who would have supposed, that they would have falsified these sacred engagements? Though it is impossible that, by the most specious assurances, they could have deceived God, whose knowledge is infinite; yet he spake of them in such a manner, as plainly intimates what might have been expected from the sentiments they avowed: ‘Surely they are children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour.’ Their conduct, however, fully proved, in many instances, that they justly merited the character here given of them, that they were lying children.—Their perfidious conduct ought to excite in us just detestation, accompanied with a solicitous concern that we may avoid every species of falsehood, especially the worst kind of it, lying unto the God of truth.

Children that will not hear the law of the Lord. God having become a Father unto Israel, and assumed them for his children, he dealt with them as he dealt not with every nation. He honoured them above all other nations, by committing to them his sacred oracles; and giving them his law, comprehending the wisest and the most salutary precepts. And that they might not be forgotten, or corrupted, he wrote unto them the great things, or as the Hebrew word signifies, the excellent, the magnificent, the precious things of his law, which were stamped with his supreme authority, and therefore claimed their highest attention. The Lord God of their fathers sent among them his servants the prophets, that they might explain his law, shew the true import of his statutes and judgments, and excite them to the practice of those duties which were therein required. But notwithstanding they were repeatedly called upon, with the greatest earnestness and affection, to hearken to the word of the Lord, they would not hear, they would not understand, they would not obey. Instead of cultivating intimate acquaintance with the law of the Lord, ‘that when they went, it might lead them; that when they slept, it might keep them; and when they awaked, it might talk with them*’; they esteemed the important and interesting matters that it contained, as a strange thing, in which they had little or no concern. Justly therefore are they here described, as children that would not hear the law of the Lord.—Think not that, by the grace of the gospel, you are exempted from this necessary duty. At the conclusion of the Old Testament, after a remarkable prophecy of the advent of the great Messiah, which is thus expressed, ‘Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing under his wings†,’ the following memorable words are subjoined, ‘Remember ye the law of Mo-

* Prov. vi. 22.

† Mal. iv. 2.

‘ seers.’ Though ye enjoy the clear light of the Sun of righteousness, and are favoured with the glad tidings of salvation, ye must never forget the law of the Lord, or neglect to yield the obedience which it justly demands.

10 Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits.

The refusal of the rebellious children to hear the law of the Lord, did not proceed merely from negligence, but from detestable pride, from hatred of the truth, and impatience under reproof.—*Which say to the seers, See not.* Seers and prophets seem to have been names of similar import; ‘ for he that was called a Prophet (in the days of Saul, king of Israel), was beforetime called a Seer *.’ In after-times, a distinction was made between these two characters, as appears from 1 Chron. xxix. 29. where are mentioned, the book of Samuel the seer, the book of Nathan the prophet, and the book of Gad the seer. The seer was probably a person who, by means of the visions and revelations wherewith he was favoured, was enabled to foresee approaching future events, of which he gave notice to the people. The prophet was a public teacher, invested with authority from Jehovah, not only to foretel future events, but to admonish men of their sin and danger, to instruct them in the knowledge of their duty, and to persuade them to perform it. To the seers, the rebellious children said, See not, &c. Far from properly esteeming persons of these descriptions, and faithfully improving the important advantages they might have enjoyed by their means, they presumptuously endeavoured to shut the eyes of the seers, and to stop the mouths of the prophets; who were employed in teaching them the right

* 1 Sam. ix. 9.

ways of the Lord. They met the servants of God with all the discouragement and opposition of which they were capable; and, instead of receiving the messages that they delivered with humble gratitude, they set themselves in a way that was not good, vigorously to withstand them.

Prophecy not unto us right things, &c. These words strongly express the deep corruption of those by whom they were uttered, and delineate a striking feature in the character of false prophets and their abettors. The faithful servants of God, by narrowly inspecting the growing vices of the people among whom they lived, and by the revelations they received from God, became acquainted with the secret sins and hypocrisy that prevailed among them, against which they vehemently inveighed in their discourses. They warmly remonstrated against abounding iniquity; they sharply reprov'd every species of transgression; they exhorted the people to true repentance, and denounced the most awful judgments against the impenitent. The reverse was the conduct of false prophets, who themselves indulged in luxury and dissipation; whilst they endeavoured to please and flatter the people, to connive at their vices, and to accommodate their discourses to their vitiated taste. The rebellious children of whom our prophet speaks, requested, that those who exercised the prophetic office among them, would not prophesy such right and severe things as they had hitherto inculcated. Speak unto us, said they, smooth and soft things, though they may not be founded in truth. Prophecy deceit and falsehood, that may not disturb our tranquillity, or awaken our fears and anxieties. Instead of shewing the evil of our ways, and threatening us with desolation and death, flatter us, by fair words, with the agreeable prospect of the continuance of safety, liberty, and prosperity. Gratify our wishes, soothe our minds, with promises of life, peace, and happiness, after we have been threatened with war,
misery,

misery, and destruction. How presumptuous and audacious was their demand, in daring to seduce the servants of God from their fidelity, and to direct them how to perform their Master's work! The truth is, they could not endure sound doctrine, faithful reproofs, and salutary counsels; and therefore they wished, that the prophets would exchange their wholesome admonitions for discourses that might be palatable and pleasant.—Jesus Christ hath expressly foretold, 'That false prophets shall arise, and deceive many*.' Permit me therefore to address you in the words of the apostle Peter: 'Seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ †.'

II Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the holy One of Israel to cease from before us.

These words contain another instance of this rebellious people's hatred of the truth, their contempt of the word of God, and the faithful admonitions of his servants. The practice of iniquity, in which obstinate transgressors are employed, is here represented, as a way wherein the multitude are securely walking; and the ministers of the Lord are viewed as standing by the way-side, and thus addressing the passengers, in their great Master's name: 'Forlake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away †.' To the true prophets, who performed this friendly office, this proud fastidious people replied, in the words before us, *Get you out of the way*, and give place to others better than

* Matth. xxiv. 11. † 2 Peter iii. 17, 18. † Prov. iv. 14, 15.

you, who will speak to us in more pleasant agreeable language. Cease from reproving, admonishing, and threatening, in which, for a long time, you have proceeded, and permit us to enjoy ease and peace.—*Cause the holy One of Israel to cease from before us.* The holy One of Israel was one of the titles which God frequently assumed, in the messages that he sent to this people; and it was often mentioned by Isaiah, in the discourses which he delivered. In allusion to this practice, the request of these profane persons intimates, that they were quite weary of the sermons wherein this name and character was introduced, which were become extremely nauseous and disagreeable to them. It imports, their earnest desire that our prophet might speak no more to them in this name, at which they were offended; and that he would desist from saying any thing farther concerning God, and the designs of his providence.—Such was the froward and wicked language used by the people to whom the prophets of the Lord were sent, which is transmitted to us for our instruction, in the book of these prophecies, wherein it was ordered to be recorded. Hence let us learn to beware of finding fault with the word of God, of growing weary of the wholesome admonitions it contains, of contracting a fondness for smooth things, and an aversion to any of the salutary truths revealed by the holy One of Israel. Let us reverence every character under which he hath been pleased to speak to us, and esteem the words of his mouth as our necessary food.

12 Wherefore thus saith the holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon.

Before he denounces the awful judgments that were to be inflicted upon this rebellious people, the prophet acquaints them with the authority by which he spake, and specifies the crimes whereby they exposed themselves

selves to severe punishment.—*Wherefore thus saith the holy One of Israel, whom you ought to have sanctified, but whom you have wickedly contemned. Be assured, that he will be exalted in judgment, and sanctified in righteousness—First, Because ye despise this word; the law of the Lord, and the prophecies delivered by his servants, particularly the prediction relating to the vanity of trusting in Egypt. This aggravated iniquity, as hath been already affirmed, is one cause of the destruction that shall certainly and suddenly seize upon you.—And secondly, Because ye trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon.* The oppression and perverseness wherein they confided, were the rich treasures and presents, extorted from the people by fraud and violence, which were sent down to Egypt on asses and camels. The tribute which, according to treaty, they ought to have paid to the king of Assyria, they perversely offered to the king of Egypt, in order to obtain his assistance. Or the fraud, as the Hebrew word signifies, and perverseness wherein they trusted, might be the deceitful perverse doctrines of the false prophets, on which they foolishly placed great dependence. In both senses of the words, the Israelites and Jews were guilty of the charge here brought against them. Thus did God clearly point out, the causes which operated to bring terrible desolation upon that people.—Sin, my brethren, is the source of all the calamities wherewith God hath visited the children of men. It expelled the first Adam from paradise; it deluged the old world with water; it brought fire and brimstone from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain; it hath spread the sword, famine, and pestilence, among many nations; it desolated the land of Judea, and kindled the fire that consumed the city and temple of Jerusalem; and, in following ages, it hath produced the most direful effects in every quarter of the world. And we may always conclude with certainty, that wherever people are punished in the manner

manner our prophet foretels, sin is the procuring cause. Let us then carefully avoid that abominable thing which God hateth; and when not repented of, he never fails to testify his displeasure against the transgressors.

13 Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant.

The punishment of the crimes mentioned in the preceding verse, is, in this and the following one, represented by two significant emblems of peculiar elegance. In the first, the people of Israel and Judah, on account of the eminence and grandeur to which they were elevated, are compared to a high wall. Through the favour of Providence, these kingdoms had been raised to great opulence, power, and splendor: they had become conspicuous in the eyes of the nations, on account of the grandeur of their princes, the number of their military forces, the multitude and strength of their fortified cities. In respect of privileges, they were exalted to heaven. They enjoyed those important prerogatives, whereby they excelled all the other nations of the earth; insomuch that their renown went forth among the Heathen for beauty, which, said the Lord God, was perfect through his comeliness put upon them*.—*Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, &c.* The sin whereby they despised the word of the Lord, the instructions of his servants, and even the name of the holy One of Israel, and sought assistance from Egypt, was to prove ruinous to them, as the swelling out in a high wall. Under this similitude, the psalmist predicted the overthrow of his enemies: ‘As a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence †.’ The breach, or bulge, which is sup-

* See Ezek. xvi. 14.

† Psal. lxii. 3.

posed to have been in the lower part of the wall, as often happens in old buildings, might signify, the insolence and pride whereby the posterity of Israel were puffed up, in the confidence of being aided by the Egyptians. And as the fall of a high wall, that is occasioned by its projecting over the foundation, and bursting out in the lower part, is commonly sudden, great, and unexpected; so, in these respects, it represented the overthrow of the Ephraimites and Jews. This iniquity here referred to, was to be the cause of the fall of both these kingdoms: and, in fact, it proved so, first to the Ephraimites, who, by their perfidy, stirred up Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, to execute vengeance upon them; and then to the Jews, who, by their treachery, provoked God to deliver them into the hands of the Assyrians and Chaldeans.

14 And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters vessel, that is broken in pieces, he shall not spare; so that there shall not be found, in the bursting of it, a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water *withal* out of the pit.

The predicted destruction, which was to terminate in the entire dissolution of the Israelitish state, is here illustrated by a new similitude.—The first clause of the verse might have been translated thus: “And its
“breaking, or bursting, shall be as the breaking of
“the potter’s vessel.” The truth affirmed in the middle of the verse, namely, that Almighty God (who seems to be the Person spoken of) shall not spare, is plainly supposed in the comparison here stated. He was to give the Ephraimites such a severe blow, such a terrible stroke, as they would not be able to recover from; in consequence whereof, they should be, so shattered to pieces, that, as a people, they were to become unprofitable and useless. As an earthen vessel that is broken to shivers, becomes unfit
for

for any valuable purpose, even for taking a little fire from the hearth, or a little water from the pit or well; in like manner, that people were to be so broken, that there was not to remain one among them who would be able to alleviate the common calamity, or afford any substantial service for promoting the public benefit. So general was to be the destruction that should befall them, that none of them was to be capable of repairing the breach made among them, or of restoring the kingdom to its former sound state.—To this deplorable condition were the Ephraimites to be reduced, as the just punishment of their sins, as our prophet had repeatedly foretold; and from sacred history it is abundantly evident, that the predictions were exactly verified.—God, my brethren, desolates the most powerful kingdoms, after they have long persisted in grievously provoking him to anger by their sins. The impiety, the injustice, the cruelty, and treachery, which abound in nations and empires, prove to them like a bulge in a high wall, which forbodes its future downfall; and, in progress of time, they fall, and are dashed in pieces as a potter's vessel. When Rehoboam, and all Israel with him, forsook the law of the Lord, the kingdom was divided, and rent in pieces. The conspiracy of Hoshea ruined the kingdom of Israel*. It was once a very powerful nation, and made a most magnificent appearance; but their iniquities brought them to desolation. The prosperity of nations is not entailed upon them as a perpetual inheritance: it sometimes passes away like a declining shadow; and sometimes, by various means, it is suddenly reversed. Would you then have your present happy condition, as a people, continued? beware of sinning against the God of our mercies, of abusing his goodness, and disobeying his authority; and endeavour to bring forth fruit unto God, suited to the many advantages we enjoy.

* See 2 Kings xvii. 4, 5.

15 For thus saith the LORD God, the holy One of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and ye would not.

The people of Israel and Judah are here reminded of their perverse obstinate rejection of the salutary counsels given them by Jehovah, in complying with which they might have enjoyed deliverance and tranquillity.—The subject is introduced by a very solemn exordium, intended to excite reverence and attention to the important truth contained in the words before us. *For thus saith the Lord God*; the eternal independent Jehovah, who gives existence to all the creatures, and disposes of them according to his sovereign pleasure; and who is God over all, blessed for ever.—*The holy One of Israel.* The rebellious people to whom this prophecy was delivered, had entreated, that this glorious character of the Almighty might cease from before them. This unreasonable request did not, however, deter our prophet from once and again repeating this magnificent title, in the prediction under our consideration. The useful instruction here delivered, is recommended by the highest authority, by supreme wisdom and goodness; and therefore merits our closest attention. And had we just views of his infinite majesty and glory who speaks to us, with what profound humility and submission would we hearken to the words of his mouth!

In the prophetic writings, a double meaning is couched under the same words; which the sacred writers of the New Testament clearly suppose, and according to which they often frame their interpretation of passages in the Old Testament. The same sentiment, according as it is explained, relates to different subjects and events, distant, it may be, in their existence, and distinct in their nature, though in some measure connected, and resembling each other. In some predictions, clear indications are given of the
mind

mind of the holy Spirit; in others, some obscure intimations only are given of those divine truths which he intended more faintly to reveal. Sometimes the literal sense is so conspicuous, both in the words and sentiment, that the remote or figurative sense is scarcely discernible: at other times, the figurative sense shines with such lustre, that the literal meaning is thrown into the shade, and becomes almost imperceptible. Sometimes the principal idea is clearly conveyed: sometimes it unexpectedly glances upon the mind, like lightning that bursts from the clouds; of which, a striking instance, if I am not mistaken, occurs in this verse. Considering the words as addressed to Israel of old, in their obvious and primary sense, they plainly import what ought to have made deep impression upon that people, and what might be easily understood by every one. By desisting from journeys into Egypt, with a view to solicit assistance from that court; by refraining from all negotiations with Pharaoh and his princes, with a view to form alliance with them—by returning from the evils to which you have been addicted, to the faithful performance of the duties you have neglected—by composing yourselves from perplexing fears, quietly waiting for God, and humbly trusting in him alone for desired deliverance, in the diligent use of the means he hath prescribed, you shall assuredly enjoy protection and safety. Such is the obvious literal meaning of the words, which express with propriety, what is no less necessary to the enjoyment of spiritual and eternal salvation, and are equally applicable to this, as to the other subject. I shall therefore consider them in this view, to which they may be distinctly referred. In the prosecution of this design, new light will, I hope, be reflected upon the language, a degree of dignity and importance added to the sentiment; whilst they gradually rise from humble to more elevated objects, until they are placed in the most conspicuous and interesting light.

Salvation,

Salvation, in scripture, not only denotes, in some instances, temporal deliverance from the evils wherein men are involved, or with which they are threatened; but it likewise signifies, spiritual deliverance from sin, the greatest evil, with its dreadful consequences. To be saved in this most important sense of the word, is, through the infinite mercy of God, to be rescued, by the Spirit of power, from the usurped dominion that sin hath acquired; and to be freed from the punishment that sin hath merited, and the pollution contracted by it, through the atoning purifying blood of Christ. It is to be conformed to the amiable image of God, to be admitted into his favour, and to live unre-servedly devoted to his service and glory, until this salvation is consummated, by its blessed Author and Finisher, in the future celestial world; when that which is in part shall be done away, and that which is perfect shall come.—If you inquire, how this great salvation is to be obtained? you have a satisfying reply in the words to be considered:

In returning and rest, &c. All we, like lost sheep, have gone astray: every one hath turned aside into his own way. Like the prodigal, we have left our Father's house, we have gone into a far country, we have wasted the goods wherewith we were intrusted, and have been feeding upon the husks of worldly vanities. Heartily convinced of our sin and folly, in departing from God, the fountain of all felicity, and of our misery and wretchedness, in continuing at a distance from him, like the prodigal, we must return to our compassionate heavenly Father. Deeply sensible of his tender mercies, and our forlorn condition, we must sincerely renounce all those sinful tempers and practices in which we formerly indulged, and abandon those other lords to whom we have yielded subjection; saying, with Ephraim of old, 'What have I any more to do with idols*.' Allured by the

* Hosea xiv. 8.

amiable discoveries of the riches of divine mercy and grace in the gospel, we must have actual recourse to God by Jesus Christ, the only appointed way to the Father; adopting the words that he himself hath dictated, 'Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously*.'—Rest must accompany this penitent return to God. This supposes, that we were previously in a disturbed and agitated condition, resembling that of the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt †; and whose raging waves, as the apostle Jude speaks, foam out their own shame. Unstable as water, and restless as the wind, we were tossed about by every vanity, and did not cease from sin. The rest here spoken of, by means whereof we attain eternal salvation, consists, in abstinence from sin, to which we were formerly addicted: in desisting from the fruitless pursuit of unsatisfying worldly vanities, that we may place all our confidence and delight in God, as our all-sufficient portion and felicity; that, with holy complacency of soul, we may acquiesce in his salvation, as admirably adapted to relieve all our necessities, and to put us in the possession of eternal rest.

In this return and rest, we shall be saved from the evils by which we are distressed, and arrive at the enjoyment of that great salvation which God hath promised to the faithful. If deliverance from sin, and nearness to God; if freedom from the anxious pursuit of lying vanities, and settled delight in God; if entire dependence upon him for every blessing, and the agreeable assurance of his presence and protection, constitute the pleasing foretastes of eternal salvation, these are the benefits enjoyed in returning and rest. In the ways of disobedience, we always meet with perplexity, disappointment, and misery; and never receive any recompense proportioned to our labour: we take greater pains to make ourselves miserable, than might be necessary, in another course, to render

* Hosea xiv. 2.

† Isaiah lvii. 26.

us happy. Whereas did we return to God, and rest in him, as he hath required, we should be free from much trouble and vexation, and enjoy that safety and comfort which is best suited to our condition. Be persuaded, then, to adopt, without delay, these salutary measures, and you shall be saved with a complete and eternal salvation.

In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength, &c. Considering these words as addressed to the Israelites, in the literal signification, their import seems to be shortly this: Were ye free from discomposing fears, and distressing anxieties, enjoying agreeable serenity of mind, and placing unshaken trust in the power and faithfulness of Jehovah, ye would certainly experience your strength as a kingdom confirmed; and success should attend your efforts, in opposing the hostile designs of your enemies. Your national power would be continued and established.—Strength, in scripture, not only signifies, personal and national vigour and firmness, whereby enemies are opposed and vanquished; but it also denotes, that spiritual ability whereby the true Israel of God perform the duties incumbent upon them, resist the enemies of their salvation, and sustain the various afflictions wherewith they are visited. For these important purposes, the peculiar people of God receive the spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind. Though insufficient of themselves so much as to think any good thing, yet, through Christ strengthening them, they can do all things; being furnished with all might in the inner man, for every good work. When confined to beds of languishing, he also strengthens them with strength in their souls, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness: and when buffeted by messengers of Satan, his strength is made perfect in weakness; his grace is made sufficient for them. Hence they adopt with pleasure, the triumphant language of the royal poet: ‘Who is God save the Lord? or who is a rock save our God? It is God
‘ that

‘ that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way
‘ perfect *.’

To the possession and increase of this strength, quietness and confidence greatly conduce. Quietness, you know, consists in freedom from outward disturbance, and the annoyance of enemies; in the enjoyment of inward serenity of mind, uninterrupted by anxiety and perturbation, and those vexing thoughts that tend to molest and distress us. Such quietness, when not abused to the base purposes of indolence and security, is a state highly favourable to improvement in spiritual firmness and vigour. It suppresses the tumultuous passions of pride, anger, envy, fear, and revenge, which discompose the spirit, and render us either weak and timid, or boisterous and precipitate. It allays those internal disorders which arise in the mind, that incapacitate for the right discharge of duty, and for properly sustaining affliction: it disposes to cultivate that serene temper which is requisite to real enjoyment and improvement. By means of this tranquillity of soul, spiritual strength is preserved and increased.—To this end, confidence is no less subservient: which consists in unshaken trust in God, for assistance, safety, and every necessary blessing; in unsuspecting reliance upon the wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness of Jehovah, in opposition to dimaying fears, and distracting cares. By this becoming exercise, spiritual strength is confirmed. As nothing tends more effectually to enfeeble the mind than suspicion and distrust, so there is not any one disposition that hath a more powerful influence to impart strength and stability than confidence in the Lord; who, in this way, giveth strength and power unto his people.—Such seems to be the import of the words of the Lord God in this verse, as they were spoken to the Israelites; and as they may be improved by us, for promoting our best interests. He that hearkeneth

* Psal. xviii. 31, 32.

unto counsel, is wise. Hear then, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. Let us return to God, and rest in him, so shall we be saved: let us endeavour to enjoy that quietness and confidence which never fail to inspire strength and fortitude.

16 But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.

This verse, with the last clause of the foregoing one, contains the obstinate refusal, and perverse resolution, of this rebellious people, to whom Isaiah delivered the preceding salutary advice, and comfortable assurance.—It might have been justly expected, that those to whom they were addressed, would have replied, with humble gratitude, as did Israel of old, ‘All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.’ Very different, however, was the reception given to this wise counsel: and therefore is this heavy charge brought against them, *And ye would not; and ye said, No.* Ye peremptorily refused to comply with the dictates of infinite wisdom, which it would have been at once your duty, your interest, and happiness, to have obeyed. Surprising indeed! they might have had salvation and strength in the easiest way possible, and yet they would not have them. Such was their perverse obstinacy, that they determined what they would do, without asking counsel of God; and after he graciously condescended to give them advice, they would not submit to his directions, but foolishly contemned them. They treated the message sent them from God, by our prophet, in the same insolent manner that they afterward treated the word of the Lord, delivered by the prophet Jeremiah; to whom they said, ‘As for the word that thou hast spoken to us
‘in the name of the Lord, we will not do it: but we
‘will

‘ will certainly do that which proceedeth out of our own mouth *.’—Alas! my brethren, we may still complain, with our prophet, ‘ Who hath believed our report?’ How few, among the inhabitants of the old world, hearkened to the voice of the preacher of righteousness? How few, among the children of Israel, believed the word of the Lord, by his servant Moses? and how few of them afterwards received, and practically regarded, the messages sent to them by the prophets? Is not the case precisely the same among us? Are there not many profane, many negligent, many forgetful, many unbelieving, many disobedient hearers, who all unite in saying, No, we will not? Be not ye stiff-necked and rebellious, like unto them.

For we will flee upon horses—and we will ride upon the swift. Though they had been instructed for ages, that ‘ a horse is a vain thing for safety; neither shall he deliver by his great strength †;’ yet they resolved, that, when the Assyrians should invade their land, they would flee upon horses, and other swift animals, into Egypt, where they might escape from the hands of their enemies. In this rash and ill-devised scheme, we see a striking proof of the extreme folly and perversity of transgressors, who refuse to comply with the counsels of Heaven; and prefer to them, projects of their own devising. In obedience to God, they might enjoy perfect safety, and find their strength confirmed; whereas the purposes formed independent of God, shall certainly be frustrated by him who maketh the devices of the people of none effect. People, in straits and dangers, often look for assistance from an arm of flesh. Some trust in chariots, some in horses, some in riches, some in alliances with foreign powers. ‘ Afa, king of Judah, in his distress, relied on the king of Syria; and, in his disease, sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians †.’ Zedekiah expected defence from the great army of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and

* Jer. xlv. 16, 17. † Psal. xxxiii. 17. ‡ 2 Chron. xvi. 7. 12.

the Ephraimites hoped to enjoy safety in that country. But divine providence frustrated and disappointed their expectations.—*Therefore shall ye flee—therefore shall they that pursue you be swift.* Since ye have expressed your resolution, the Lord God now informs you of his determination. Because ye have purposed to make your escape by flight, ye shall indeed flee; but they that pursue you, shall be swift, and overtake you: and so your sin shall be written in your punishment. Thus doth God make the devices of the people of none effect, and baffle their best contrived enterprizes. Absalom formed great expectations from the good counsel of Ahithophel; but God turned it into foolishness. ‘ Ahaz hoped to receive much assistance from the king of Assyria; but he distressed him, and strengthened him not*.’ And, in the prospect of invasion by the Assyrians, the people of Israel and Judah, who thought of escaping by a speedy flight into Egypt, are here informed, that those who pursued them, should be as swift as they; so that they should not be able to escape the threatened calamities.

17 One thousand *shall flee* at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee, till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill.

The timidity and cowardice of this rebellious people, with their unhappy consequences, are here strongly represented. So very pusillanimous and faint-hearted were they to become, that they would easily be restrained from executing their purposes; insomuch that the sharp reproof, even of one of their enemies, was to put a thousand of them to flight.—*At the rebuke of five shall ye flee, &c.* This hyperbolical expression clearly points out, what actually came to pass. Notwithstanding the number of enemies employed

* 2 Chron. xxviii. 20.

against them was small, when compared with their multitudes, a few were to put them all to flight. Contemplating this extraordinary event, we may inquire with surprize, in the words of Moses, ‘ How should one chase
 ‘ a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, ex-
 ‘ cept their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had
 ‘ shut them up *?’ This great calamity proceeded from God, who, on account of their manifold aggravated transgressions, delivered them into the hands of their enemies, at whose approach they were intimidated and terrified.—*Till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain*; a sign exhibited on some conspicuous place, to prevent shipwreck, or to give early notice of invasion: or, according to the marginal translation, ‘ As a tree bereft of its branches;’ intimating, the solitary deserted condition to which they were to be reduced.—*And as an ensign, or standard, erected upon an eminence, with the design of directing travellers in their journey.* By these two similitudes, our prophet, with his usual elegance, plainly intimates, that only few of the rebellious people to whom he delivered this message, were to survive the calamities to be inflicted upon them: that being divested of all defence, they were to be exposed to injuries of every kind; and exhibited to public view, as warnings to all other people, carefully to avoid those dangerous practices which proved ruinous to them. To us, they convey this important lesson, which we ought never to forget: That it is better to trust in God, than to put confidence in man: that ‘ cursed is
 ‘ the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his
 ‘ arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he
 ‘ shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not
 ‘ see when good cometh †.’

18 ¶ And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will

* Deut. xxxii. 30.

† Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you; for the LORD *is* a God of judgment: blessed *are* all they that wait for him.

These remarkable words, which merit our serious attention, are introduced as an inference from the preceding predictions. As the just punishment of their sins, this rebellious people were to flee before their enemies, and to be reduced to a solitary, forlorn, and defenceless state. They were not however to be totally abandoned of God, who, in due time, would extend his mercy and favour to them, and send them deliverance.—The Hebrew word translated *gracious*, is of very extensive import: it signifies, tenderly to regard, to have compassion, to confer favour, to do good. The grace of God, his free unmerited favour, is the source from whence flows all the benefits, temporal and spiritual, enjoyed by the children of men. All the deliverances wrought for them in every age, all the benefits received by every individual, proceed from the grace and kindness of God. He bestows them freely, notwithstanding we have forfeited all claim to them; he confers them generously, and without constraint; he imparts them liberally, and often without solicitation; he conveys them with pleasure, and not with reluctance. So infinitely gracious and bountiful is he, that he giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not. Men may exhaust their treasures by their liberality; and they who have most to bestow, cannot always give, nor to every one that needeth: but the grace of God, which is the everlasting fountain from whence every blessing proceeds, can never be exhausted or diminished. Nor doth he upbraid us with our unworthiness and ingratitude, or with the number and excellence of the benefits we have already received.—But this is not all: to illustrate the exceeding riches of his grace, it is affirmed, *The Lord will wait, that he may be gracious unto you.* With astonishing condescension, he

waits for the most proper season to interpose in behalf of his people; and when they are in the most proper posture and temper of mind to receive his mercy, he administers to them necessary relief. In this manner, he waited to be gracious to his servant David; and therefore when he penitently acknowledged, 'I have sinned against the Lord,' the prophet Nathan was directed to say to him, 'The Lord hath done away thy sin *.' In like manner, he waited to be gracious to Saul of Tarsus; 'in whom he shewed forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting †.' After he had humbly asked, trembling and astonished, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ‡?' the Lord sent Ananias to intimate to him, that peculiar grace which he had long waited to confer upon him. Thus also the Lord waited to be gracious unto his people Israel, until having heard them bemoan themselves, 'he remembered them; his bowels were troubled for them; and he said, I will surely have mercy upon them ||.' Notwithstanding the manifold aggravated transgressions of his rebellious people, God is pleased to exercise much long-suffering patience toward them; and when the fittest opportunity arrives, he surprises them by appearing for their relief, he rescues them from affliction, and enriches them with blessings suited to their condition.

And therefore will he be exalted, &c. There are not any dispensations of divine Providence toward his people, by which God is more gloriously elevated, than by extending his mercy to them, when they are in wretched circumstances; than by delivering them from the hands of their enemies, and out of all adversity. This gives the most admirable displays of the riches of his grace, which he accounts his highest glory, and in the exercise of which he delights. Hence he thus

* 2 Sam. xii. 13.

† 1 Tim. i. 16.

‡ Acts ix. 6.

|| Jer. xxxi. 20.

speaks, by the prophet Jeremiah, of the distinguishing kindness that he promised to confer upon his people: 'And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness, and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it *.' The amiable character ascribed unto the Lord, in the first part of this verse, justly demands the warmest adorations and praises, whereby his name is highly exalted. Hath he waited that he may be gracious, when no hand but his own could help, when we must have perished unless he had seasonably interposed? surely, then, he ought to be greatly magnified. On this account, the church is taught by the sweet psalmist of Israel, in those beautiful hymns composed for their use, in every age, gratefully to extol and celebrate, in the highest strains of devotion, his ever-enduring mercy and grace †.—Let us then exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill; who himself is exalted above all, by his grace that faileth never, and his mercy that endureth for ever; who can elevate us to glory, honour, and immortality.—*That he may have mercy upon you.* Grace and mercy are intimately connected, though they respect the creatures, who participate of their effects in circumstances somewhat different. The Lord is gracious, when he dispenses to his people the fruits of his sovereign good pleasure: he hath mercy, when he confers upon them important blessings, to relieve them from the miseries in which they are involved. He is gracious, when he bestows the benefits of which they are utterly unworthy: he is merciful, when he averts the calamities and condemnation which they have merited, and actually relieves them from distress—when he pardons their sins, heals their spiritual distempers, supplies their necessities, and rescues them from the evils un-

* Jer. xxxiii. 9.

† Psal. cxviii. and cxxxvi.

der which they groaned.—Let us then wait upon God, that he may be exalted, in shewing us mercy; then may we hope seasonably to enjoy its blessed fruits.

For the Lord is a God of judgment, in the several important senses in which the word is used in scripture. His understanding is infinite; so that he is intimately acquainted with all the characters, the actions, and circumstances of mankind. The decisions which he forms, concerning their condition and conduct, are perfectly equitable and just. All the punishments which he inflicts, and the deliverances which he works, are conducted with the highest wisdom and prudence, executed at the fittest season, in the most proper measure, and for the best purposes. When he corrects them for their faults, he does it, not in anger, but in judgment, with affection and moderation; not in his hot displeasure, with unrelenting severity, but with kindness and forbearance. He does not precipitately and unjustly afflict them; but in righteousness and wisdom he visits them with chastisements, after having weighed every circumstance in their condition, that may render his corrections subservient to promote their best interests. They may therefore be assured, that, at the very time wherein he knows his own glory, and their real benefit, will be most effectually promoted, he will interpose in their behalf, and send them deliverance.

Blessed are all they that wait for him. Much uneasiness commonly arises from waiting upon injudicious, rash, and foolish persons, who know not, who care not, what they do: but true blessedness is enjoyed by those who wait on the God of judgment, who never fails to gratify their just expectations, and faithfully to accomplish his promises. This is one of wisdom's ways, which is always attended with pleasure and peace; and to which the divine benediction is annexed, in the words before us. It gives us the agreeable possession of ourselves, and the comfortable prospect

prospect of receiving every blessing in the most proper season. Whom the Lord pronounceth blessed, must be blessed indeed.—Having explained the import of waiting upon God, when discoursing from chap. xxv. 9. permit me now to recommend to you this blessed exercise. We are naturally fond of present satisfaction, of immediate relief from the evils that we feel or fear, and delay is apt to betray us into impatience, which places an unsurmountable bar in the way of waiting upon God. Say not, in the time of affliction, with an unhappy prince, ‘ This evil is of the Lord ; wherefore should I wait on the Lord any longer * ? ’ It seems probable, that this king had waited for a while ; after which he became impatient, and expressed himself in the language I have now quoted. The reason he gave for desisting from this employment, was the strongest argument that could have been suggested, why he should have persevered in this duty. This evil is of the Lord, who will remove it in good time ; and therefore I persist in waiting upon him. Good and bad men may reason on the same principles, but they seldom fail to deduce opposite conclusions. Cease not then patiently to wait upon Jehovah, for all the mercies that you need. Beware of limiting him, in whose hand are all our times and concerns, to means, or to seasons, which he hath reserved in his own power. Wait, I say, upon the Lord.

19 For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem : thou shalt weep no more : he will be very gracious unto thee, at the voice of thy cry ; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee.

We are now arrived at the consolatory part of this discourse, to which our prophet passed, by a natural and easy transition, in the latter part of the preced-

* 2 Kings vi. 33.

ing verse. He begins this article, by an enumeration of many excellent benefits which God would confer upon his church, after he had executed the judgments above mentioned. The temporal blessings of which he speaks, are so expressed, that the words may not only be literally understood, as emblematical of spiritual good things; but they may be figuratively explained: in which sense, some of them at least are chiefly to be considered. He begins, by foretelling, that the people should be restored to their former habitation, where they were to enjoy signal advantages.—*For the people shall dwell in Zion, &c.* This, as well as the former part of the discourse, which commenced at the 8th verse of this chapter, seems to have been directed both to the Jews and the Israelites. The perfidious and rebellious people of Judah, were, by means of calamities, to be broken like a potter's vessel; and to be driven out of their own land, by their enemies the Assyrians, until the few that were left, should be as a beacon upon the top of a mountain. Having abandoned their idolatrous practices, and returned to God, in the exercise of true repentance, after the expiration of seventy years, they were to return to their own land, to inhabit their metropolis, and the best part of their country which lay around it. There they were to dwell safely and comfortably, under the protection of the Almighty, possessing the inheritance of their fathers, employed, like them, in the service and worship of Jehovah.—This prediction was literally fulfilled, when, by the royal proclamation of Cyrus, king of Persia, the Jewish people were treated with great munificence; and had liberty granted them to return to their own land, and to take with them the vessels of gold and silver which belonged to the house of the Lord. Having accomplished their journey, they again took up their residence in Zion and Jerusalem: they rebuilt the temple; and their condition became prosperous and happy.

Thou shalt weep no more, &c. Weeping, you know, is a natural effect of sorrow, a strong expression of grief, that may proceed from various causes, especially from a humbling sense of sin. We read, in the book of Judges *, that when the Israelites were sharply reprov'd, by an angel of the Lord, for their disobedience, that the people lift up their voice, and wept; insomuch that they called the name of the place Bochim, or weeping. Some expositors have supposed, that this was the place afterward called the Valley of Baca; which, being interpreted, also signifies weeping. Now, the promise under consideration, plainly intimates, that they were not to mourn any more in the very distressing manner, and for the same reasons, that they had wept at Bochim; and at the rivers of Babylon, where they sat down, and wailed, when they remembered Zion †. By divine mercy, they were to be restored to a comfortable state, in which their former afflictions and sorrows should be happily removed.—*He will be very gracious unto thee.* This prediction is explained and illustrated by the memorable fact, recorded 2 Kings xiii. 23. where it is written, ‘That when the Syrians oppressed Israel, the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence.’ And on many other occasions did he mercifully interpose in their behalf, and shew them favour. A remarkable instance of his kindness and benignity is specified in the following words:

At the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee. Prayer is, with great propriety, expressed in scripture, by crying unto God, to intimate the vehemence of the desires, and the earnestness of the supplications, which his people present before his throne. As needy persons, in distress or dan-

* Judges ii. 1.

† Psal. cxxxvii. 1.

ger, call loudly for assistance; so humble supplicants, with ardor and importunity, implore relief from the Almighty. Here they are promised gracious audience, and answer to their requests. The comfortable assurance contained in the words before us, is frequently repeated in scripture, that it may make the deeper impression upon mens minds. Elihu, speaking of the afflicted man, affirms, ‘ He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him, and he shall see his face with joy *.’ David declared his resolution, with the reason on which it was founded, in these words: ‘ I will call upon thee; for thou wilt answer me †.’ And, to the same purpose, our prophet elsewhere affirms, in the name of God, ‘ And it shall come to pass, that, before they call, I will answer; and, whilst they are yet speaking, I will hear ‡. In many instances, this truth hath been actually verified. Whilst prayer was made without ceasing for the apostle Peter, by his friends, at the time he was lying in prison, Peter came in among them; so that they might have said, There is the answer of our prayers §. As the prophet Daniel was employed in making supplication for the holy mountain of his God, even whilst he was speaking in prayer, the angel Gabriel was sent speedily to give him information respecting the subject of his requests §. Such favour God here assures his people, they should enjoy at the time to which this prediction referred. And that the promise might be the more encouraging, it is addressed to every individual in particular, *At the voice of thy cry, &c.*—The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much, and shall never be in vain. Though they may not get a return in kind, at the time their requests are presented, they shall be answered in due season. Notwithstanding we may not reap the fruits of our prayers,

* Job xxxiii. 26.

† Psal. lxxxvi. 7.

‡ Isaiah lxxv. 24.

§ See Acts xiii. 5. *et seq.*

§ Dan. ix. 20.

the succeeding generation may get the benefit of them. One generation may, in this respect, sow, and another reap. At all events, the words which we have now considered, contain a powerful motive to incite us, as our Lord hath taught, to pray, and not to faint.

20 And *though* the LORD give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers.

Another benefit foretold to be conferred upon the posterity of Israel, after their return from captivity, is, that, amidst the adversity and affliction with which they might be visited, they should enjoy the blessing of spiritual instruction.—Isaiah seems to have foreseen, by the spirit of prophecy, that the church, under the Old Testament, after their restoration, were hardly ever to be entirely free from trouble and distress, arising from some quarter or another. This circumstance was expressly foretold by the prophet Daniel, toward the end of the ninth chapter of his book. The truth is well known, both from scripture and experience, that God frequently places his people in an afflictive condition, in order to promote the most salutary purposes; and that the benefits resulting from such a state, do oft-times much more than counterbalance the losses and sorrows which were then experienced. This was to be the case with the Jewish people, according to this prediction, at the period to which it looked forward; for though the Lord might give them the bread of adversity, and water of affliction, and suffer them to be reduced to great distress—*yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, &c.* The teachers here meant, were the persons employed in the sacred office of instructing the people with sound knowledge and understanding, in the fear of the Lord; and in acquainting them with

the way of salvation, by the promised Messiah. This useful class of men were not to be obliged any more to hide themselves in dens and caves of the earth, or to retire to some remote corner of the land, or to be shut up in prisons and places of confinement, as in the times when wicked princes oppressed and persecuted them. Emerging from obscurity, they were to be publicly employed in the duties of their function; and in openly inculcating the truths of the word of God, in the view of the people, who were to resort to them for instruction.—In seasons of distress, and scarcity of temporal provision, look to God, that, according to his word, he may abundantly compensate your outward wants, by satisfying your souls with spiritual blessings; and refreshing you by means of their instructions, whose office is to give to every one his portion in due season.

21 And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This *is* the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.

In these words, faithful warning, and seasonable direction, are promised to the church, in times wherein they may be most necessary and useful.—The teachers of the people are beautifully represented, as acting the part of a kind parent or tutor, who, placing his children or scholars before him fully in his view, diligently observes all their movements, and every part of their conduct; and faithfully admonishes them, whenever he sees them going wrong, or acting amiss. Such friendly attention and care was to be shewn to the church, by him who taught Israel to go, taking him by the arms; and by those whom he employed to instruct and direct them.—The *word* intended in this promise, can be no other than some suitable reproof, admonition, or advice, contained in the scriptures of truth, adapted to the present

sent circumstances of the person for whose benefit it is particularly designed:—some portion of the lively oracles of God, that is admirably fitted to regulate his conduct in his present situation, and to warn him against the evils and dangers to which he might be exposed. That passage which is best suited to accomplish the purpose infinite wisdom hath in view, and which God is pleased to employ, seems to be the word whereof our prophet speaks, that he saith—*Thine ears shall hear.* Thou shalt listen to it, not only with thy bodily ears, but thou shalt hearken to it diligently, so as to believe and obey the word of God. The promise under consideration, does not import, that the people of God shall individually hear an audible voice coming directly from him, to point out the path of duty, and to guard them against error and mistake. Such a supposition would be altogether absurd, and dangerous in the extreme. We have a more sure word of prophecy than even the voice which was heard from heaven by the disciples, on the holy mount with Jesus Christ, whereunto you do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. It only denotes, that they shall closely attend to the word of God delivered by their teachers, and carefully apply what is suited to their condition; that each of them shall cordially assent to the truth, unfeignedly approve of the information he receives, and cheerfully yield obedience to what is required, in consequence of its being powerfully impressed upon his mind by the holy Spirit, who is promised to lead into all truth. In this manner, they are either effectually preserved from wandering out of the path of life, or, having gone astray, they are happily restored to the right way: they are kept from falling, or mercifully raised up, after they have fallen.—A circumstance which is here mentioned, ought not to be overlooked: *The word is promised to be heard from behind thee;* which may intimate, that the person, unmindful of his duty and interest, had turned his back

on the great Teacher of the church, who, though he might have suffered him to wander in counsels of his own heart, yet vouchsafes, with tender affection, to give him the most friendly and seasonable admonition: and being addressed by one whom he did not see, his attention and surprize would be excited by what he heard; whilst he would be disposed to look to the quarter from whence the voice came, that he might discover from whom it proceeded, and who it was who saith,

This is the way, walk ye in it. The advice is worthy of a kind instructor, who observes any of his scholars departing from the right way wherein they ought to go. The way that I point out to you, in which you should walk, is possessed of every qualification and advantage that you can possibly desire. It is a high way, open to persons of every description; it is the way of holiness, wherein the unclean shall not walk; it is a patent way, wherein the way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err; it is a safe way, wherein you shall be protected from the hostile attacks of your enemies; it is a pleasant way, wherein you shall enjoy sacred peace; and it is an infallible way to arrive at fulness of joys, and rivers of pleasures for ever more.—*Walk ye in it.* All other ways are only by-paths, that lead down to the chambers of death, in which ye shall find neither safety nor comfort; and therefore avoid them with care and solicitude. In the way in which I direct you, diligently endeavour to make regular progressive advances, until ye reach the end of your journey, and attain the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Be not discouraged by apparent difficulties that may start into view, by obstacles that may seem unsurmountable, or by enemies that may endeavour to insnare and oppose you. Study to yield unlimited obedience to the authority of Jehovah, who requires you to walk in this way, and who graciously offers his friendly assistance to enable you to make progress.

‘ Hear

‘ Hear then instruction, be wise, and refuse it not :
 ‘ attend to his words, and incline thine ear to his say-
 ‘ ings. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine
 ‘ eye-lids look straight before thee. Ponder the path
 ‘ of thy feet, and let all thy ways be ordered aright.
 ‘ Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left : re-
 ‘ move thy foot from evil *.’ Whoſo hearkeneth
 unto him, ſhall dwell ſafely, and ſhall be quiet from
 fear of evil : whereas if you rebel, and vex him, he
 will turn to be your enemy, and will fight againſt
 you, as he did againſt Iſrael of old ; and the iſſue of
 the combat may be eaſily foretold.

*When ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to
 the left.* The promiſed admonition ſhall be given in
 the ſeaſon wherein it is moſt needed, and the want of
 it might be attended with the worſt conſequences.
 The expreſſion plainly intimates, that there are dan-
 gerous by-paths on both hands, into which the people
 of God are apt to turn aſide.—On the right hand,
 there are erroneous principles and practices, which
 are miſtaken for that truth and holineſs whereof they
 are really deſtitute. Such are, profeſſed confidence in
 God’s pardoning mercy, diſjoined from the acknow-
 ledged neceſſity of his ſanctifying grace : high preten-
 ſions to faith, which are not verified by ſolicitude to
 maintain good works : flaming profeſſion of piety to-
 ward God, unaccompanied with the exerciſes of juſ-
 tice, mercy, and charity toward men : great pretended
 zeal againſt public vices, attended with indifference
 as to ſecret personal tranſgreſſions : loud approbation
 of diſcourſes that expoſe infidelity, hypocriſy, and in-
 quity, whiſt theſe ſins are indulged in heart and
 life.—On the left hand, there are alſo pernicious
 principles, and dangerous practices, into which men
 are prone to deviate. Such are, the confeſſion that
 holineſs is indiſpenſably requiſite to the enjoyment of
 God, whiſt the neceſſity of atonement for ſin is de-

* Prov. iv. 25, 26, 27.

nied or overlooked: strenuous assertions of the importance of good works, separate from a proper regard to faith, the active principle from which they proceed: high respect for the duties of justice, mercy, and charity, joined with criminal indifference and neglect of the exercises of piety and devotion: partiality to their own favourite sins, and unaffectedness with the transgressions of other people, whereby God is offended, his law is transgressed, and his truth dishonoured. Such are the right and left hand ways, into which men incline to turn aside. Hence appears, the high importance of being directed in the right way, and admonished when we are apt to go astray. Virtue lies in the middle between two extremes, which are equally to be avoided: and the kindness of God toward his people is nobly displayed, in assuring them, that when they turn either to the right or left hand, they shall hear a voice saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.—Let us, my brethren, plead with God for the accomplishment of this reviving promise; and diligently study, through the grace of the Most High, to yield a cheerful compliance with the direction we are thereby taught to expect.—This prediction was in some measure fulfilled, after the return of the Jewish people from Babylon, when various circumstances contributed to render their condition adverse and perplexing. Neighbouring nations looked upon their restoration with a jealous eye: the land which had lain for a long time uncultivated, did not soon gratify the expectations of the husbandman; and until the temple was rebuilt, did not enjoy the divine benediction. The distresses, however, of that period, were greatly alleviated by the instructions of the many excellent teachers whom God raised up, to feed them with sound knowledge and understanding; and to preserve them from superstition on the one hand, and from idolatry on the other, as a happy prelude to the more plentiful and explicit instructions with which he was to favour his church under the New Testament.

22 Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence.

A third benefit to be enjoyed by the church, at the period referred to, was deliverance from the practice of both public and private idolatry.—The children of Israel were strictly forbid to make any kind of idols, and to practise any species of idolatry. The prohibition was frequently repeated in different forms. It was engrossed into the second commandment, recorded Exod. xx. 4. which runs thus: ‘Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing, that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, &c. Again, at the 23d verse of that chapter, it is thus written: ‘Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall you make unto you gods of gold.’ To preserve in the minds of the people, an awful sense of the high importance of this precept, the Levites were expressly required to say, with a loud voice, unto all the men of Israel, ‘Curfed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in secret: and all the people shall answer and say, Amen*.’ All the good kings, therefore, which sat upon the throne of David, interposed their royal authority to prevent, as far as in their power, the forming, and the public service of idols. There were, however, many among that people, who still retained household-gods, to which they privately paid their homage. Those images which were formed of wood and stone,

* Deut. xxvii. 15.

and overlaid with silver or gold, were called graven images: those made of silver and gold, which had been melted in the furnace, and cast in certain moulds, were called molten images. That they might be kept quite clean, coverings were made, and carefully put over them, to preserve them from the dust, and to conceal them from every curious wandering eye. That they might appear more beautiful, and more worthy of admiration and respect, they were adorned with ornaments of various kinds. These absurd practices afforded a lively representation of their criminal conduct, who set up idols in their hearts, who worship and serve the creature more than the Creator. Persons of this description, commonly spare no trouble or expence in the service of the idols whom they admire.—Concerning these coverings and ornaments, our prophet foretold,

Ye shall defile, and cast them away, &c. At the period to which this prediction looked forward, the posterity of Israel, when turning from dead idols to serve the living God, were to renounce their vain superstition, and to abandon that abominable idolatry in which they had indulged both in public and private. Not only so, but they were to view it with abhorrence; and to throw away the furniture, and whatever belonged to the idols they formerly honoured, with the utmost detestation and contempt, as they did any thing that was polluted and unclean. And, in the heat of their indignation and zeal, they should say to every thing that pertained to their idolatrous service, *Get thee hence; let us see thee no more,* which hath provoked the Lord God to testify his righteous displeasure against us. This, my brethren, is the genuine temper and language of every true penitent, returning to the Lord from whom he had departed, ‘What have I to do any more with idols *?’ ashamed and confounded on account of his egregious sin and

* Hosea. xiv. 8.

folly, he casts them with disdain, as it is elsewhere expressed, ‘to the moles and to the bats *.’—This prophecy was remarkably accomplished by the Jewish people, after their return from captivity at Babylon, when they totally abandoned the idolatrous practices to which they had been addicted for many ages. An event this, truly worthy of admiration, which it becomes us to recollect with pleasure and gratitude—That a nation which would not refrain from detestable superstition and idolatry, notwithstanding the many admonitions and reproofs of the prophets, and the divine judgments with which from time to time they were visited, should at once renounce the transgression of their fathers, and (a few instances excepted) adhere closely to the faith and worship of the one true God, after having been long detained among an idolatrous people, in whose superstitions it might have been expected they would have joined.

23 Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal, and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures.

A fourth benefit which God promises to confer upon his people, was abundance of temporal and spiritual provision for their comfortable subsistence.—Whilst our prophet foretels the temporal mercies wherewith the posterity of Israel should be favoured, at the period to which he looked forward, he seems likewise to have had in view, the spiritual blessings with which they were to be enriched. With peculiar art and beauty, he so adjusts his discourse, as to raise the mind from earthly to heavenly objects: and therefore, in illustrating this prediction, we may, with propriety, consider it both in the literal and figurative

* Isaiah ii. 20.

sense. To explain it in this manner appears necessary, in order to comprehend the full import of what is foretold: indeed, it is only in this way that some parts of prophecy can be rightly understood.—*Then shall he give the rain, &c.* The Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, is doubtless the Person here spoken of, though he be not expressly named. To give rain, is one of the glorious prerogatives whereby he is distinguished from the gods of the Heathen nations; and to this he appeals, as a proof of his supreme divinity: ‘Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee; for thou hast made all these things*.’ This inestimable blessing, whereby the earth is watered, and the seeds cast into it are cherished and rendered fruitful, is here promised to be conferred in such measures, and at such seasons, as were best adapted to nourish them, and make them grow up into a plentiful harvest.—*And bread the increase of the earth, &c.* God graciously promises to give his people, not only rain from heaven, but also bread that is made from corn, produced by the earth. This is one of the most valuable and necessary presents that God hath bestowed upon men. It is the staff of life, which strengthens our hearts and our hands, gives firmness to the human constitution, and furnishes for executing the several functions and businesses in which we ought to be employed. This bread, it is foretold, *shall be fat and plenteous*; of the best quality, and in great abundance.—*In that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures.* They shall share in the general plenty of the times, and feed at large, without molestation, in rich extensive pasture-ground.

Such seems to be the literal meaning of this prediction, of which the following exposition is intended to

* Jer. xiv. 22.

give you the spiritual import and design. According to the infallible interpretation of Jesus Christ, the seed is the word of God, which is sown into the hearts of men, by the servants of the Most High. The rain that waters this precious seed, which causes it to spring, to grow as the willows by the water-courses, and to bring forth much fruit, is the Spirit and blessing of God, which comes down as rain upon the mown grass, and showers that water the earth. This is the inestimable blessing promised in the first part of the verse, according to the figurative sense of the words.—The bread of the increase of the earth, may denote, the spiritual provision whereby men live, and in which is the life of their spirits, that is conveyed to them, in great abundance, by means of those earthen vessels, from which a portion is distributed to every one in due season. At the period referred to, the church of God, the flock of his heritage, were to feed, in the green pastures of his ordinances, upon those divine truths, which, to them, are most delicious and strengthening.

24 The oxen likewise, and the young asses that ear the ground, shall eat clean provender which hath been winnowed with the shovel, and with the fan.

The animals employed in cultivating the land, and in performing the various parts of husbandry, were to be fed with the best provision. Oxen, asses, and other beasts used in labouring the ground, are, you know, often fed with unwinnowed corn, and many of them seldom have clean provender given to them. The time, however, of which our prophet speaks, was to be remarkable for such vast plenty of excellent corn, that these laborious animals were to be fed with provender that had been properly cleaned, according to the custom of the time and country, with the shovel and the fan. The Hebrews are said to have
separated

separated their corn from the chaff and chopped straw, by means of an instrument somewhat like a large shovel, with a long handle, whereby they tossed the grain into the air, that the wind or fan might drive away the husks and chaff with which it was mixed.—

Doth God take care for oxen? or saith he this altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, to assure industrious ministers of the gospel, who labour in word and doctrine, and are spoken of under this figure in the eleventh chapter of this prophecy, that, whilst they were employed in feeding the church with pure and wholesome doctrine, unmixed with the chaff of human inventions and traditions, they should enjoy abundance of the best provision.

25 And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers *and* streams of waters, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.

This prediction, expressed in terms which plainly intimate, that it is to be understood chiefly in the figurative sense, foretels, that even those high places, which are commonly dry and barren, were to be plentifully watered. I do not suppose that Isaiah prophesied, that the well-known law of nature was to be reversed; according to which, water-courses are in low valleys, situated among high hills. His words, literally interpreted, seem to import no more than that the streams flowing through the land of Canaan, which took their rise from springs near the tops of high mountains, and from the snow that lay on their summits, should, at the time referred to, flow undisturbed, and abundantly water the country, so as to render it both pleasant and fertile. Figuratively, they may denote, that, in the most conspicuous places, which were most celebrated and exalted above others, such as renowned cities, synagogues, and public seminaries, the doctrine of God's holy word was copiously to flow;

by

by means of which, those who were desirous of true wisdom, might have their thirst for divine knowledge allayed, and thence derive much satisfaction and benefit. A similar prediction is recorded in chap. xli. 18. of this prophecy, where it is foretold, ‘ I will open
‘ rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of
‘ the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of
‘ water, and the dry land springs of water.’——The remarkable period wherein these hyperbolical predictions were to be accomplished, is thus described, *In the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall;* when God was to execute awful vengeance upon the enemies of his church; when princes, and great men, who seem to be intended by the towers spoken of, were to be cut off by the righteous judgments of heaven.——This prophecy was accomplished in the times of the Maccabees, after the return of the Jews from captivity. Until then, the Jewish people had given them the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction: from that time, their condition became, in all respects, more prosperous; and they were crowned with abundance of the precious blessings which are here foretold. That was indeed a season of vast slaughter, wherein many great men fell. Like other predictions, which take in at once a variety of events, distinct both in nature and time, it hath been more amply verified, at several periods, under the New Testament.——Let us be solicitous to participate in the inestimable benefits of which our prophet speaks: and earnestly pray, that the Lord may give us that which is good; that our land may yield its increase; that God, even our own God, may bless us; and that all the ends of the earth may fear him.

26 Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of
of

of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.

Besides the benefits already mentioned, a fifth blessing is promised to the church, consisting in the wonderful increase of divine light, here expressed in very beautiful and elegant allegorical language; after which, the period is marked wherein this favour was to be communicated.—*The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun.* It is unnecessary, I suppose, to adduce any proof, that this prediction cannot be understood in the literal sense of the words. Who ever heard, that the light of the moon equalled the light of the sun, or that the light of the sun was seven-fold greater than in any former period? or who is so extravagant as to expect, that this event shall literally take place in the natural world? This prophecy therefore must be considered, like many others interspersed among predictions of temporal good things, in its figurative meaning, denoting some important spiritual privilege; and its accomplishment must be looked for according to this interpretation. In what glowing colours, and by what sublime images, does our prophet exhibit the renewal of the divine favour, the commencement of universal prosperity, and the great abundance of divine light with which the church was to be illumined, at the time he had in view?

The sun and moon are the two great celestial luminaries, which enlighten this world, and convey to its inhabitants the light which we enjoy. This reviving light affords a beautiful emblem of the excellent knowledge of divine truths, the amiable sanctity of manners, and the sacred consolation and joy, which, in scripture, is called the light of life. Several instances of the truth of this remark have occurred, in our progress through these prophecies. Symbolical terms, like the plainest words in common language, are frequently capable of several senses, and admit the same difference of construction; which yet creates no unfurmount-

unfathomable difficulty to those who closely attend to the scope of the writer. The moon may here be considered, as a symbol of the principal persons, taken collectively, who are officially employed in dispelling the darkness of ignorance and error, which overspread the church; and in supplying them that walk in the truth, with desirable assistance and direction. Those who occupy this useful station, are represented, with great propriety, under this figure; because, like the moon, their appearance is subject to various changes, and all the light which they reflect is derived from the Sun of righteousness. Concerning such persons, it is foretold, that their acquaintance with the truths, the ways, and consolations of God, shall be greatly increased, both in respect of clearness and extent, and that they shall shine forth with uncommon lustre and magnificence. So refulgent was to be the splendor in which they were to appear, that it should resemble the celestial light, displayed by him who is given to be Head over all things to the church. They were to exhibit, with peculiar advantage, those divine graces, and amiable virtues, which he illustriously exemplified.

And the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days. This is a grand idea: indeed, the human mind cannot easily conceive any thing greater, or more sublime.—The sun may here signify, the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, the unspeakable gift of God, the joy of our hearts, who is emphatically styled, the Sun of righteousness; or, as the words import, the true Sun, the true real light, which illuminates the spiritual world. Material objects are only emblems, of things spiritual: those which are corporeal, are only figures of them that are true, spiritual, and permanent. At the time to which this prophecy looked forward, he who is the light of the world, was to shine forth with amiable majesty, and meridian brightness; communicating to the church, the knowledge of the glory of God, the beauties of holiness,

holiness, and the most reviving consolations. According to the elegant language of our prophet, ‘The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory*.’ In consequence whereof, the ignorance, superstition, and impurity, in which they had been involved, being removed, the light of life was to appear in its full beauty and glory, with a lustre far superior to any thing hitherto experienced.—It shall be seven-fold greater, and more resplendent, than in times past. Their felicity was, in all respects, to be increased seven times beyond what had been enjoyed in former days. To form a proper estimate of this promised prosperity, in the vast abundance of which the church was to rejoice, the light of seven days must be supposed collected into one; and therefore it must be exceeding great, far surpassing description. The number *seven*, by which many remarkable circumstances and events are set forth in scripture, is often used to denote plenitude and perfection. We read of seven spirits, seven angels, and seven churches. God threatens to punish his people seven times for their transgressions; and, in the words we have been considering, he promises, that the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, at once pure and abundant.—The time in which this prophecy shall be accomplished, is thus described:

In the day that the Lord bindeth up, &c. The words might primarily refer to several remarkable periods, wherein the Jewish people were greatly hurt and broken, by means of their idolatry, superstition, hypocrisy, and other enormous crimes. On account of their obstinate rebellion against God, they were visited by many severe judgments, by which terrible breaches were made among them; and they were so deeply wounded, that their condition seemed to be dangerous, and to threaten the dissolution of both their church and state. In these perilous circumstances,

* Isaiah lx. 19.

he who said to them, I am the Lord that healeth you, was graciously pleased to bind up their breach, and to heal their wound. Amidst their multiplied provocations, God, who saw their ways, pitied their miseries, healed their distempers, and restored comforts to them. This is the period here fixed, for the fulfilment of the above prediction; which, on such occasions as that now mentioned, hath been in some measure verified. After they returned from captivity to their own land, the breach and stroke they had received, was bound up and healed. They beheld their city and temple again appearing in beauteous majesty; they were admitted into the courts of the Lord's house; they were favoured with the clear increasing light of divine instruction, and walked up and down in the name of the Lord their God.—That deliverance, however, was only imperfect and typical; and its concomitants can hardly be said to come up to the accomplishment of what is here foretold. The prophecy receives its completion, in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, when God is pleased to heal the breaches, and the wounds, to which sin hath given rise. In such happy periods, the spiritual light, diffused through the church, as much transcends that which was enjoyed under the former dispensation, as the light of the sun excels the light of the moon. The true Sun illuminates them with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God; he enriches them with abundance of divine gifts and graces, and causes them to rejoice in plenteous prosperity and felicity. To this pleasant prospect, the predictions of all the prophets lead forward our views and expectations. In this hope, let us frequently and fervently pray, that God, who is faithful, may accomplish the prophecies of his servants, answer the prayers of his people, and perform his glorious promised work.—Heavenly Father, grant us the blessedness of them who believe, that there shall be a performance of those things which are told us from the Lord. Put a

speedy period to temptation, to sin and trouble : hasten the happy time, when all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and his Christ ; and the nations of them that are saved, shall be glad and rejoice, and give honour to thee. Extend, we beseech thee, most merciful Father, the knowledge of the revelations of thy grace unto all the inhabitants of the world ; and grant, that sinners, ready to perish, may be effectually enlightened and saved, by him whom thou hast given to be thy salvation to all the ends of the earth. Let the praises of the Lord our God fill heaven and earth ! may they occupy the hearts, the lips, and the lives of all thy people ! and let the worshipping assemblies of thy saints shew forth thy righteousness and salvation all the day ! O Lord God, who art a present help in time of trouble, bind up the breach of thy people, heal the stroke of their wound ; and hasten the glorious day, when the church universal shall shine forth as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold. And let all the people say, Amen, Praise ye the Lord,

27 ¶ Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden *thereof* is heavy ; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire.

We now proceed briefly to discuss the last article of the discourse contained in this chapter, which treats of the awful punishment to be inflicted upon the Assyrians, and the important consequences wherewith that event was to be accompanied. Having shewn the Ephraimites the folly and vanity of the project they had formed, of calling in the aid of the Egyptians against the Assyrians, whilst the true God, the God of their fathers, was able and ready to defend, from their powerful enemies, those who trusted in him, and implored his protection ; a striking proof of which

which he sets before them, by predicting the destruction of Sennacherib's army—Having foretold the dissolution of the Israelitish state by the Assyrians, to encourage the upright among them who confided in God, and to shew that those who oppressed them were not to pass unpunished; the prophet delineates, with admirable eloquence, the tremendous judgment to be executed upon the Assyrians, who represented the formidable adversaries of the church, that, in subsequent ages, would oppose and distress them. To render his description the more magnificent and interesting, the Almighty is introduced in the character of an offended Prince, highly displeased at some daring affronts offered to his majesty, and determined to vindicate his injured honour and glory.

Behold the name of the Lord, &c. Jehovah is here exhibited going forth to execute righteous vengeance, discovering symptoms of indignation and contempt, which were to be poured out upon a haughty cruel people.—The name of the Lord is a Hebraism, which denotes the Lord himself. It is often used by the writers of the Old Testament: of this, a remarkable instance occurs in the animated address of Moses to the Israelites; who declared, that the various calamities with which they were threatened, were intended to induce them 'to fear this glorious and 'fearful name, The Lord thy God *.' In this sense, the expression may be understood here, intimating, that Jehovah was to conciliate glory to himself, and to render his name great and renowned among the nations, by the displays he was to give of his mercy, in the deliverance of his distressed people; and of his righteousness, in the destruction of their enemies: or, by the name of the Lord, may be meant, the angel, in whom is the name of the Lord, who was to be employed in executing the terrible judgment which is the subject of this prophecy. This celestial messen-

* Deut. xxviii. 58.

ger came from far, even from heaven, whence the wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. Perhaps, the words *from far* may relate to the time in which this dreadful calamity was to be inflicted; namely, after it had been long delayed, justly deserved, and frequently foretold by our prophet, and the other servants of God, even from ancient times.

Burning with his anger. The wrath of the Most High was, on this occasion, to be kindled, and to burn as fire; to which it is often compared in scripture, that it might consume, like stubble, the proud insulting foes of his kingdom.—*And the burden thereof is heavy.* These words may allude to the severity of the punishment which God denounced against the enemies of his people. His wrath was not only to consume them, by its scorching heat; but to crush them to pieces, by its unsupportable weight.—In allusion to what takes place in men, when they are greatly incensed, two effects of God's hot displeasure are mentioned in the next words: *His lips are full of indignation.* Anger not only reddens the face, and causes the eyes to sparkle; but when it arrives at a great height, it makes the lips to quiver.—*And his tongue as a devouring fire.* The words spoken by his servants the prophets, were to be like sharp arrows of the mighty, and as coals of juniper, to devour the implacable enemies of his heritage. Unite all the parts of the description, and it appears truly majestic and awful, especially when what is said in the following verse is connected with it.

28 And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and *there shall be* a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing *them* to err.

The subject introduced in the preceding verse, is here continued and amplified.—The breath of God's mouth may denote, the predictions and commands delivered in his word; or his wrath, and the awful judgments which are its direful consequences, sometimes intended by this expression. All those signal interpositions of providence, whereby the divine mercy hath been magnified, or the divine righteousness demonstrated, are to be ascribed to the breath of God's mouth, to his gracious purpose, or dread displeasure. To shew the powerful effects which it was to produce, it is elegantly compared to an overflowing stream, which runs with great force and rapidity, carrying every thing along with it that lies in the way.—To point out its mighty influence, this stream *shall reach to the neck*. The kingdom of Assyria seems here to be compared to a human body: the head of which was the king; and the neck, the princes, nobles, generals, and other great men, in the empire. To persons occupying these elevated stations, and possessing the highest offices in the state, the threatened calamities were to reach. This beautiful figurative expression emphatically represents, the perfect ease with which the foretold desolating judgments were to be inflicted, and the powerful extensive effects wherewith they were to be attended.

To sift the nations with the sieve of vanity. A sieve, you know, is used in the barn, or at the mill, to separate the best from the worst and lightest parts of the grain, which, during the operation, is greatly agitated, and tossed to and fro. Vanity sometimes signifies in scripture, a thing that is light, or of little or no value, which cannot yield any substantial advantage; such as a bubble floating upon the water, or a vapour ascending from the earth. At other times, it denotes, that which is false and deceitful, and is not in reality what it appears to be; such as riches and honours, which promise great things that they cannot perform. To sift the nations with this sieve, to win-

now them with this van of emptiness, is to excite among them the most violent commotion, to dash them one against another, so as to reduce them to a state of confusion, with the view of separating the better from the worse. This operation being performed with the sieve of vanity, nothing useful was to remain behind, but all was to come to nothing, and to terminate in disappointment.—Farther, to illustrate this subject, another metaphor of peculiar excellence is introduced, taken from the common practice of putting bits into the horses mouths, by which they are easily commanded and directed. In allusion to this well-known custom, it is foretold, *There shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people.* The same figure is used, chap. xxxvii. 29. of this prophecy, in relation to the same subject, where God saith, concerning Sennacherib, ‘I will put my hook into his nose, and my bridle into his jaws.’ The expression imports, that the Almighty would lay such restraints upon the people, and so direct their motions, that they were certainly to execute the designs he had in view to accomplish.—The extraordinary purpose which this bridle was to serve, is next mentioned in these surprising words, *causing them to err.* Bridles are put on horses and mules, not to make them go out of the way, but to keep them in it. In the instance before us, the restraining power of God was to be exerted for preventing the king of Assyria, and his vast army, from destroying Jerusalem, and making them desist from the hostile designs they had formed against it. In this manner did the Most High cause the enraged enemies of his people to deviate from the wicked purpose they had in view, and so effectually disconcerted the schemes they had projected.

29 Ye shall have a song as in the night, *when* a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the
 mountain

mountain of the LORD, to the mighty One of Israel.

These words beautifully describe the exultation and joy which were to be expressed by the Jewish church, on their deliverance from the oppressive power of Assyria, which threatened their destruction. Ye to whom God hath been gracious, who have waited for him, who have cast away your idols, and devoted yourselves to his service, whose breach the Lord hath bound up, and whose wound he hath healed—ye shall have a song: ample ground shall be afforded you of joy and praise, which ye shall gratefully express in hymns of triumph, wherein ye shall celebrate the praises of your great Deliverer, and the happiness of your condition. The heart-felt joy excited by some wonderful unexpected interposition of providence, cannot easily be confined to inward emotions, but bursts forth in songs, and in other expressions of gladness. The Israelites, when delivered from bondage in Egypt, when rescued from the oppression of the Canaanites, and on other occasions, testified their joy in songs of gratulation and triumph. In like manner, the Jewish people were to have a song, on account of their being miraculously saved from the oppressive power of Assyria.

As in the night, &c. These words seem to have an obvious reference to one or other of the sacred festivals, instituted under the former dispensation. Among these, there were three required to be kept with peculiar solemnity and joy; namely, the feast of the passover, of pentecost, and of tabernacles. Of all the feasts, the passover was the first, and the most solemn, having been appointed to commemorate the wonderful preservation of the first-born of Israel, when the first-born of the Egyptians were slain; and the exit of that people from under the hand of their oppressors. It is therefore called, in way of eminence, the feast, and the feast of the passover, both
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in the Old and New Testament. The posterity of Israel were enjoined to observe this festival at night, as we learn from its institution*. From the nature and design of this solemnity, it is evident, that the joy of the Israelites must have been very great at that season, when, in psalms and hymns, they celebrated the praises of God, who saved them from the hands of their cruel task-masters. In the verse before us, God, by our prophet, graciously assures the inhabitants of Judea, that they were to have similar reasons to sing his praise, for delivering them from the tyranny of Assyria. Some learned men have affirmed, that the seventy-sixth psalm was the song which was sung on this memorable occasion. Indeed, it well accords with the circumstances of that great event; and is admirably adapted to that very extraordinary interposition of divine providence, which is the subject of this prophecy.—Blessed be God, we also, my brethren, have our holy solemnities, which ought to be kept with gladness of heart. We have the Sabbath, the Lord's day, instituted by the command, the example, and blessing of God, which hath been honoured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, by the effusion of the Holy Ghost at pentecost, and many subsequent testimonies of the divine presence. Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us; and therefore we ought to keep our great gospel-solemnity, not only with sincerity and truth, but with thanksgiving and praise. This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will be glad and rejoice: we will not only rest from our worldly employments and recreations; but we will solemnize it, by uniting fervent supplications with grateful thanksgivings, by reading the scriptures, by alms-giving; and attending divine ordinances, such as the Lord's supper, and the ministry of the gospel.

And gladness of heart, as when, &c. Another beautiful emblem is employed, to represent the very

* See Exod. xii. 42.

great joy which was to be diffused among the Jewish people, by the righteous vengeance which God executed upon their enemies. Under the former dispensation, the Israelites were exceeding joyful when they ascended mount Zion, to the house of the Lord; especially at certain solemn seasons, when they convened for the express purpose of rejoicing before the Lord their God. On such occasions, they went up with delight the sacred mountain, on which stood the temple of Jehovah; who, in the following words, is called the mighty One, or the Rock of Israel. In joyful processions, preceded by psalteries, tabrets, pipes, and harps, they approached his holy habitation, that they might present before him their gifts and offerings in the manner he required. Hence the invitation of the royal poet, ‘ Serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with singing*.’ Recollecting, in solitude, his own experience, he says, ‘ He went with the multitude that kept holy-day, to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise.’ The gladness of heart felt by the inhabitants of Judea, at the time to which this prophecy refers, was to resemble the joy which they expressed in seasons of peculiar festivity, when it arrived at the greatest height.—The reason is subjoined in the next verse.

30 And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of *his* anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, *with* scattering, and tempest, and hailstones.

Our prophet now foretels, that Jehovah was to appear in the glory of his majesty, and in the terrors of his wrath. The description is truly sublime, exhibiting great objects with a magnificent display of imagery and diction; expressing ideas at once with per-

* Psal. c. 2.

spicuity and elevation, that they might strike more forcibly upon the mind.—The glorious voice of God may denote, the thunder of his power, the voice of his excellency, which none can understand. Of this voice, which is truly glorious, the psalmist gives a splendid representation in Psal. xxix; where he says, it rends, shakes, penetrates, melts, and breaks the objects to which it reaches. The thunder may be called the voice of God; because it proceeds from him, is indeed tremendous, and affords an awful display of his majesty, power, and glory. Not only was the Lord to make his voice to be heard, but he was also to *shew the lighting down of his arm*. In allusion to the arm of man, by which he exerts his strength, and performs the greatest achievements, to assist our feeble apprehensions of the divine power, the scriptures speak of the arm of the Lord, by which he displays his omnipotence, not only in protecting, delivering, and assisting his people, but in overthrowing their enemies. Of his holy arm, Jehovah was to shew the lighting down. His avenging power was to accomplish the most astonishing effects, when it laid hold on the people of his wrath, and made them feel the direful consequences of his dread displeasure.—*With the indignation of his anger*. In accommodation to the weakness of the human understanding, Isaiah, speaking of Jehovah, ascribes to him those actions and passions that cannot in a literal sense be applied to him; but which lead the mind to investigate those operations and qualities which belong to him, that are analogous to the images he employs. Though anger is not in God, a turbulent uneasy passion as in man; yet indignation and wrath are attributed to him, when he acts in some measure as men that are highly displeased. The expression under consideration, imports, that, in fulfilling this prediction, the Almighty was to vex, in his hot displeasure, those who had insulted and provoked his majesty, and to distribute sorrows to them in his wrath. Then, as
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said the prophet Ezekiel, ‘ his anger shall be accomplished, and he will cause his fury to rest upon them *.’—A striking description is next given of the dreadful concomitants of the divine displeasure. It was to be attended with

The flame of a devouring fire. The words may be understood literally, signifying the terrible flashes of lightning which were to accompany the execution of the awful judgments here threatened, and to be the means of consuming the haughty adversaries of the kingdom of God: or they may be interpreted figuratively, denoting the dreadful judgments which were to be inflicted upon the Assyrians, at the time referred to. Like the flames of devouring fire, they were to break forth suddenly and unexpectedly, and to spread with amazing rapidity, consuming all that came within their reach. Adopt either of the expositions that you think best, and most suited to the connection and design of the prophecy.—*With scattering*; probably the effect of a prodigious stormy wind, that dispersed and carried away every thing moveable upon which it lighted.—*And with tempest*: which may either signify, a violent commotion in the air, accompanied with a fierce stormy wind; some sudden impetuous irresistible calamity, or a combination of desolating judgments.—*And hailstones*, from those treasures which God hath reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war, when he sometimes showers them down of a large size, in vast quantities. The army of the five confederate kings, which were discomfited in the days of Joshua, suffered much more from the great hailstones that fell upon them, than from the sword of the Israelites †. Of this sort, were the hailstones by which the army of the proud Assyrian monarch was in part to be overthrown.—O Lord, how great are thy works! how unsearchable are thy judgments! We contemplate the

* Ezek. v. 13.

† See Joshua x. 11.

operation of thy omnipotent arm, not only in the immeasurable expanse of heaven, and in this well-furnished world; but in the wind, the rain, the hail, the thunder, the lightning, and the tempest, which thou sendest upon some places, to execute those purposes of mercy, or righteousness, which thou hast in view to accomplish. O Lord! be not a terror to us in the day of evil.

31 For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, *which* smote with a rod.

Though the destruction of the Assyrians was to be executed by the ministry of an angel, yet it was not to be accomplished in profound silence: it was to be accompanied with an amazing tempest, with thunder, lightning, and hail; at least, with such confusion and terror as is excited by some dreadful hurricane. There seems to be an allusion, in this verse, to the desolation produced by the thunder of God's power, which beats down all that stands in its way, and does great things that we cannot comprehend. By this tremendous voice of Jehovah, the Assyrians, who had smitten with a rod, and severely punished the people of God for their sins, were to be laid prostrate on the ground.—Indelible impressions of the majesty, power, and glory of God, may be discerned, not only in the creatures he hath made, but in the dispensations of his providence, which we never contemplate aright, unless we see God in them. A nice judge looks with a critical eye on a fine picture, not so much to observe the different shades in the colouring, as to discover the exquisite skill of the painter, that, in the beauty of the workmanship, he may admire the abilities, and read the name of the artist. Thus ought we, my brethren, to behold the wonderful works of the Most High, and particularly his works of judgment, which are admirably adjusted in
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all their circumstances; and clearly announce his name, and his voice, from whence they proceed.

32 And in every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which the LORD shall lay upon him, it shall be with tabrets and harps: and in battles of shaking will he fight with it.

These words seem designed to confirm and illustrate the certainty of the divine judgment, which was to be executed upon the proud adversaries of God's people.—The king of Assyria, with his army, was the grounded staff, or the rod of correction, as the Hebrew word signifies, intended in this prediction; of whom the prophet Habakkuk thus speaks: ‘O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast founded them for correction *.’ The Assyrian empire was the rod or staff wherewith God corrected the nations, and particularly his own people; the instrument whereby he inflicted righteous judgment upon them for their sins.—In every place in the land of Canaan, through which this staff, the Assyrian monarch and his army, passed, *i. e.* had occupied and desolated—*which the Lord shall lay upon him; i. e.* upon which place the Lord shall cause his rod of correction to rest, according to the marginal reading; it, the rod or staff, shall pass away with tabrets and harps. The metaphor is taken from oxen put into the yoke, or beasts of burden which carry heavy loads, that are goaded and struck with a rod, by those who have the management of them. In a condition similar to these animals, were the people reduced to servitude by the Assyrians, who greatly distressed them by heavy taxes, oppressive edicts, and servile labours. All those places which were still inhabited, that had felt the oppressive weight of this grounded staff, after their

* Hab. i. 12.

miraculous deliverance from the power of an insulting foe, by the slaughter of the Assyrian army, were to celebrate this great event with the instruments of music which were then in use.—*And in battles of shaking will be fight with it.* Those places in Judea, which had been spoiled and desolated, were greatly to rejoice, when the remains of the vast Assyrian army passed along; because God himself had, from heaven, fought against their enemies, and by his strong hand, and stretched-out arm, had shaken and torn them to pieces. The thunder, lightning, and hail, with other plagues, struck them with terror, made them tremble and shake, whilst they were entirely defeated, and all their hostile designs disconcerted. Sennacherib, having conspired against the Jewish people, and taken the defended cities of Judah, laid siege to Jerusalem, fully determined to spoil and destroy that city: but almighty God was pleased to frustrate his purpose, to fight against his army in battles of shaking, to humble that haughty monarch, and to cut down the thickets of his forest.—The judgments of God are a great deep, which we cannot explore. We are unable to explain their nature, to investigate the causes of their suddenness and severity, of their frequency, extent, and continuance. These subjects, which far transcend the most penetrating understanding, we ought to contemplate with awe, veneration, and profound submission, deeply sensible, that, in this manner, it is our indispensable duty to give glory to the Lord our God.

33 For Tophet *is* ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared: he hath made *it* deep *and* large: the pile thereof *is* fire and much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.

This verse, which concludes the subject of which our prophet hath been treating, contains an important argument

argument whereby the foregoing predictions are established, and a forcible description of their entire completion. Considering the words in relation to the Assyrians, to whom they primarily referred, they must be literally explained: viewing them as having respect to the inveterate enemies and persecutors of the church of God in every age, to them they may be figuratively applied. Let us shortly consider them in both senses.—The Hebrew word Tophet signifies, such a martial instrument as we call a Drum. It was the name of a valley, situated near to the city Jerusalem, on the south-east; which was also called, the Valley of Hinnom. In this place, the Canaanites, and afterward the Israelites, notwithstanding they were strictly prohibited, sacrificed their children, burning them in the fire, in honour of the idol named Moloch. It was a hollow image, made of brass, placed in this valley, into which its votaries having put fire, they threw in the children alive, that were offered to this idol. To prevent their lamentable shrieks and cries from being heard, persons were appointed to beat upon drums, or instruments somewhat similar to them. Hence it had the name of Tophet. Several things are related concerning this infamous place in the Old Testament, which shew, that it exhibited a striking emblem of the place of torment, the lake of fire and brimstone, wherein the wicked are punished. Situated without the walls of Jerusalem, it was destined to be the theatre on which the most excruciating anguish was suffered: the most bitter screams of the tortured children were every where heard. In these, and in other respects, it afforded an affecting representation of the infernal regions, which are separated from the New Jerusalem by an impassable gulf; where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched; where the voice of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, who worship the beast and his image. It is therefore used for a place of punishment by fire.

Tophet is ordained of old. It was appointed and appropriated by the most High, to whom all his works are known from the beginning, to be the place wherein the most awful divine judgments were to be executed upon the avowed implacable enemies of the church. This ordination is affirmed to have been of old, in the counsels of God, which are from everlasting: or, as the word, in the original language, signifies, from yesterday. The expression, when applied to any divine constitution, must be understood in a figurative sense, denoting that period, long ago elapsed, when God settled the mountains, and formed the valleys, which, to him, is as yesterday.—*Yea, for the king it is prepared.* The literal Tophet was so ordered and disposed, by infinite wisdom and power, as to form a proper convenient place for the destruction of the vast army of the great king of Assyria. The allegorical Tophet is also prepared, by the same omnipotent righteous Lord, for the king, the prince of this world, the chief and leader of the powers of darkness, with all his subjects, who are led captive by him at his pleasure. Our blessed Saviour therefore, describing the process of the final judgment, declares, that he will say to them on his left hand, ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels *.’—*He hath made it deep and large.* So extensive were the dimensions of the valley of Tophet, that it was admirably suited to the accomplishment of the awful purpose to which, at the time referred to, it should prove subservient. The Tophet prefigured by it, is made sufficiently capacious, not only to contain the king and head of the apostasy from God, but all the nations of them that forget the Lord, and yield chosen subjection to the prince of the power of the air.

The pile thereof is fire and much wood. Vast quantities of timber must have been collected into the valley

* Matth. xxv. 41.

of Tophet, for the horrid purpose of consuming the immense number of human sacrifices which were there offered to Moloch. The fire and much wood, burnt in that place, might represent, the dreadful ingredients which constitute the complicated misery of those who shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. It may be inquired, How could the large piles of combustible materials be kindled? The answer is given in the next words: *The breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.* Notwithstanding numbers of people were doubtless employed in setting on fire the large piles of wood which burnt in the valley of Tophet, yet the word of God, accompanied with his almighty power, gave secret efficacy, and certain success to their operations, that they might accomplish his righteous judgments. With respect to the other Tophet, of which it was the figure, the wrath of Jehovah, here compared to liquid brimstone, effectually kindles the unquenchable fire, whereby the wicked shall be tormented; who, in the words of Jesus Christ, ‘shall be cast into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*.’

This momentous and interesting truth ought not to be superficially discussed, or slightly passed over, lest, by treating it in this manner, it fail to operate those extensive salutary effects, on our temper and conduct, which it is intended to produce. I will not, however, enlarge at present, lest your attention, which hath been arrested by this awful subject, may relax, and so the impression it is suited to convey, become faint and confused. I therefore conclude this Lecture more abruptly than I could have wished.—‘The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil†.’ An excellent Hebrew scholar remarks, that the original words might be properly translated, “The Lord hath made every

* Matth. xiii. 42.

† Prov. xvi. 4.

“ thing for that which corresponds to it; even the
 “ wicked for the day of evil:” and what is more suited to a wicked man, than an evil day. Doth not affronted majesty, and impartial justice, require, that those who perversely endeavour to counteract the design of infinite wisdom in their formation, should feel the effects of almighty power in their punishment? Would you then happily avoid the dreadful doom of the enemies of God? flee from the wrath to come, forsake your evil ways, and betake yourselves to the hope set before you. In the plenitude of purest compassion, and with bowels of the tenderest love, the great God, whom you have offended, entreats you to escape from the terrible miseries that are coming on the workers of iniquity. ‘ As I live, saith the Lord
 ‘ God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked—turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for
 ‘ why will ye die, O house of Israel *?—The Lord
 ‘ bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face
 ‘ shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the
 ‘ Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give
 ‘ thee peace †.’

* Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

† Numb. vi. 24, 25, 26.

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