

GOD'S APPROBATION

OF OUR

LABOURS

NECESSARY TO THE
HOPE OF SUCCESS

BY

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GOD'S APPROBATION OF OUR LABOURS....

Numb. xiv. 8 — *If the Lord delight in us, then he will
bring us into this land, and give it us.*

YOU recollect, my brethren, that, when the children of Israel were going up to possess the land which the Lord their God had promised them, they were directed to send spies before them, who should search out the land, and report whether it was good or bad, and whether the inhabitants were strong or weak, few or many. The greater part of these spies proved unfaithful. They brought an evil report of the good land; depreciating its value, magnifying the difficulties of obtaining it, and thus spreading despondency over the hearts of the people. The effect was, that, instead of persevering in the under-taking, they were for returning to Egypt.

There were two out of the number, however, who were of another spirit, and whose report was different from that of their companions. *The land*, said they, *which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land, which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them: fear them not.* These worthies stood alone in their testimony, and the people had well nigh stoned them for it; but the Lord honoured them: for, of all the generations which came out of Egypt, they only inherited the promise.

Considering the object of the present meeting, you will probably suppose that my thoughts have been employed in drawing a parallel between the undertaking of Israel to subdue the Canaanites, and take possession of their land in the name of Jehovah; and our undertakings to subdue to the obedience of Christ the hearts of his enemies, both at home and abroad, and, in this manner, take possession of the world for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is true, they have: and, in discoursing upon the subject, I shall first attempt to justify the application by tracing the analogy between the two cases, and then consider the provision which we are given to expect success.

I shall attempt to justify the application of the subject, by tracing:

I. THE ANALOGY BETWEEN THE UNDERTAKING OF ISRAEL, AND THE EFFORTS OF CHRISTIANS TO DISSEMINATE THE GOSPEL

It is allowed, that the imagination, unaccompanied with judgment, will often find resemblances which the sacred writers would have disavowed, as beneath them; and far be it from me to imitate so puerile and unwarrantable a method of treating the oracles of God: but it appears, to me, that the gift of the holy land to Abraham and his posterity was really *designed* to prefigure the gift of all nations to the Messiah for his inheritance, and that thus it is represented in the scriptures. It is said, in the 72d Psalms, *He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth*. This promise, I suppose, had immediate reference to the kingdoms of Solomon, and signified, that during his reign, the whole extent of country included in the original promise to Abraham should be actually possessed: but, in a more remote sense, it refers to a greater son of David than Solomon. This is manifest from several passages in the psalm, which are inapplicable to any one but the Messiah. It is his kingdom only which shall *continue as long as the sun and the moon endure, throughout all generations*: Him shall *all nations serve*, and to him shall *all kings bow down; men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed*. Now, considering the promise before-mentioned in this light, it signifies, that, like as Israel, during the reign of Solomon, inherited the utmost extent of country promised to them, so the church, during the reign of the Messiah, should possess the utmost extent of country promised to the, so the church, during the reign of the Messiah, should possess the utmost extent of country promised to him, which is the whole world, or *the uttermost parts of the earth*. In the joyful prospect of these times, the Psalms concludes: *Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things: and blessed be his glorious name for ever; and LET THE WHOLE EARTH BE FILLED WITH HIS GLORY. AMEN, AND AMEN!*

The taking possession of Canaan, and the setting up of the true worship of God in it, not only prefigured the kingdom of the Messiah, but were preparatory to it—the foundation of the gospel structure. The carnal Jews, at the coming of our Saviour, it is true, did not enter into these view; and even his own disciples were much in the dark; but the ancient Israelites understood and felt them. *God be merciful unto us*, said they, *and bless us*, and *cause his*

face to shine upon us—Wherefore? That they might be a holy and happy people? Doubtless this was a part of their desire; but not the whole. They prayed to be blessed that they might be blessings to the world; *that God's way might be known, through them, upon earth, and his saving health among all nations; that the people might praise him, yea that all the people might praise him, and all the ends of the art fear before him.* Canaan was a country situated in the center of the world, and, therefore, adapted to be the spot on which Jehovah should set up his standard for the subjugation of the world to himself. From hence, the little leaven should diffuse its influence through the earth, till the whole were leavened. Such appears to have been the design of God, in bestowing it upon the posterity of Abraham, and such are the effects which have been actually, though gradually, produced. *Out of Zion has gone forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

There are several points of dissimilarity, I allow, between the undertaking of the Israelites and that of Christians to disseminate the gospel; but, whatever differences there are, they are altogether in our favour. They went forth armed with the temporal sword; we with the sword of the Spirit: their commission was to destroy men's lives; our to save their souls: cities, and fields, and vineyards, and olive-yards, were their reward; our hope, and joy, and crown, are sinners rescued from destruction, standing in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming. Finally: The people who they encountered were appointed by the Lord of the universe to utter destruction, as the just demerit of their crimes; and, though some submitted and were spared, yet the invaders were not given to hope, or directed to wait, for a change of this kind in the body of the people; but were commanded to drive them out, and take their place. It is not so with us: we live under a dispensation of mercy: go where we will, we have glad tidings of great joy to communicate. They, having no hopes of the people, might have said, We seek not you, but yours: but our hopes terminate on the people; we, therefore, can say, *We seek not yours, but you.*

There are several important points, however, in which the undertaking are similar. The following have occurred to me, as the most remarkable:

1. The *ultimate object* of the one was to overturn the kingdom of Satan, and to establish the knowledge and worship of the true God: and the same is true of the other. The world, at that time, not a nation exempted, was under the

dominion of Satan, enveloped in idolatry, and the abominations which always accompany it; so that, if God had not selected a people for himself, and, after having taught them to fear and obey him, given them a possession among the nations, he had had no people nor name nor worship upon the face of the earth. And what is the state of mankind at present? Not altogether so deplorable: but, whatever difference there may be, it is owing to that divine revelation which God communicated to Israel, and, by them, to the Gentile nations. In Heathen countries, the god of this world reigns uncontrolled. The children of men, from generation to generation, are led captive by him at his will. Much the same may be said of those countries which are overspread by Mahometanism. Nor is it materially otherwise where the corruptions of Popery maintain their sway. And even in our own country, where the scriptures are read in the native language, there are but few who pay any serious attention to them. Is it not evident, to an impartial spectator, that the great body of the people are practical Atheists, living without hope, and without God in the world? The number of worshippers, including even the laxest and most inattentive, in all our cities, and, I fear, in most of our towns and villages, is few, when compared with those who attend upon no worship at all. In the earlier times of the Reformation, whatever defects might exist with respect to church-government and discipline, the doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ was much more generally preached and believed than at present. Since the great principles of evangelical truth (alike clearly stated in the Articles of the Established Church and in the catechisms and confessions of Dissenters) have been relinquished, and a species of heathen morality substituted in their place, the nation has been almost heathenized. If the Lord had not justify us a seed of faithful men, some in the Establishment and some out of it, whose object it has been to propagate the common salvation, and to inculcate the holy practice which becomes it, surely we had, ere now, been as Sodom. Or it, like a certain great nation near home, we had revoked the laws in favour of religious liberty, and massacred, silenced, or banished the faithful witnesses of Christ, surely, like the, we had been lost in the gulf of Infidelity.

2. In invading the country of the Canaanites, Israel went forth by *divine authority*; and the same authority attends our invasion of the empire of sin and Satan. Nothing short of an express commandment could have justified a people in destroying or subjugating another people, whatever might be their

moral character: but the Creator of the world had an indisputable right to dispose of any part of it, and to punish transgressors in what manner he pleased. And, though the gospel is far from being injurious to the temporal interests of mankind, yet the opposition to it has been as fierce as decided, as if it had been aimed to rob them of every thing necessary to their happiness. The servants of Christ have been taught to expect opposition, and all the evils which a world lying in wickedness, and hating to have their repose disturbed, can inflict upon them. And though, by the kind hand of God, whose influence governs all human counsels, they have had their seasons of peace and rest, yet the enmity has been much the same. The truly zealous and faithful labourers in Christ's harvest have generally, even in the most favourable periods, had to encounter a larger portion of reproach and misrepresentation. And what but the *authority of heaven* should induce us to expose ourselves to such inconveniences? We have our feelings, as well as other men; and it would, doubtless, be agreeable to us to possess the good opinion of all about us. We have no ill will to those who preach even what we account *another gospel, and not the gospel of Christ*, whether in or out of the Establishment; and if we had, we have so much good will to ourselves, that, if consistently with the love of Christ and the souls of men we could hold our peace, we should probably be inclined to do so, and employ ourselves in something less offensive, and more adapted to promote our temporal interests. But the command of Christ is not to be trifled with. He to whom we must shortly give account of the use we have made of every talent committed to us, has said, Go, TEACH ALL NATIONS—PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE! If we have any authority from Christ to preach at all, (which I shall not here inquire,) we are, doubtless, warranted and obligated, by this commission, to embrace any opening, in any part of the earth, within our reach, for the imparting of the word of life to them that are without it. The primitive ministers went every where preaching the gospel, and gave no less offence to its enemies, even among the established teachers of religion, than we give; and were by them reproached as *ignorant* men, no less than we are. Yet they persevered in their work, and endured the consequences. If we be ministers of Jesus Christ, we ought to follow their example. It is true, there are some things of an *extraordinary* kind, in which we cannot follow them; but the work of spreading the gospel is ordinary, and not confined to a single age. Had not Christ's commission been binding to the latest posterity, it

would not have been added, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!*

3. The Israelites went forth, not only by divine authority, but *under a divine promise*; and the same is true of Christian ministers. God spake unto Abraham, saying, *I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.* This, in substance, was often repeated to the patriarchs; so often, that the country was from thence denominated, *The land of promise.* This it was that supported the faith of Caleb and Joshua. It was not in a dependence on their numbers, or their prowess, that they said, *We are well able*; but on the arm of Him who had spoken in his holiness. Nor do those who labour in the Lord's service, in the present times, whether at home or abroad, (for I consider the work as one,) go forth with less encouragement. The Father has promised his Son, that he *shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied*; that he will *divide him a portion with the great*, and that he *shall divide the spoil with the strong.* Travail, in a figurative sense, commonly signifies, grievous affection issuing in a great and important good. Such was the suffering of our Lord, and such must be the effect rising out of it. *A portion with the great*, may refer to the territories of the great ones of this world; such as the Alexanders and the Caesars, who, in their day, grasped a large extent of empire: but the kingdom of Christ shall be greater than the greatest of them. The division of the spoil, implies a victory, and denotes, in this place, that Christ shall triumph over all the false religion and irreligion in the world. And, as the Father's word is given to his Son, so the word of the Son is given unto us. He that said, *Go, teach all nations*, added, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* These declarations afford equal ground for confidence, as those which supported a Caleb and a Joshua.

4. The promise to Israel was *gradually* fulfilled; and the same is observable of that which is made to Christ and his people. It was almost five hundred years, from the time that God entered into covenant with Abraham, before his posterity were permitted to set foot upon the land, as possessors of it; and nearly five hundred years more elapsed before their possession was completed. And, in establishing the kingdom of his Son, God has proceeded in a similar manner. The accession of the Gentiles was promised to Noah, under the form of Japheth being *persuaded to dwell in the tents of Shem*: but

more than two thousand years roll on before anything very considerable is accomplished. At length, the Messiah comes; and, like Joshua by Canaan, takes possession of the Heathen world. At first, it seems to have bowed before his word; and, as we should have thought, promised fair to be subdued in a little time. But every new generation that was born, being corrupt from their birth, furnished a body of new recruits to Satan's army: and, as the Canaanites, after the first onset in the times of Joshua, gathered strength, and struggled successfully against that generation of Israelites which succeeded him and forsook the God of their fathers; so, as the church degenerated, the world despised it. Its doctrine, worship, and spirit being corrupted, from being a formidable enemy, the greater part of it becomes a convenient ally, and is employed in subduing the other part, who hold fast the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Thus the war is lengthened out: and now, after a lapse of eighteen hundred years, we see not all things yet put under him. On the contrary, when reviewing our labours, it often seems to us that we have *wrought no deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen*. But let us not despair: *we see Jesus* upon his throne; and, as the Canaanites were untimely driven out, and the kingdom of Israel extended from sea to sea; so assuredly, it shall be with the kingdom of Christ.

The great disposer of events has, for wise ends, so ordered it, that the progress of things shall be gradual. He designs by this, among other things, to try the faith and patience of sincere people, and to manifest the hypocrisy of others. Hereby scope is afforded both for faith and unbelief. If, like Caleb and Joshua, we be for going forward, we shall not want encouragement; but if, like the others, we be weary of waiting, and our hearts turn back again, we shall not want a handle, or plea, by which to excuse ourselves. God loves that both person and things should appear to be what they are.

5. The promise was not accomplished, at last, but *by means of ardent, deadly, and persevering struggles*; and such must be the efforts of the church of Christ, ere she will gain the victory over the spiritual wickedness with which she has to contend. The Canaanites would not give up any thing but at the point of the sword. Hence the faint-hearted, the indolent, and the weak in faith, were for compromising matters with them. The same spirit which magnified difficulties at a distance, which spake of cities as *great, and walled up to Heaven*, and of the sons of Anak being there, was for stopping short when they had gained footing in the land, and for making leagues with the

residue of the people. Thus it has long been in the Christian church: the gospel having obtained a footing in the western nations, we have acted as though we were willing that Satan should enjoy the other parts without molestation. Every Heathen and Mahometan country has seemed to be a city walled up to heaven, and the inhabitants terrible to us as the sons of Anak. And, even in our native country, an evangelical ministry having obtained a kind of establishment in some places, we have long acted as if we thought the rest were to be given up by consent, and justify to perish without any means being used for their salvation! If God means to save any of them, it seems he must bring them under the gospel, or the gospel, in some miraculous manner, to them: whereas the command of the Saviour is that we go, and preach it to every creature. All that Israel gained was by dint of sword. It was at the expense of many lives, yea, many thousands of lives, that they at last came to the full possession of the land, and that the promises of God were fulfilled towards them. The same may be said of the establishment of Christ's kingdom. It was by ardent and persevering struggles that the gospel was introduced into the various nations, cities, and towns where it now is; and, in many instances, at the expense of life. Thousands of lives were sacrificed to this great object in the times of the apostles, and were I to say millions in succeeding ages, I should probably be within the compass of truth. But we have been so long inured to act under the shadow of civil protection and without any serious inconvenience to our temporal interests, that we are startled at the difficulties which the ancient Christian would have met with fortitude. They put their lives in their hands, *standing in jeopardy every hour*: and, though we cannot be sufficiently thankful, both to God and the legislature of our country, for the protection we enjoy; yet we must not make this the condition of our activity for Christ. *He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap*. If ever God prosper us, in any great degree, it will be in the exercise of that spirit by which the martyrs obtained a good report.

The above particulars may suffice to show the analogy between the two cases: the object aimed at, the authority acted upon, the promise confided in, its gradual accomplishment, and the means by which this accomplishment is effected, are the same in both: I hope, therefore, the application of the one to the other may be considered as justified.

Let us consider:

II. THE PROVISIO ON WHICH WE ARE WARRANTED TO HOPE FOR SUCCESS:

*If the Lord DELIGHT IN US,
then he will bring us into the land, and give it us.*

The term *delight* does not express that divine love to our souls which is the source of our salvation, but a complacency in our character and labours. Thus it is to be understood in the speech of David, when fleeing from the conspiracy of Abaslom: *If he say, I have no delight in thee, here I am: let him do with me as seemeth him good!* He could not mean by this, If God have no love to my soul, I submit to be forever separated from him, for such submission is not required of any who live under a dispensation of mercy: but If he approve not of me as the head of his people, here I am: let him take my life away, as it pleaseth him. The amount is, That if we would hope to succeed in God's work, our character and undertakings much be such as he approves.

1. The *object* which we pursue must be simply the cause of God, unmixed with worldly policy, or party interest. It has been insinuated, that, under the colour of disseminating evangelical doctrine, we seek to gain over the common people, and so to obtain, it should seem, an ascendancy in government.^[1] If it be so, we may be assured the Lord will take no delight in us. The work, in this case, must be altogether of man, and will come to nothing; yea, and to nothing let it come. The desire and prayer of my heart is, that all such undertakings, if such there be, may perish! The kingdom of Christ will never prosper in those hands which make it only the secondary object of their pursuit, even though the first were lawful; and much less when it is made to subserve that which is itself sinful. But, if the divine glory be the object of our labours, the work is of God; God himself will delight in us, and every attempt to oppose it will be found to be fighting against God.

There is another way in which, I apprehend, we are in much more danger of erring: I mean, by an improper attachment to *party interest*. I am far from thinking it a sin to be of a party. Every good man ought to rank with that denomination which, in his judgment, approaches nearest to the mind of Christ: but this is very different from having our labours directed to the promotion of a party, *as such*. If so, we shall see little or no excellence in whatever is done by others, and feel little or no pleasure in the success which

God is pleased to give them: but, while this is our spirit, whatever be our zeal, we are serving ourselves rather than Christ, and may be certain the Lord will not delight in us to do us good. The only spirit in which the Lord takes pleasure is, that which induces us to labour to promote *his* cause, and to rejoice in the prosperity of all denominations *so far as they promote it*.

2. The *doctrine* we teach must be that of Jesus Christ and him crucified. The person and work of Christ have ever been the corner-stone of the Christian fabric: take away his divinity and atonement, and all will go to ruins. This is the doctrine taught by the apostles, and which God, in all ages, has delighted to honour. It would be found, I believe, on inquiry, that in those times wherein this doctrine has been most cordially embraced the church has been most prosperous, and that almost every declension has been accompanied by a neglect of it. This was the doctrine by which the Reformation was effected; and to what is the Reformation come in those communities where it is rejected? This was the leading theme of the Puritans and Nonconformists; and what are their descendants become who have renounced it? Many of them rank with Infidels, and many who retain the form of Christianity deny the power thereof.

If it be alleged that the Church of Rome retains this doctrine amidst its great apostasy, and some Protestant churches do the same, which, notwithstanding, have exceedingly degenerated; I answer, it is one thing for a community to retain doctrines in its decrees and articles, and another to preach them with faith and love in their ordinary labours. Divine truth requires to be written, not merely with ink and paper, but by the Spirit of God, upon the fleshly tables of the heart. If the Church of Rome had retained the doctrine of Christ's divinity to any purpose, its members would have worshipped him, and not have turned aside to the adoration of saints and relicks; and if his atoning blood and only mediation between God and man had been properly regarded, we had never heard of mediators, pardons, and penances of another kind.

Christ crucified is the central point, in which all the lines of evangelical truth meet and are united. There is not a doctrine in the scriptures but what bears an important relation to it. Would we understand the glory of the divine character and government? it is seen in perfection *in the face of Jesus Christ*. Would we learn the evil of sin, and our perishing condition as sinners? Each

is manifested in his sufferings. All the blessings of grace and glory are given us in him, and for his sake. Practical religion finds its most power motives in his dying love. That doctrine of which Christ is not the sum and substance, is not the gospel; and that morality which has no relation to him, and which is not enforced on evangelical principles, is not Christ, but Heathen.

I do not mean to be the apologist for that fastidious disposition apparent in some hearers, who require that every sermon shall have Christ for its immediate theme, and denominate every thing else legal preaching. His sacred name ought not to be unnaturally forced into our discourses, nor the holy scriptures turned into allegory for the sake of introducing it: but, in order to preach Christ, there is no need of this. If all scripture doctrines and duties bear a relation to him, we have only to keep that relation in view, and to urge practical religion upon those principles. If I leave our Christ in a sermon, and allege that the subject did not admit of his being introduced, I fear it will only prove that my thoughts have not been cast in an evangelical mould. I might as well say, there is a village which has no road to the metropolis, as that there is a scripture doctrine or duty which has no relation to the person and work of Christ. Neither can I justly allege that such a way of preaching would cramp the powers of my soul, and confine me to four or five points in divinity: we may give the utmost scope to our minds, and yet, like the Apostle, determine to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. There is breadth and length and depth and height sufficient in his love to occupy our powers, even though they were ten thousand times larger than they are.

In all our labours, brethren, in the church or in the world, in our native country or among the Heathens, be this our principal them. In this case, and not otherwise, the Lord will delight in us, will bring us into the land, and give it us for a possession.

3. The *motive* of our undertakings must be pure. God cannot possibly take pleasure in the labours of the *sordid* or the *vain*. Indeed, I do not perceive how, in the greater part of our labours, we can suspect ourselves, or be suspected, of acting from a regard to our worldly advantage. In attempting to carry the gospel among the Heathen we certainly can have no such motive; as every part of the work requires the sacrifice of interest, and that without the most distant prospect of its being restored. And even in carrying what we believe to be evangelical doctrine into the villages of our native country, it is

commonly at the expense of both ease and interest. In those labours, however, that are within the vicinity of our respective congregations, in which success may contribute to our temporal advantage, it becomes us to watch over our own hearts. If such a motive should lie concealed among the springs of action, it may procure a blast upon our undertakings. The Lord will have no delight in such preaching; and without him we can do nothing. Or in avarice have no place in us, yet, should we be stimulated by *the desire of applause*, it will be equally offensive to a holy God. The idea of being a Missionary, abroad or at home may feed the vanity of some minds, and, indeed, there is no man that is proof against such temptations. We have all reason to watch and pray. There is a *woe* hangs over the *idol shepherd*; *the sword will be upon his arm, and upon his right eye!* I have no suspicion of any one, but merely wish everyone to suspect himself. If we secretly wish to appear great among our brethren, to magnify ourselves or our party, or to figure away in the religious world, as persons of extraordinary zeal, all is naked to the eyes of him with whom we have to do, and, depend upon it, he will have no delight in us. But if our eye be single, our whole body shall be full of light. Those that honour God shall be honoured of him; and however he may prove them for a time, they shall find, in the end, that their labour has not been in vain in the Lord.

4. We must go forth in all our labours as little children, *sensible of our own insufficiency, and depending only upon God*. The first city which Israel besieged, on their passing over Jordan, was won without striking a single blow, but merely walking round it, and sounding their trumpets, according to the command of the Lord. This was doubtless meant to teach them a lesson, at the outset of the war, not to lean upon their strength, or numbers, or valour; but upon the arm of Jehovah. This lesson was ordinarily repeated throughout their generations, whenever led to battle by godly men: instead of filling them with ideas of their own sufficiency, (which is the universal practice of worldly men who have had the command of armies,) they taught them to distrust themselves, and to rely upon their God. This is the spirit by which true religion is distinguished; and in this spirit we must go forth to subdue the hearts of sinners, or the Lord will have no delight in us, but leave us to fight our battles alone. Thus that eminent man of God, from whose pulpit I now address you, represents the four captains, and their ten thousands, after besieging Mansoul without effect, as presenting their petition to Shaddai, for

assistance. The more self-annihilation we possess, the more likely we are to be useful to the souls of men. God has *respect unto the lowly; but the proud he knoweth afar off*.

5. We must persevere in the work of the Lord to the end. When Israel came out of Egypt, I suppose they all intended to go forward, and to possess the land: but when difficulties arose, the great body of them fainted, and were for going back. When an undertaking is new and plausible, many come forward to engage in it: but a time comes when the first flush of spirits subsides, when great and seemingly insurmountable difficulties present themselves, and when success appears to be much farther off than at the beginning: this is the time for the trial of faith. A few such seasons will commonly thin the ranks of Christian professors; but blessed are they that endure temptation. Those who *followed the Lord fully* were brought into the land. It is possible that our motives may be pure at the outset, and yet, through the strength of temptation, we may be turned aside. The Lord speaks well of the church of Ephesus, as having, for a time, *borne, and had patience, and for his names sake had laboured, and not fainted*: yet it follows, *Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love*. This is an example for us to shun. Another follows, namely, the church at Thyatira, for our imitation: *I know thy works, and thy charity, and service and faith, and thy patience, and thy works*, AND THE LAST TO BE MORE THAN THE FIRST.

6. We must exercise *a lively faith* in the power and promise of God. I reserve this remark to the last, because it contains the spirit of the passage, and is a matter of the highest importance. It was owing to unbelief that the body of the people drew back, and to faith that Joshua and Caleb were for pressing forward. Nor is there anything of greater importance to the Christian ministry, especially to those engaged in extraordinary labours. He that endeavors to extend the limits of Christ's kingdom, resembles a navigator who engages in a voyage of discovery: he is exposed to ills and dangers which cannot be foreseen, nor provided against. Carrying a doctrine to which all his hearers have a natural and deep rooted aversion, the difficulties he has to encounter are as islands of ice near the poles, or as rocks in unknown seas; but faith in the power and promise of God is sufficient for all his wants.

Confidence is agreeable to a generous character, while suspicion thrusts a

sword into his heart. The former is honourable to him, affording him opportunity of carrying his kind intentions into execution: the latter dishonours him, and lays him under a sort of incapacity of doing good to the party. A generous character will feel impelled by a principle of honour to keep pace with the expectations of those who confide in his goodness and veracity. Nor is this confined to the concerns of men. There is something greatly resembling it in the dealings of God with us. The Lord has magnified his *word* more than all his name; and as faith corresponds with the word, he has bestowed greater honour upon this grace than upon any other. Hence we find such language as the following: *O how great is thy goodness which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men.—Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper—The Lord taketh pleasure in them that hope in his mercy.* Under the New Testament still more is said of this important principle. In almost all the miracles of our Saviour, he made a point of answering to the faith of the parties, or of those that brought them; and where this was wanting, he is represented as under a kind of incapacity to help them. *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.—According to your faith be it unto you.—Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.—He could there do no mighty works—because of their unbelief.* Nor was this principle honoured merely in miraculous cases: our Saviour taught his disciples to cherish high expectations from the divine mercy and faithfulness, in their ordinary approaches to a throne of grace. *Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them.*

In recommending a strong and lively faith, I do not mean to encourage that species of confidence which has no foundation in the divine promise. This is not faith, but fancy, or the mere workings of the imagination. Those who, many ages since, engaged in what were called the *holy wars* desirous of driving out the Turks from Jerusalem, were not wanting of confidence; but the promise of God was not the ground on which it rested, It was not faith, therefore, but presumption. It was not thus with Israel, in going up against the Canaanites; nor is it thus with those who labour to extend the spiritual kingdom of Christ. The promise of God is here fully engaged. *He hath sworn by himself, the word is going out of his mouth in righteousness, and shall not return.* Many passages might be produced in proof that, before the end of time, the kingdom of the Messiah shall be universal. I shall select a few: *The*

stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.—I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him.—And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.—Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like a little leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the WHOLE was leavened.—The seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever. These are the true sayings of God. Surely they afford ground for a strong and lively faith in every effort to disseminate the gospel.

God has not only dealt largely in promises, but has given us abundance of examples of their fulfillment. A large part of scripture prophecy has already been converted into history. *Unto us a child is actually born; unto us a son is given; the government is upon his should; his name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Might God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.* But the same authority which foretold this, has added, *Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.* There is also a peculiar pledge given for its fulfillment: *The zeal of the Lord of Hosts, it is declared, shall perform this!* Zeal is a fervid affection of the mind, that prompts us to pursue an object with earnestness and perseverance, and to encounter every difficulty that may stand in the way of its accomplishment. From such a spirit, even in men, much is to be expected. Yet what is the zeal of creatures? Always feeble, often misguided, disproportionate, or declining. But conceive of it as possessing the heart of the omnipotent God. What an overwhelming thought! The establishment of Christ's kingdom deeply interests him: his thoughts are upon it; all his plans include it; and all that is going on in the world, from generation to generation, is made to subserve it. We draw some encouragement from the zeal of creatures in God's cause. When his servants take pleasure in the stones of Zion, and favour the dust thereof, we consider it a hopeful symptom that the Lord is about to arise and have mercy upon it. The importunity and liberality of Christians, the diligence of ministers, and

the cries of the souls from under the altar, for the fall of Babylon, may have each their influence: but the zeal of the Lord of Hosts surpasses all. Here is solid rock, for faith to rest upon.

Unbelievers may deride every attempt to turn sinners from the errors of their way; and even believers, while viewing things through sensible mediums, may discover insurmountable difficulties. The people will not believe us, nor hearken to our voice: the prejudices of men are almost insuperable in our native country; and if we go abroad they are worse: these *casts*, this *voluptuousness*, this *savage ferocity*, this *treachery* of character....How can we hope to overcome such obstacles as these?' But all this is only a repetition of the objections of the all unbelieving Israelites: *The people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are great, and walled up to heaven: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there!* If we can believe....all things are possible to him that believeth.

Past instances of mercy furnished the church with matter of prayer: *Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord! Awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old? Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?* And why should we not apply the past operations of grace to a similar purpose? That arm is not grown weary which subdued Jewish malignity in the days of Pentecost, and overturned Heathen idolatry by the doctrine of the cross.

I think I may add, there is reason to hope that the time when these things shall be accomplished cannot be far off. I have no desire to deal in uncertain conjectures. The prophecies were not designed to make us prophets, nor to gratify an idle curiosity. They contain enough, however, to strengthen our faith, and invigorate our zeal. If we carefully examine the scriptures, though we may not be able to fix times with any certainty, yet we may obtain satisfaction that the day is not *very distant* when the kingdom of Christ shall be universal. The New Testament writers, in their times, made use of language which strongly indicates that time itself was far advanced. *The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.—Behold the judge standeth at the door.—The end of all things is at hand.—He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly!* These, and such like passages, I should think, cannot mean less than that in those days they had passed the meridian of time, and entered, as it were, into the afternoon of the world. And now, after a lapse of

eighteen hundred years, what else can be expected, but that things are fast approaching to their final issue? But it is not merely on general grounds that the conclusion rests. The prophet Daniel, in his seventh chapter, describes the successive establishment and overthrow of four great governments, which should each, in its day, rule the greater part of the world. He also speaks of the last of these governments as issuing in ten branches, and describes another, which he calls a little horn, as rising from among them. The dominion of this last government was to continue *until a time, times, and the dividing of time*. After this *the judgement should set, and they should take away its dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end*. And then it immediately follows, *And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High*. There are many things in the prophecies which are hard to be understood: but this seems to be very clear. There can be no doubt of the four great governments being the Babylonian, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman. Now these have each appeared upon the stage, and are gone into perdition. The division of the Roman empire into a number of lesser governments, such as continue in Europe to this day, and, among them, exercise a dominion over the rest of the world equal to what was formerly exercised by the Romans, is doubtless signified by the *ten horns* of the fourth beast. Nor can we be at a loss to know what that government is which is signified by a *little horn*, which rose up from among the ten horns, which speaketh *great words against the Most High, and weareth out the saints of the Most High*. We have seen its rise, felt its reign, and in part rejoiced in its overthrow. The period alluded to, as the term of its existence, is manifestly the same as that which John, in the Revelations, calls *forty and two months, or one thousand two hundred and sixty days*, during which *the holy city should be trodden under foot, the witnesses prophesy in sackcloth*, and the true church have her abode *in the wilderness*, in a manner resembling the state of things in Jerusalem in the times of Antiochus. More than a thousand of these prophetic days, or years, must have already elapsed. The period itself must be drawing towards a close: and when this is closed, there is an end to every species of Satanic government. That which follows is given to the Son of Man, and to the people of the saints of the Most High. The amount it, We are under the last form of the reign of darkness, and that form is fast dissolving. Surely, the day of the church's redemption draweth nigh!

And while these views afford a joyful prospect to the church of Christ, there is nothing in them which can furnish any just ground of alarm to civil government. There is no reason to imagine that the church of Christ will ever become a political community, exercising dominion over others; but that Christian principles will pervade and rule the governments of the earth. However God may overrule the tumultuous revolutions of these times, to the making way for his kingdom, his kingdom itself will be entirely different: the wind, the earthquake, and the fire may go before it, but the thing itself will be as a still small voice. It will not come with observation, or outward show. The banners that will be displayed will not be those of sedition and tumult, but of truth and peace. It will be a renovation in the hearts of men; a revolution, in both rulers and subject, from slavery of sin to the love of both God and man: and this, as it must produce the establishment of peace and good order, cannot be an object of dread to any who are well disposed. It is not impossible that we may live to see things of which at present we have scarcely any conception: but whether we do, or not, Jesus lives, and his kingdom must increase. And what, if while we are scaling the walls of the enemy, we should a few of us lose our lives? We must die in some way; and can we desire to die in a better cause? Probably many of the Israelites who went up to possess the land with Joshua, perished in the attempt: yet this was no objection to a perseverance in the cause. In carrying the glad tidings of eternal life to Jews and Gentiles, Stephen and James, with many others, fell sacrifices at an early period: yet no one was discouraged on this account, but rather stimulated to follow their example.

I close with a few words by way of reflection. It becomes us to inquire, each one seriously for himself, whether the little success which we have already experienced may not be owing to this cause—There may be something about us, on account of which God does not delight in us? I mean no reflection upon any; but let each one examine himself. What is the secret spring of my zeal? Is the doctrine I preach truly evangelical? Let me not take this matter for granted; but examine whether it quadrates with the scriptures. If half my time be taken up in beating off the rough edges of certain passages, to make them square with my principles, I am not in the gospel scheme. If one part of scripture requires to be passed over, lest I should appear inconsistent, I am not sound in the faith, in God's account; but have imbibed some false system, instead of the gospel; and, while this is the cause, I have no reason to expect

that he will delight in me, so as to make me a blessing.'

Finally: Whether we possess the land, or not, it will be possessed. Though some of the Israelites perished in the wilderness, that did not overturn the counsels of God the next generation entered into his rest. And though there should be so much selfishness, false doctrine, unbelief, or inactivity, about us, as that God should take no delight in us, and refuse to give us the land, yet our children may possess it. God's word will be accomplished. Deliverance will arise to the church of God, whether we do ourselves the honour of serving it, or not. But what do I thus speak? Surely it is the desire of many in this country, and of many in this assemble, to be active, and so to act as to be approved of God.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] To this effect were the insinuations of Professor Robinson, concerning the efforts of Mr. Robert Haldane and his friends, in a proposed mission to Hindoost'han. The modest and dignified manner in which that gentleman repelled the accusation, and even forced his accuser to retract it, may be seen in his late excellent pamphlet on that subject. The Bishop of Rochester, in a late address to his Clergy, after representing the Socinians as aiming at this object, adds as follows: "Still the operations of the enemy are going on—still by stratagem—the stratagem still a pretence of reformation. But the reformation, the very reverse of what was before attempted. Instead of divesting religion of its mysteries, and reducing it to a mere philosophy in speculation, and to mere morality in practice, the plan is now to affect great zeal for orthodoxy; to make great pretensions to an extraordinary measure of the Holy Spirit's influence; to alienate the minds of the people from the established Clergy, by representing them as sordid worldlings, without any concern about the souls of men, indifferent to the religion which they ought to teach, and to which the laity are attached, and destitute of the Spirit of God. In many parts of the kingdom new conventicles have been opened, in great number; and congregations formed on one knows not what denomination."

If the religion of Jesus must be reproached, it is best that it should be done in some such manner as this. Had the Bishop of Rochester preserved any regard to candour, or moderation, he might have been believed; as it is, it may be presumed there can be but little danger of it. None, except those who are as deeply prejudiced as himself, can, for a moment, imagine that the late attempts for disseminating evangelical doctrine are the operations of a political scheme, carried on by Infidels in disguise. A very small acquaintance with men and things must convince any one that the *persons concerned in this work are not the same* as those who affected to reform the church by reducing the mysteries of the gospel to "a mere philosophy in speculation, and to a mere morality in practice." Men of that description were never possess of zeal enough for such kind of work. We might as soon expect to see Bishop Horsley himself turn village-preacher, as them.

In repelling such language as the above, it is difficult to keep clear of the acrimony by which it is dictated. Suffice it to say, I am conscious that no such plan or design ever occupied my mind for a moment: nor am I acquainted

with any person whom I have ground to suspect any such thing. I know persons who are, as I believe, sinfully prejudiced against government, and of whose spirit and conversation I seldom fail to express my dislike: but I know not an individual whom I have any reason to think engages in village-preaching with so mean and base an end as that which is suggested by this prelate.

The picture which is drawn of the Clergy is, doubtless, unpleasant; and, if applied to the serious part of them, far from just: whence it was taken is best known to the writer. I am inclined to think however, that though he has represent it as the language of village-preachers, he would be unable to prove such charges against them. There may be violent individuals engaged in village-preaching, who may take pleasure in exposing the immoralities of the Clergy: and if they have half the bitterness on the one side which this writer discovers on the other, they are unworthy of being so employed. Whatever grounds there may be for such charges against numbers of the Clergy, the body of those who have been employed in preaching of preferring them, but have confined their attention to the preaching of Jesus Christ.

I have no scruple, however, in saying, if reducing religion to "a mere philosophy in speculation, and a mere morality in practice," be subverting it, it is subverted by great numbers in the Church of England, as well as out of it. And where this is the case, it is the bounded duty of the friends of evangelical truth to labour to introduce it, regardless of the wrath of its adversaries.

The suppression of "conventicles," I doubt not, would be very agreeable to some men: but I have too much confidence in the good sense of the legislature, to suppose that it will suffer its counsels to be swayed by a few violent Churchmen.