

**An Innocent Game  
For  
Babes In Grace;  
Or  
Diversion For Infants At The Hole Of The  
Asp.**

**William Huntington**

*Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and  
scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing  
shall by any means hurt you.—*

Luke 10:19

**To The Congregational Churches Of Christ  
At Providence Chapel,  
And At Richmond In Surrey,  
With Their Deacons.**

Dear Brethren in the Household of Faith, and Fellow-Subjects in the Kingdom and Patience of Christ,

SOME of you very earnestly solicited me to publish this discourse after the delivery of it; which sollicitation I could not then comply with, as I had so many things on my hands, and so little time to attend to them; but, having now published to the world the greatest part of the dealings of God with me, I am willing to comply with your former request.

I choose to dedicate this discourse to you in humble acknowledgment of the manifold favours which you have shewed me in the erection of the chapel, from your assiduous care in managing the outward matters thereof for me, without burdening me in the study, and from your liberality in supporting the cause of God with honour.

I know the title of this discourse will give an offence, as most people imagine all religion to be something gloomy and melancholy, and that, as soon as persons become serious in the ways of God, they immediately become miserable, and therefore are fit for nothing but an hermitage or a madhouse. However, if there be no happiness in the favour of God, I am sure there is none in his wrath; because a guilty conscience, which is the harbinger of wrath, always pursues the sinner.

Nor are real Christians without their various diversions; but then they are all of a spiritual nature, fit for spiritual gamesters; and hence it is that entangling the minds and affections of sinners, and alluring them to Christ with gospel promises, is called fishing, Mark 1:17. Struggling with God under the Spirit's influence for blessings is called wrestling, Gen. 32:24. Keeping up a close union with God in gospel diligence is called running the race that is set before us, Heb. 12:1. And grasping the highest attainments in grace is called attaining the mark that secures the prize of our high calling, Phil. 3:14. In short, he is allowed to be a good gamester, and

to play the best of games, that wins Christ, though he lose every thing else. "But what things were gain to me, those I accounted loss for Christ: yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for when I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ," Phil. 3:7, 8. The Lord keep you all in the simplicity of the gospel, and then you will play with safety, though it be at the hole of the asp. The breast of consolation, in the mouth of crying and praying faith, affords such nourishment to Babes in Grace, and causes them to cleave so close to the Father of all mercies and God, of all comfort, that there is little room to suspect the danger of being envenomed at the hole of the asp. That you may play a warrantable game, and come off with the garland is the desire and prayer of

Him that loves you in the bowels of Christ, and is willing to serve you for his sake,

W. Huntington

## An Innocent Game, Etc.

*"And the child shall play on the hole of the asp,"—Isaiah 11:8.*

IT is allowed by the choicest divines, that, of all the prophets, Isaiah is the most evangelical, as his sermons savour most of the dear Redeemer. And indeed Isaiah's views of his birth, his temptations, his travels, his ministry, his death, his ascension, his receiving and giving the Spirit, his seeing the travail of his soul in the conversion of the Gentiles; the universal spread of the gospel, his predictions of these our isles waiting for his law; the real experience of Christians, the glorious exaltation of Christ, his universal government, and eternal reign; are so exactly pointed out, that, if he had sat in the eternal council of the Trinity, he could not have preached the doctrines of eternal election and absolute predestination more clearly than he does. The deity of Christ; his glorious offices, as king, priest, and prophet; his government as a king, his sacrifice as a priest, and his doctrines as a prophet; are so sublimely and profoundly handled, that it is as if he had spent his days on a mount of transfiguration; on which he traces the manifold wisdom of God from the ancient settlements of the Trinity down to the end of time, and to all eternity. Indeed he was one that lived, moved, and had his being in the glorious visions of God. He treats so sweetly of the soul-travail of awakened and quickened sinners; of the Lord's tender care over them; their cordial reception into covenant favour; their justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ; the saints' holding on their way without fainting, and the certainty of their possessing at last what God has promised in Christ Jesus, called by this prophet, things which the eye hath not seen, ear heard, or heart of man conceived, and which are said to be laid up for all that wait upon and wait for God.

This prophet appears to be one of the royal house of David; and I believe he preached fifty or three-score years; and at last was sawn asunder, Hebrews, xi. 37; and as some of the Jews allow, under the reign of Manasseh, who they say was his grandson.

The prophet, in the beginning of this chapter, foretells of the coming of Jesus Christ, as the omnipotent and eternal Ruler, whom he terms, "a rod growing out of David, called the stem of Jesse;" and a blessed sprig of righteousness coming forth "out of his roots, as a tender plant out of a dry ground."

He means the conception of Christ; that, under the divine agency of the Holy Ghost, there shall come forth a holy and blessed seed, that, while righteousness is looking down from heaven for satisfaction, truth shall spring out of the earth and give it.

"A branch shall grow out of his roots," ver. 1. The prophet here prophesies of the glorious fulness of the Spirit that should rest upon him. Christ, as a king, was to have "dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth;" and, to qualify him for the government of his kingdom, and to subdue his enemies, "the Spirit of wisdom shall rest upon him."

As a prophet of his church and people, he shall reveal the mysteries of heaven, and make plain the path of life; and he is qualified for this with the "spirit of understanding."

And, for the office of an advocate for his people, he is furnished with the "spirit of counsel."

As the foundation of his church, "the spirit of might" shall rest upon him.

As he is ordained to be the judge of quick and dead, the "spirit of knowledge" shall rest upon him; and, as a servant in covenant character, the spirit of the fear of the Lord shall be upon him. "If I am a master," says God, "where is my fear?"

The answer is, Christ, as a servant, shall fear him all his days: "the spirit of the fear of the Lord shall rest upon him," yet. 2. Thus the humanity of Christ was anointed with all the fulness of the Holy Ghost; grace was poured into his lips indeed, and he was full of grace and truth; his own proper deity inhabited that body, and a sevenfold unction abode upon it.

He next treats of his omniscience. "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears;" ver. 3. But, as the searcher of all hearts, he shall judge and reprove according to their thoughts; as was verily fulfilled in his ministry, when there came a company to him saying, "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man; for thou regardest not the persons of men. Tell us, therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute to Ceasar, or not?" Matt. xxii. 16, 17. There was not a word amiss in all this. They told the Saviour that they knew he was true, and that he taught the ways of God truly; that he was not afraid of the faces of men; and they asked him if it was lawful to pay tribute to the Roman emperor, who was no better than a usurper over them. Where was the harm in all this? I answer, there was none; but the omniscient Saviour knew their drift was to drag something out of his mouth that would amount to treason; and, if they could have caught that, then they would have been the first to have accused him to Herod of treachery, and delivered him up to his authority, and so have exposed him to all the severity of the secular power. "But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" Here the dear Redeemer did not judge after the hearing of his ears; if he had, in all probability he would have judged charitably, for there was nothing amiss in their words. But, to confute them by their own acts and deeds, he said, "Shew me the tribute money;" and, when they brought it, he said, "Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him Ceasar's." Is it Caesar's? Did not God at first reign over you? and did he not, in the wilderness, levy many tributes on

you, to shew you that your obedience and loyalty was due to him only? "But whose image and superscription is this? They say unto him, Ceasar's." How came you under the sceptre of an heathen monarch? Is this his image? Why then, if his image and superscription go current among you, you allow of his government; and it is a proof that you have cast off the sceptre of God; "Render therefore to Ceasar the things that are Ceasar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

Thus it appears that Jesus did not judge after the sight of his eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of his ears; but, as the omniscient Jehovah, he judged according to the base hypocrisy of their hearts.

"But with righteousness shall he judge the poor," ver. 4. By the *poor* understand the "poor in spirit;" such as are stripped of their own supposed merit, brought in debtors by the law of God and conscience, chased from all confidence in the flesh, brought to hunger and thirst after righteousness, and humbled to beg the bread of heaven at mercy's door.

"And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth," ver. 4. By the rod of his mouth understand the power of his preached word. The Lord says, "I have smitten Ephraim, and he is gone on frowardly in the way of his heart: for the iniquity of his covetousness was I wrath, and smote him. I hid me, and was wroth," Isa. lvii. 17. That is, God smote him with the words of his mouth, and hewed him by the prophets, Hos. vi. 5. And, after God had thus wounded him, he brought him back, and bound up his broken heart. "I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners." Thus he smites some, and then heals them again; as it is written, "Despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty; for he maketh sore, and he bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole," Job, v. 17, 18.

By "the breath of his lips" understand the spirit that attends the word of the Lord, and that slays the old man of sin; and, on the other hand, that makes the word of God a savour of death unto death to all that maintain an impious rebellion against the light.

"And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins," verse 5. This represents the Saviour as a just God; that he will appear strictly just both as a Saviour and as a judge: as a Saviour he will answer every demand to justice by paying a perfect obedience to every precept of the law, and then submitting himself to death, as the just sentence of God, denounced against man for sin. Death is the sentence of God, man is the subject of this sentence, and sin is the cause. "By sin came death." The Saviour submitted himself to death spiritual by taking our sins, and by being made a curse to death eternal by the departure of God from him. "Why hast thou forsaken me?" To death temporal when his soul was separated from his body. "He made his soul an offering for sin." Having thus satisfied justice, he is strictly just when he justifies his own elect; and, as the judge of quick and dead, he will be strictly just in executing the sentence which the law denounces against the wicked.

By *girdle* understand his close adherence to the administration of mercy to the elect, and of justice to the reprobate.

"And faithfulness the girdle of his reins" ver. 5. By *reins* or *kidneys*, we may understand the deep councils and secret purposes of the Saviour; that his immutable mind and will, and the secret thoughts of his heart toward his own people, are braced or girded about with all the faithfulness and veracity of Deity.

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb." By *wolf* understand persecutors that devour the sheep of Christ; such as Paul was, who appeared to fulfil his father's character—" Benjamin

shall raven as a wolf," Gen. xlix. 27. Paul was one of that tribe, and did destroy some of the Lord's sheep; and would have destroyed more, if sovereign grace had not arrested him on the road; but afterwards he lay down at the feet of the Lamb of God, and became as meek and gentle as any lamb of his fold.

"And the leopard shall lie down with the kid." By the leopard we may understand a pharisee who is cleansing himself, Jer. xiii. 23, and yet rebelling fiercely against the fountain that God has appointed to cleanse. However, some of this stamp have been humbled, and brought to submit to and find rest in the dear Redeemer, and to lie down with the Saviour's kids in the shepherds' tents, Cant. i. 8.

"And the calf and the lion," &c. By *calf* we may understand young growing Christians thriving in grace. "They shall grow up as calves of the stall," Mal. iv. 2. And by *lions*, fierce opposers by nature, but brave gospel champions when fortified and panoplied by grace; in short, they shall all herd together; "and a little child," or a babe in grace, "shall lead them" into the knowledge of the truth, under the Spirit's influence. Such were the apostles, who are called little children and babes. "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes," Matt. xi. 25.

"The cow and the bear shall feed," &c. ver. 7. By the *cow* we may understand, in a figurative sense, a gospel nurse, 1 Thess. ii. 7, or a minister of consolation; such as Paul was, who fed the Lord's infants like a wet nurse; as it is written, "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for ye were not able to bear it," 1 Cor. iii. 2.

Young Christians, being called "growing calves," are said to desire the sincere milk of God's word, that they may grow thereby, 1 Peter, ii. 2. Hence a tender minister, holding forth

the sweet nourishment of the gospel, may be compared to a good cow.

Ministers, because of their hard labour in the gospel yoke, are sometimes compared to *oxen*; and, in their character of nurses who feed with milk, why not to *cows* also? Read Isa. vii. 21.

The bear sometimes in scripture signifies "a wicked ruler over the poor people," Prov. xxviii. 15. However, some such have been called by grace. Kings have been made nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers, Isa. xlix. 23. And their nurseries have been brought to lie down becalmed and composed in gospel rest and quietude.

"And the lion shall eat straw like the bullock," ver. 7. I am inclined to think this *lion* represents a sinner whom the gospel has left in his unregenerate state, unhumiliated, because he is set forth as feeding, not lying down; and his feed is straw, not the green pastures of Christ's sheep, Psal. xxiii. 2. Feeding on straw is no better than the prodigal's husks, which I take to be the doctrines of men.

2dly, It may denote a false teacher, who feeds on the apostacy of hypocrites, who are the refuse of the Lord's floor, straw and stubble being the fuel of an harvest; so hypocrites are the straw and stubble which God's threshing instruments beat off, Isa xli. 15; and which the fan generally scatters, Mat. iii. 11; and which the day of wrath will consume as straw or stubble, Mal. iv. 1. However, the *lion* and his *straw*, the *serpent* and his *dust*, are all coupled together in the word of God. "The lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpent's meat," Isa. lxxv. 25.

Having briefly paraphrased down to my text, I will arrange my thoughts under the following heads:

First, Describe the gamester—a *child*.

2dly, His breast—he being a *sucking* child.

3dly, The subject of the game—an *asp*.

4thly, The play-ground—the *hole* of the asp.

5thly, and lastly, The *rules* of the game.

First, Whose child is this, that dares to put its hand on the hole of the asp? I answer, It is God's child: no child can play with safety at this hole but a child of God.

The next inquiry will be, How do we become children of God? I answer, first, by "eternal election;" and therefore we are called "a chosen generation," 1 Pet. ii. 9.

2dly, By "pre-adoption. And, because ye are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father," Gal. iv. 6.

3dly, By *regeneration*. God, who from everlasting willed our adoption in Christ, begets us by his word, under the prolific operations of his Spirit operating and working with ii. "God of his own will begat us with the word of truth," James, i. 18.

The word comes to the elect, "not as the word of man," 1 Thes. ii. 15; "not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance," 1 Thess. i. 5. When this is the case, the word, under the operation of the Spirit, becomes a spiritual embryo; or, as Peter terms it, an incorruptible seed; "being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God, that lives and abides for ever," 1 Peter, i. 23.

Under the quickening influences of the word and Spirit the sinner is brought to a spiritual sense of his state; he feels the severity of the law, the terrors of God, and the fears of death. These generally entangle the quickened sinner more or less. The ever-blessed and glorious Trinity are jointly concerned in this work of quickening the sinner. God gave us life in Christ Jesus; Christ is the resurrection and the life; and the Holy Ghost appears the Spirit of life, and quickens us to feel our need of "the bread of God that came down from heaven;" as you see in the parable of the prodigal son, who cried out, "I

perish with hunger," and yet was convinced there was enough of the bread of life in his father's house. Thus God gave us life in Christ Jesus, and the Spirit quickens us to feel the need of it, and in time leads us to feed on it.

The word of God does not quicken unless the Spirit attend it. Some "hold the truth in righteousness," and the gospel comes to some in word only; but when Jesus speaks to the sinner's heart, the Spirit of God applies the word, and life and power are felt. "The words that I speak unto you are spirit, and they are life."

It is true the Psalmist says, "This is my comfort in my affliction, thy word hath quickened me;" yet he owns the Spirit of God as the life of that word, as appears by his prayer, "Take not thy holy Spirit from me."

Under this powerful sensation the will is humbled, and sweetly inclined to choose the better part. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of my power." The soul longs for reconciliation with his offended God; and the word of God at times gives a little encouragement to faith and hope; but fresh discoveries of sin, attended with Satan's temptations, encourage doubts, fears, and unbelief. Thus the soul labours between feeble faith and unbelief, languid hope and slavish fear. This is the travail of the soul that is quickened, and drawing near his delivery; as it is written, "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but, as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man child is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice," John, xvi. 21, 22.

Under this spiritual travail the soul is kept in spiritual activity: every power is in motion after God, though it has such a burden of imaginary and real evils to wade through. "I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search," Psal. lxxvii. 6.

The world, with its trifles, is detested, and the one thing needful will be uppermost. The trouble of his mind crucifies him to popularity, and secret retirement best suits the frame of his heart: this keeps him from his old companions; the word of God becomes his hourly study and meditation; and a saving knowledge of God is the ultimate desire of his soul. "Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom," Prov. xviii. 1.

At times a light sweetly shines on the word, and then hope perceptibly rises in the mind; but when these rays are withdrawn, fear sinks the soul again. Thus light and darkness, hope and fear, faith and unbelief, struggle together as with a woman in hard labour; as it is written, "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee; they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them. Like 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," Isa. xxvi. 16, 17.

At times this labour abates, and an insensible frame takes place; benumbing ease stupifies the soul, and renders it careless; until some fresh contracted guilt rouses the mind; then trouble springs up again, all the bearing pangs come on afresh, and the struggling is stronger than ever. Indeed the awakened sinner is afraid of carnal ease; he is afraid of stopping short, and so failing "of the grace of God," Heb. xii. 15. He would sooner struggle through the worst of difficulties than be left to go back to his former course of wickedness; for he knows the reality of God's wrath against sin by what he feels, and dreads the thoughts of falling as a polluted sinner into the hands of the living God. This is the labour, more or less, of those that are born again, or born of the Spirit; and labour they do until perfect love, Zion's best midwife, appears, and draws the soul through the inflexible straits of binding fear and stubborn unbelief. "He that feareth is not made perfect in love, for perfect love casteth out fear," 1 John, iv. 18. When

love has done this the birth is clear. "For love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God," 1 John, iv. 7. Thus the word of God occasions the conception; the Spirit of God quickens the soul; faith and hope bring to the birth; and love revealed gives strength to bring forth. The new-born soul is like one just awaked from a dream, or fancies himself just sprung from the womb into a new world; as it is written, "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's; he shall return to the days of his youth," Job, xxxiii. 25.

"Old things are" now "passed away" with such a happy soul, and "all things are become new," 2 Cor. v. 17.

He finds his impenitent heart sweetly dissolved, and softened to receive the law of faith written by the Spirit; his hardness is removed, and an heart of flesh is given, agreeable to the promise, "A new heart also will I give you," Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

The *spirit of love* inflames him, the *spirit of truth* instructs him, the *spirit of faith* persuades him, and the *spirit of supplication* helps him in every approach to God. "And a new spirit will I put within you," Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

The mind of the new-born soul is likewise employed in sweet meditation; his views are enlarged as he meditates, his soul is enriched with the promises, and established by faith in the immutability of the covenant: this fills his soul with an holy triumph, and his tongue is employed in expressing his rapturous thoughts. "They spake with new tongues," Mark, xvi. 17.

This new heart is the Saviour's new bottle, and the new spirit is the new wine. "New wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved," Matt. ix. 17. And indeed sometimes the Christian finds it as Elihu expresses it, "Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles." Job, xxxii. 19. When this is the case of the happy soul he spends his rich income in holy conversation, or in singing the praises of his sweet Redeemer. "And he hath put a new song

in my mouth, even praise unto our God," Psalm, lx. 3. In short, the new-born soul sees with new eyes, walks in a new way, and associates with a new community.

Having treated of the birth of this child, I come now to speak of the child-like disposition of this little gamester.

First, He is of a teachable temper. "They sit down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words," Deut. xxxiii. 3.

Secondly, He is tractable; the most despicable instrument (in the eyes of man), if his conversation and counsel be evangelical, may lead him. Thus Cornelius drops on his knees to receive a divine message from the mouth of poor Peter the fisherman; which appears little better than idolatry. But, as an angel from heaven had ordered him to send for Peter, we have reason to believe he viewed him as God's oracle; for salvation to Cornelius and his house was to be delivered from Peter's mouth. Peter takes him up; declares himself no more than a man; and directs the bended knee to God, whom Peter personated, and whose ambassador he really was.

Thirdly, He is meek and quiet, which divine ornaments bedeck the soul, and are in the sight of God of great price. "The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way," Psal. xxv. 9.

Fourthly, He is simple in his devotion and in his deportment; he pays no respect to religious pomp and parade; external shows of godliness are lightly esteemed by him. He makes the good will of God in Christ Jesus his rule, the Son of God his plea, and the promise of God the warrant of his faith and foundation of his hope. "Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope," Psal. cxix. 49.

He is simple in his deportment. He is so demeaned, that he esteems all others better than himself. He longs to represent the grace of God in all its lustre, and is grieved when any heavy cross prohibits his being divinely cheerful; he is

perpetually guarded by filial fear, and is afraid of opening the mouth of fools, or exposing the cause of God to contempt; dreads the thoughts of being a stumbling-block to the coming soul, or of being a pattern to the presumptuous.

Fifthly, He has no trust in himself. He goes forth in the Lord's strength, engages his spiritual adversaries in the Lord's name, and simply leans on his revealed arm, as a child on the arm of its nurse. "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe," Psal. cxix. 117.

I come now to treat of the breast of this little gamester. We must be born again, and nourished with divine consolation, before we presume to invade the frontiers of an asp, much less to play a game on his hole.

It is the "sucking child" that shall play on the hole of the asp, and the "weaned child" that shall put his hand on the cockatrice den.

The child must be weaned from the pleasures of the world, from the love of sin, from confidence in the flesh, and from the society of wicked company, before he dare put his hand on this hole.

The new-born soul finds a strong affection going out after God, which flows from a sense of God's love to him. Hence the word of God becomes his soul's delight, prayer is his highest privilege, and communion with God the quintessence of his fidelity. The Bible is read as his heavenly Father's will. By faith he proves his sonship; and his sonship gives him a gospel right and title to the divine legacy; for he is an heir of promise, and consequently an heir to every blessing promised, which all centre in this, namely, that he is an heir of God, as his only portion, and a joint heir with Christ, to all intents and purposes, Rom. viii. 17.

Milk is the essence of herbage, and God's word is compared to green pastures; and the blessings contained in the word

are called the sincere milk of it, when they are preached and applied with gospel sincerity. "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby," 1 Peter, ii. 2.

Every promise that is applied by the Holy Ghost discharges its divine refreshings to nourish hope, strengthen faith, and to encourage an holy familiarity with a reconciled God in Christ Jesus.

Promises are Zion's breasts, with which all her infant progeny are nourished; and every established soul in Zion is willing to lend the bearing arm, and to hold forth the full-fraught breast to the simple soul that is born again of God. And the babe in grace will draw in the comforts and instructions as fast as the tender nurse can bring them forth; as it is written, "That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolation; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory," Isa. lxvi. 11. Let it be observed that

None but justified persons can feed a babe in grace with wholesome food. Prating lips and barren hearts afford no nourishment to the child of God. Zion must be justified by faith, and enjoy gospel peace herself, before she can draw out the gospel breast to her offspring. As it is written, "For thus saith the Lord, Behold I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then shall ye suck; ye shall be borne upon her sides, and dandled upon her knees," Isaiah, lxvi. 12.

These divine comforts are an unction to the understanding, a rapture to the affections, and a fortification to the whole soul; as the prophet speaks, "And when ye see this your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish as an herb," Isa. lxvi. 14.

I come now to describe the object of the sport.

The object to be sported with is an asp. "The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp."

The asp, or aspic, is a most dangerous reptile, very numerous in the great deserts of Arabia, and in Ethiopia, and well known in the Holy Land.

They are a kind of serpent, or adder, very small, curiously marked on the back, are very wise and subtle, apt to bite; and so venomous, that it is almost impossible to cure their bite. The venom which it conveys with its teeth spreads its contagion so fast, that unless a remedy be speedily procured, it is almost impossible to stop the infection. The venom of this creature is dreadful in its operations; it has a benumbing, stupifying, and intoxicating nature; it exhausts the animal spirits, withers the frame, and speedily draws the sufferer into a state of insensibility; insomuch that it lulls him into the final sleep of death, by a kind of lethargy. It causes a swelling as it runs, and has as bad an effect on the intellects as it has on the blood. There is no venomous creature so fatal in its bite, unless it be the scorpion.

So much for the *history*; I come now to the *mystery* of the asp.

This asp, in the mystery, is the devil, who is often called a serpent, Isa. xxvii, 1; and an adder, Psalm, xci. 13; because of his wisdom, Matt. x. 6; his subtlety, Gen. iii. 2; his crooked turns, Job. xxvi. 13; his dreadful bite, Eccl. x. 11; and the hellish contagion of sin that spreads its dreadful infection throughout both body and soul. It benumbs the conscience, hardens the heart, stupifies the mind, and lulls the sinner fast asleep in his sin; and, if grace prevent not, sends him out of the world in an awful lethargy, till in hell, when "he lifts up his eyes, being in torment"

When the old serpent the devil seduced Eve, he chose the most subtle creature in the brute creation to disguise himself in; and he pursues the same scheme now; for he pitches upon the subtlest and wisest men to support his interest in the world. Men in ecclesiastical or civil power, of great learning, great parts, quick turns, and nervous reasonings, are

generally the devil's tools to spread his nets, and ensnare the souls of men. Hence it is that God has poured so much contempt on the wisdom of this world, as to make their understanding foolishness. And the Saviour thanked his Father for hiding the gospel from the wise and prudent, and for revealing it unto babes.

In times of darkness Satan works men up to practise all manner of debauchery, oppression, and cruelty, and to deal destruction round them in a thousand forms; but, when the light of the gospel appears, then he stirs men up to persecute, and to spread his errors: by the former he labours to stop the progress of the gospel, and by the latter to mingle lies with it; and generally conveys his venom by those who are falsely called gospel ministers. Such are the Arminians, who discover the serpent's wisdom by producing much scripture, as the devil did when he deceived Eve, and yet perverting the plainest truths; they discover the crooked workings of the serpent by their serpentine wriggling, first out of truth into error, then out of error into truth. Sometimes, by their words, you would think they were in Christ, and soon after you will perceive them to savour of nothing but flesh and blood; hold up and confess one doctrine at one time, then turn about again, and tear it all down. This is the crooked serpent "They have made them crooked paths, whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace," Isa. lix. 8. At times they hold for the blood of Christ as shed for all the human race, and then by and by tell you that those washed in it may be damned. This is the spirit of error that intoxicates. "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright; at the last it biteth as a serpent, and it stingeth like an adder," Prov. xxiii. 31, 32. They discover the deafness of the serpent by being hardened against all reproof, rushing on in the face of every faithful witness, and spitting their venom at the brightest testimonies. "They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely," Psalm lviii. 4.

They discover the subtlety of the serpent, by concealing their inward principles until they have insinuated themselves into your affections; and they will bring them forth a little at a time, as you can swallow them down; and, lest you should suspect the devil to be in them, they contend vehemently for good works and holiness of life. Under this mask they convey the bane of Satan to your heart. This is the subtlety of the devil, beguiling souls by false teachers, as Paul says, "But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 3, 4. So much for the asp. I come now to treat of his *hole*, on which the child is to play.

In the verse out of which the text is taken you read of a *cockatrice den*, and that the weaned child shall put its hand on that. The cockatrice and the asp are both serpents: and there is but very little difference between them. The *cockatrice den* is a false preacher's *heart*, and the *hole* of the asp is a false preacher's *mouth*.

The Saviour called the Jewish tribe of false teachers serpents and vipers. "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Matt. xxiii. 33. He called them serpents because the old serpent, the devil, was in them. Satan keeps his court in the heart, which is his palace, Luke, xi. 21. "The devil worketh in the hearts of the disobedient," Eph. ii. 2. And the unrenewed heart is the serpent's den. There it is that lie works up all his destructive compounds, and sends them forth in the open blaze of gospel light; that, while some precious souls simply receive the new wine of the kingdom of God, and rejoice in it, these instruments of Satan secretly hold all their venom; as Moses speaks of some of the Israelites, who brought away the Egyptian gods with them, and secretly carried on an infernal familiarity with devils, practising magic art. "For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall,

their clusters are bitter: their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps."

It is called the vine of Sodom, as springing up from Satan, the root of wickedness; bitter clusters, because they embitter the heart, and fill it with enmity against God and his sovereign will; wine, because it intoxicates the soul, stupifies the conscience, blinds the understanding, confuses the judgment, and employs the tongue in nothing but inconsistencies, contradictions, and mere nonsense.

As wine sets people to staggering, boasting, prating, wrangling, and whoring, so errors set people a staggering at the truths of God, boasting of human merit, prating against those that are orthodox, wrangling with simple souls, and to committing spiritual fornication against the Lord. Errors lead the heart of the deceived to an infernal conjunction with the devil himself. Hence it is called wine of fornication.

Popery I call the mother of whoredoms, and the Arminian body her younger sister; and such I believe in my conscience they will appear in the great day; for I can see no more difference between Popish principles and the principles of Arminianism, than I can between my two eyes. The church of Rome is said to make people drunk with the wine of her fornication; that is, the spirit of error; as it is written, "I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication," Rev. xvii. 1, 2.

Thus the spirit of error is said to make men drunk, as Milton represents the intoxication of Adam and Eve. After they had taken their fill of forbidden fruit, they thought "they felt new divinity springing up within them," until their false drop conveyed the bane of guilt into their conscience, and then they saw their nakedness, and began, as he represents, "their vain contest, that found no end." So Zophar represents the

false joys and airy flights of the deceived hypocrite. "The triumph of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. Though his excellency (mark that !) mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall perish for ever. Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue, yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him," Job, xx. 5, 6, 12, 14. And, as he loves such nourishment, God says he shall have no breast to suck but that; and, as he fed on the viper's bane, he shall be destroyed by the viper's tongue. "He shall suck the poison of asps; the viper's tongue shall slay him," Job, xx. 16.

Hence it appears that the false preacher's mouth is the hole of the asp; and the tongue of such a deceiver conveys the very venom of the devil, with his doctrine, which lies concealed under his tongue; as it is written, "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips," Psalm cxi. 3.

And to this agrees the apostle Paul—" With their tongues they have used deceit: the poison of asps is under their lips," Rom. iii. 13. It is called wine of fornication, because it seduces men from the covenant of grace, which is a covenant of wedlock, and alienates the affections from God, instead of attracting them to him, and in the end leads souls into an affinity with the devil himself; as it is written, "Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel," Jer. iii. 20. And pray how was this done?—by perverting their way, and forgetting their God. Jer. iii. 21; until God was "broken with their whorish heart which departed from him, and with their eyes that went a whoring after their idols," Ezek. vi. 9. False prophets lead to false doctrines, false doctrines lead to false gods; and their false gods lead them to false devils, and devils led them to hell And so it is now; for, if you obscure, or cast a false light upon any essential truth, you obscure an attribute of God that shines in that truth; for all his perfections shine in his word; and hence it

is that he has "magnified his word above all his name," Psalm cxxxviii. 2. And, by obscuring God's truths, or setting them forth in a false light, they have obscured the tremendous and illustrious attributes of the MOST HIGH AND ETERNAL GOD.

I can prove, from the Arminian writings, that they have beclouded three parts out of four of the revealed perfections of the ALMIGHTY. None have gone farther in this work than they, except the Atheists, who, by denying the being of a God, have, in fact, denied themselves all sense, reason, and motion, and laboured to prove themselves in a state of annihilation; for God's existence and man's existence stand or fall together, according to scripture," For in him we live, move, and have our being," Acts, xvii. 28.

If the truths of God are obscured, the perfections of God are obscured, and God is represented in a false light; and consequently I am led to entertain false ideas of God, and to set up a false god in my own imagination, which will float and vary just as I do. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you," Psalm 1. 21, 22.

Having treated of the *child*, of his *breast*, of the *asp*, and of his *hole*, I come now to treat of the *sport* that may warrantably be made of this asp, and of the rules of the game, which I take to be five-fold:

First, We may whip him with the scourge of the tongue.

2dly, We may treat him with irony.

3dly, We may lay our hands on the hole, and defy his power.

4thly, We may stop up the hole, if we can.

5thly, We may set fire to the hole, and run away safely by the light of it.

First, We may whip this asp with the scourge of the tongue, as the prophet Isaiah did. He calls them "foolish pastors and shepherds, that cannot understand." He pays no regard to their hoary heads, their venerable appearance, nor to the honour they assume. He passes over both their age and their honour without any respect to them, because the word of the Lord was against them. "Therefore the Lord will cut off from Israel both head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. The ancient and honourable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed," Isa. ix. 14–16.

John, in his Revelation, honours one of Satan's prelates with the title of key-keeper, or porter of hell. "And unto him was given the key of the bottomless pit;" Rev. ix. 1. In the second verse he tells us that the business of this prelate was to let out the steam of the infernal regions, in order to darken the sun and air. By the *sun* understand the glorious rays of Christ in his gospel, and by the *air* the sweet breezes of the Holy Ghost. When this smoke had blinded the eyes of them that believed not (2 Cor. iv. 4), there sprung up a troop of locusts, empowered to use the sting and venom of the scorpion. Here John compares false teachers to locusts, a despicable insect; and their power to that of a scorpion, one of the most odious, dangerous, and venomous creatures in the whole world. "And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth; and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power," Rev. ix. 3.

Their intention was to destroy or root out the word of God, and to destroy by their errors every plant of righteousness that the Lord's right hand had planted, Isa. lxi. 3. But their power was limited, for they were commanded not to hurt the grass, nor the trees; "but only those men which have not the seal of God's Spirit upon them," Rev. ix. 4.

The dreadful flashes of conscience those received that imbibed their principles are represented by the scorpion's sting; but, when their consciences were hardened, these gradually wore off "They shall be tormented five months; and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when he striketh a man," ver. 5. The shapes of these locusts were compared unto horses prepared unto battle, because of their undaunted courage, being hardened against God "through the deceitfulness of sin," Heb. iii. 13; and rushing upon their own destruction, as the thoughtless horse does into the battle, Jer. viii. 6.

They are represented as having crowns of gold; perhaps to shew that they were authorized and protected by government; or it may denote that they were all princes who reigned in their various principalities, under the infernal sceptre of Satan; as it is written, "And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon (or one that deals destruction); but in the Greek tongue he hath his name Apollyon," one that tries to root out and destroy all that is good, ver. 11.

John farther represents them as having only the faces of men; that is, all that they are allowed to have of manhood about them; all the rest is effeminate, brutal, and devilish; as it is written, "And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were the teeth of lions" (ver. 8), to shew their business was to devour souls under the lion of the bottomless pit, who is said to be going about "seeking whom he may devour," 1 Peter, v. 8. Their main armour, it seems, is an hardened conscience, which John calls a breastplate. "And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron" (ver. 9), which Paul calls a "conscience seared with a hot iron," 1 Tim. iv. 2. In short, the asp, by the false prophet, deals in three things: he scatters the sparks of spiritual wickedness, spreads his darkness to blind men's understandings, and so leads them on in sin to his own destructive residence; as it is written," And

out of their mouths issued fire, smoke, and brimstone," Rev. ix. 17.

I am now to treat of the second branch of this head, namely, that we may treat a false prophet with irony.

This was the manner in which grave Elijah treated the four hundred false prophets of Baal. He wanted them to prove the existence of their god, and the power of their faith, by an answer to their prayers; as it is written, "And it came to pass about noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud." The prophets wanted more fervour in their devotion, and a little more lip labour. "Cry aloud," saith he, "for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey; or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked," 1 Kings, xviii. 27.

In like manner did the Saviour treat the Jewish blind guides in his days, who were always cavilling at him, and opposing his ministry. He sent them to seek friendship and shelter in Mammon, the god of wealth; figuratively the devil, the god of this world. For they despised and rejected the Saviour, who came to reconcile God and man, and so to bring about a glorious friendship by his death. And, as they refused reconciliation by him, he sends them to seek it elsewhere. "And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations," Luke, xvi. 9.

3dly, We may lay our hands on the hole of this asp, and defy his power.

Putting our hand on the cockatrice den, signifies, that we should bear a faithful witness against the deceitful heart of a false prophet; for all false doctrines spring out of the heart. "They prophesy unto you a false vision," Jer. xvi. 14. "They speak a vision of their own heart," Jer. xxiii. 10.

The heart of a Christian is the palace of the Holy Ghost; but the heart of a false prophet is the den of the cockatrice. The real Christian has the law of truth and the law of kindness on his tongue; but the false prophet hath file poison of asps under his lips; therefore we must put our hands on the den, that is, we must bear witness against them; as it is written, "If there be found among you, within any of your gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, man or woman that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the Lord thy God, in transgressing his covenant, and hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, and it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and inquired diligently, and behold it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel, then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which hath committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or woman. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him, and afterwards the hands of all the people," Deut. xvii. 1–7.

Thus we are to lay our hands, and to bear witness, against any setter-up of new gods, and against any who try to eclipse the glory of the "Ancient of days;" as it is written, "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thy own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers, thou shalt not consent unto him; nor hearken unto him; neither shalt thine eye pity him; neither shalt thou spare him; neither shalt thou conceal him: thy hand shall be first upon him, because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage," Deut. xiii. 6, 8, 10. In short, we are to lay our hands, and to bear our testimony, against this asp, wherever he appears, whether it be in a *prelate* or in a *curate*; and that is as much as we are able to do.

It is not in our power to destroy this asp, or his works; that is the work of our great Lord and Master. Nor are we to venture

at the hole of the asp in our own strength, or in our own name. Satan, that waged war in heaven, defies all human power. If we remember that awful battle, we shall not dare to engage without the grace of God; and, though we know that he will torment and deceive mankind when we have done our best, yet we are to lay our hands on him, and bear a faithful witness against him, and that is all; as it is written, "Lay thine hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more," Job, xli. 8.

I come now to the fourth branch of this head of discourse, which is, that we may stop up the hole of the asp if we can.

The hole of the asp I have proved to be a false teacher's mouth; and it is from this hole that Satan has sent all the errors that are now in the world; all the poor sinners that have gone down to the grave with a tie in their hands, Isa. xlv. 20, have been destroyed from this hole of the asp; therefore we may warrantably stop the hole up if we can. When we hear men say that are perfect and clean from all indwelling sin, and that there is such a state of perfection to be attained in this life, we may tell them that they speak lies, Isa. lix. 3; "for, if we say we have not sinned, we make Cod a liar," 1 John, i. 10; "and, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is riot in us," 1 John, i. 8. When we hear men open their mouths at this rate we must bring scripture proof, and stop up the hole. "But the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped," Psalm lxiii. 11.

When we hear preachers speaking against the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. and contending for their own legal obedience as a sufficient righteousness to justify them before Cod, we must not allow it, but exclaim against such impious boasting of their wretched merit; because the Saviour will not allow even his apostles, upon whom his grace was so abundant, to boast; no, not even of the fruits of their faith. "When ye have done all these things, say ye, we are unprofitable servants," Luke. xvii. 10. From hence we may conclude that all men, who boast of their merit, are under the

law; and we must bring forth the law in its spiritual meaning, and shew its spiritual demands; as it is written, "Now we know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may' be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God," Rom. iii. 19.

Whenever, or wherever, this asp opens a hole, we must labour to stop it up; we must not be idle when the asp is busy; we shall often find "men of corrupt minds, creeping into houses, leading captive silly women;" telling them that religion lies in a plain cap, or in a long narrow bonnet, and delivering lectures against a snuff-box, and nursing their pride by setting them up as class. leaders; instead of preaching tip the sovereign grace and Spirit of God.' Christ calls such preachers fly-catchers; "they strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." Many silly women are led away by these errors; "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," 2 Tim. iii. 7.

The main drift of false teachers is to overthrow the faith of young beginners, setting them to despise orthodox preachers, and the glorious doctrine of election and predestination; and, when they are hardened in errors, they despise and ridicule these revealed truths of God. Therefore we are commanded" to hold fast the faithful word as we have been taught, that we may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers: for there are many unruly and vain talkers, and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision (that is, workmongers), whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not," Titus, i. 9–11.

It is true, the faithful servants of God may sometimes see their flocks scattered and corrupted by false teachers, and they may seem to thrive in their deceivings, inasmuch as the true prophets may be broken-hearted under and amazed at it, as you read in Jeremiah, chap. xxviii. Notwithstanding this, their devised fables shall not stand: nor shall they destroy the elect

of God in the end, though they may deceive the reprobate and themselves; and this is often made manifest when their errors entangle them in the revealed wrath of God, until they break out into open rebellion against the light, and then they are left to stagger on in darkness, and grope like the blind for the wall, even while the Sun of Righteousness shines in his full strength. We may be sure of this, that God will save the poor in spirit from being destroyed by their mouth; as it is written, "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong. They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night. But he sayeth the poor from the sword, from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty, so that the poor hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth," Job, v. 12–16.

I come now, as was proposed, to speak to the last branch of this general head of discourse, namely, that we may set fire to the hole, and run safely away by the light of it.

The Spirit of God operates as a spirit of judgment, and as the spirit of burning, in the souls of the elect. He kindles the flame of love in the affections, and a holy zeal according to knowledge in the mind, and shines like a sun-beam in the understanding, by his burning and shining rays. It is the Holy Ghost that makes a minister a flame of fire. Heb. i, 7. Nor is this the blessed privilege of ministers only, but of the whole household of faith; for the Spirit of God is promised to all the chosen seed, Isa. lix. 22; a measure to each to profit withal. We may hold forth God's flaming truth at the hole of the asp; we are not to spare the asp, let him appear where he may; if he suggest evil to Peter, we may say, "Get thee behind me, Satan." I know that an erroneous preacher and a hearer of errors are the hardest of any to work upon, especially when the cockatrice has kept possession of the impenitent heart so long, and bent their tongue like a bow to shoot lies, instead of

being valiant for the truth, Jer. ix. 3. Yet some such as these have been brought to understand and to acknowledge the truth as it is in Jesus. "They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine," Isa. xxix. 24.

When God's word comes with power to the sinner's heart, it soon demolishes that cockatrice den; and, if the spirit of burning operates, the asp is soon burnt out of his hole. God's word is sufficient to break the heart, and to burn out the asp. "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Jer. xxiii. 29. I have been an eye and an ear witness to several souls who formerly allowed the asp to carry on his business in their mouths, who have been brought, after all, to confess the real truth, and exult in it, under the sweet influences of sovereign grace. Oh, it is sweet to see the asp burnt out of his hole by the glorious flame of electing and everlasting love. God has often condescended to own and bless the labours of his faithful servants even to do this. I have known several very stiff advocates for free-will and other popish trumpery, who have cavilled against election and imputed righteousness vehemently, that have been brought off from free-will by a storm from Sinai, and to embrace sovereign grace, and be thankful for it. And, when I have seen them shine in the truth, and burn in the love of it, I have ran joyfully away by the light of it.

The elect of God may, at their first setting off, and while under legal convictions, be tossed about with various errors; and the Arminian scheme is as well adapted (perfection excepted) to please those that are working for life as any scheme that ever the devil invented. But of this we may be assured, that the elect of God will never be finally deceived, nor shall the smoke of Satan ever extinguish the fire of truth. The word of God shall destroy all the doctrines of men, the maintainers of them, and the adherents to them, if grace prevent not; as it is

written, "For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the Lord. They have belied the Lord, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us. And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them; thus shall it be done unto them. Wherefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them," Jer. v. 11–14. We are commanded to contend earnestly for the faith that was once delivered to the saints; and, if we do this, we must contend for the glory of the ever-blessed Trinity; for the glory of all the revealed perfections of the godhead, that their glory may not be eclipsed; we must contend for every essential truth of the bible, and for the Spirit's work on the souls of God's elect. This is the duty of every Christian: and, if any of our opposers be of the chosen seed of Israel, God will in his own time bring them out; but if they are of the house of Esau, the gospel will be a savour of death unto death to them, and in the end consume them; as it is written, "And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the Lord hath spoken it," Obad. 18.

There are many deluded souls, that fight desperately against the truth, who have got the fire of God's wrath within them; and conscience fights as much against them as they fight against the truths of God. It is the duty of every Christian to contend for the truth; and we shall be sure to set fire to the hole one way or other; for, if the fire of eternal love never purifies them, the flames of wrath will surely torment them. The Saviour is both a *refiner's* fire, and a *consuming fire*—a propitious Saviour, and a dreadful Judge.

"The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp." When we find that there are no signs of reclaiming these enemies of truth, they being hardened against all reproof, we may turn the

tables against them. "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy," Prov. xxix. 1. By turning the tables against them I mean, that, while they are ragtag against the decrees of God, we may prove to their faces that they are at the same time fulfilling them; yea, while such are kicking against election and predestination, they are all the while fulfilling the pre-appointments of God; as it is written, "To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious. Wherefore is it also contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builder disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation," 1 Pet. ii. 4–9.

But to whom is Christ a *stumbling-stone*? I answer, to *merit-mongers*. They want to climb to heaven without being brought in debtors to grace. Jesus Christ resisteth them, agreeable to his word: "The Lord resisteth the proud," 1 Pet. v. 5.

Jesus Christ will allow a preacher to be a worker together with himself, in dispensing the word of his grace, because the feet of the preacher carry the message, and the preacher's tongue delivers it. "We then are workers together with him," 2 Cor. vi. 1. But the Arminian wants to be a co-partner with him in the work of justification. God says, No. Jesus shall magnify the law, and make it honourable, Isa. xlii. 21. "And by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many," Isa. liii. 11. The Arminian wants to be a co-worker with the Holy Ghost in the work of sanctification. The Lord of Hosts says, No. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," Zech. iv. 6. The Arminian wants some ground to boast on, and to have the

honour of coping the building with sinless perfection. The Lord God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ says, No. "He shall bring forth the head-stone with shoutings;" and sinners shall cry, "Grace, grace (not works), unto it," Zech. iv. 7. In short, they will not "enter by the door," and he will not let them "climb up any other way." They want to help him out in his work, that they may share in his glory; and he deems them "thieves and robbers;" and says, "He will not give his glory to another." This is the dreadful dispute that is going on between the Lord and them.

Thus Christ is an impediment in their way; they cannot submit to him, and he will not bow to them. His sovereignty is an impediment in the way of free-will; *particular* redemption lies in the way of natural affections; his imputed righteousness is an impediment in the way of human merit; and free grace is an impediment in the way of pride, because it cuts off boasting. Thus the Saviour becomes a stumbling-stone instead of a foundation, 1 Cor. iii. 11; and a rock of offence instead of a stone of help, 1 Sam. vii. 12. He is called a rock of offence because of his stability, it being impossible for those offended at him ever to move him. Thus Christ is a rock in the way of self-righteous ones; cavilling at him, as an impediment in their way, is called stumbling; and being offended at him is like seeking revenge on a rock that has thrown us down, by kicking at it; at which labour we are sure to wound ourselves, but never to move or hurt the rock. But you will say, Is it not strange that people should oppose the glorious truths of God, that shine like a sun throughout the sacred scriptures? Not at all: they fight against sovereign love, because they know it never was shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost; therefore they preach up an universal love; that, as they have no assurance of an interest in the former, they may include themselves in the latter, being a doctrine of their own. So, if imputed righteousness had ever been applied to them, they would have boasted of it, as all poor saved sinners have done who were found in it; but, as they are strangers to the

enjoyment of this robe, they hold fast their own web: so, if the atonement of Christ had ever been applied to their consciences, they would contend for the redemption of Christ's sheep only, as all the faithful ministers of Christ have done; but, as conscience tells them this never was their happy case, they preach up universal redemption, or else they would exclude themselves. Hence it is that they strengthen one another's hands with their lies, and so keep matters together as well as they can: for, if they give up their untempered mortar, and conscience stands to it that they never have mixed real faith with the truth, Heb. iv. 2, they would throw down their own wall. However, God has promised to throw it down for them. "Thus will I accomplish my wrath upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar: and will say unto you, The wall is no more, neither they that daubed it," Ezek. xiii. 15.

Let them turn which way they will, they fulfil those very decrees they fight against. Are some offended at the sovereignty of Christ, and at his elect? and do they teach others to be offended at them? They fulfil the decree—"It must needs be that offences come; but wo be to that man by whom the offence cometh," Matt. xviii. 7. Do they stumble and fall? They fulfil the decree—"And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken," Isaiah, viii. 14, 15. Do they make sport of the truth, and wanton with the grace of God to their own condemnation? They fulfil the decree—"For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation," Jude, ver. 4. Do they rage and storm as soon as they hear a preacher advance the truth? They fulfil the decree—"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," Isa. xxviii. 19. Do they plunge farther and farther into errors, notwithstanding all that is said to reclaim them? They fulfil the decree—"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being

deceived," 2 Tim. iii. 13. And, when they cry out, "I will never believe such doctrines," they fulfil the decree—" Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you," Acts, xiii. 41.

In short, God's word shall be fulfilled even by the wicked as well as by the just. Israel must abide in Egypt till the iniquity of the Amorites was full, Gen. xv. 16. Christ sent apostles and wise men to be persecuted by the wicked, that they might fill up the measure of their fathers, Matt. xxiii. 32–35. And, if men receive not the truth in the love of it, God has promised to send strong delusions, that they shall believe a lie, 2 Thess. ii. 11. If men turn to wicked ways, "the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity," Psalm cxxv. 5. And, if a man fall by his lies a victim to wrath, "it is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God," Job, xx. 19. And, if hell is the eternal habitation of the deceiver, it was anciently built for him; for "Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared," as well as for the subject, Isa. xxx. 33.

Men may contradict the decrees of God, and fight against them: but they shall never overthrow them nor run from them.

The destiny of the sinner as well as the saint is fixed; Tophet is ordained of old, as well as mount Zion. God made all things for his own glory, and God's end will be answered whether men are saved or lost. "He made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil," Prov. xvi. 4. There is therefore a decreed vengeance for the wicked, as well as a decreed glory for the righteous; and I believe God's fixed gulfs and firm decrees will never be moved, neither by men nor devils. "He worketh all things by the counsel of his own will;" and therefore his *wills* and *shalls* must abide for ever.

I add no more.