

derive profitable instruction from that portion of the sacred history which is now before us, and may copy, with advantage, the example of Nehemiah.

I. Let us consider THE UNDERTAKING IN WHICH WE ARE ENGAGED.

The Christian church, at the time of its establishment, was beautiful and glorious. It was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." The truths of the gospel were understood and enjoyed. Spiritual happiness shined in its lustre on the community. Believers cultivated "meekness and gentleness of Christ," and "fruits of righteousness" were produced, "to the praise and glory of God." Jews and Gentiles ceased to strive, uniting in fellowship, and seeking each other's good. Full obedience to the laws of the Saviour was rendered. A simple form of government prevailed, admirably adapted to promote union and preserve purity. A spirit of enterprise pervaded the whole body. In those days, men "lived as of the Lord." The church was "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

But disastrous changes soon took place, affecting the entire frame-work of Christian society, and issuing in a worse than Babylonish captivity. Corrupting influences were in operation even in apostolic times. They were partially held in check by persecution, but exerted a tenfold power when persecution ceased. Truth was supplanted by trifles, or neutralised by human tradition, and "weapons of faith" yielded to superstitious observances. Diversities of opinion were counted as heresies. Instead of argument and prayer, the apostolic "weapons of warfare," professed Christians resorted to new methods of attack and defence altogether opposed to the spirit of the gospel. Heresies were at first cursed—then cudgelled—and afterwards additional power was obtained, imprisoned, banished, or put to death. True piety fled from such scenes. Scripture churches were rarely to be found; they were scattered abroad and driven into corners. For many centuries the city of God lay in ruins. Angels gazed and wondered, Devils triumphed. The people of the Most High, and sad, wept, and prayed, and waited, and as they mournfully watched for returning day, exclaimed, alas! in unbelief, "Arise, O Lord! how long?"

At length the morning came. After a long season