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WITH

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS.

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REVD JOHN FLAVEL.

THE

MOURNER'S COMPANION.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY

ROBERT GORDON, D. D.
EDINBURGH.

FOURTH EDITION.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

It is the express declaration of Scripture, that "God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men;" and if the declaration be understood as meaning, that he cannot take pleasure in their suffering, and cannot therefore inflict it merely for the purpose of making them unhappy, it is one in which no professing Christian can hesitate to acquiesce. The truth of the proposition, indeed, is necessarily implied in the first and simplest idea that we are taught to entertain of the divine nature; for, if we have conceived of the character of God at all, as we have been accustomed to hear that character spoken of in a professedly Christian community, we must have conceived of him as a being of infinite beneficence, wisdom, and power; and infinitely removed, therefore, beyond the influence of those motives by which one human being is tempted to make encroachments on the comfort and happiness of another. As omnipotent, he has nothing to fear from the efforts of his creatures, be they ever so daring or malignant; because no efforts of theirs can, in the slightest degree, affect his blessedness, or detract from the es-

sential glory of his nature. As possessed of knowledge, which embraces every possible event, and every conceivable combination of circumstances; and of wisdom, that can never be for one instant perplexed in the choice of means whereby to accomplish its object, he can in no case be surprised by an occurrence which he did not foresee, or an emergency against which he had not provided; and the combination, therefore, of these attributes, necessarily excludes from his moral administration any thing like those sudden acts of revenge, or blind impulses of passion, which characterize human nature, and bear witness at once to its depravity and its weakness. And if his knowledge and his omnipotence do thus furnish the most unequivocal assurance, that there cannot be any thing like a hasty or precipitate exercise of his supremacy, in the way of inflicting suffering, and secure the undisturbed accomplishment of all his counsels—his beneficence is a pledge that these counsels must be designed and calculated to promote the well-being of his intelligent creation; and that the communication of happiness, and not the infliction of suffering, is the tendency of his righteous administration. The immediate result of his dispensations, it is true, may, in certain circumstances, be evil, as all suffering, considered in itself, unquestionably is; but it is because his purposes have been opposed, and the gifts of his bounty perverted: for, if the attributes of which we have been speaking do really belong to the divine nature, it is abhorrent to the very idea of God, nay, it involves a palpable contradiction, to suppose that he can ever inflict pain, merely for the sake of doing so. The consciousness of guilt,

indeed, may perhaps suggest hard thoughts of God; and, conceiving of his displeasure as if, on this point, he were altogether such a one as ourselves, we may be ready to suspect, that something like revenge may enter into his treatment of those who have offended him; and that, notwithstanding the beneficent tendency of his administration in general, he may be disposed to act towards sinners as if he took pleasure in the punishment with which he visits their transgressions. The gospel, however, has furnished a complete refutation of every such suggestion, inasmuch as we are there assured, that the present life is to mankind, even till the last moment of it, a season of respite, and not a time of retribution; that a free forgiveness, through the blood of Christ, is tendered to all, without exception; and that God is waiting to be gracious even to the chief of sinners;—and if we believe this, then we must also believe that beneficence and mercy characterize all his procedure towards them; that if he has no pleasure in their death, he can have none in their present sufferings; and that he cannot, therefore, afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

But, though the truth of these remarks will be readily assented to by all who professedly believe the gospel, yet there is reason to suspect that it is often practically denied, and that even with many who do most cordially acquiesce in the general proposition, there is a tendency virtually to question it in particular cases, when they are themselves individually concerned. We do not, indeed, suppose that Christians can avowedly arraign the wisdom or the beneficence of God, on the ground of any affliction which they

may witness in others, or experience in themselves; or that they can ever ask why he has permitted his creatures to be subject to suffering at all, as if by that suffering injustice had been done them. Such a question is just a particular form of the idle and presumptuous inquiry, why sin has been permitted; it indicates, on the part of those who urge it, a lamentable blindness to all that is most affecting in the character of God—even those attributes of his nature, which the existence of moral evil has been the means of unfolding to the view of his intelligent creatures, and which, as far as we can conceive of them, never could have been exhibited in any other way; and it cannot, therefore, be deliberately proposed by any man who professedly believes the gospel. But there is reason to fear, that, even with many such, the subject of affliction is frequently a perplexing one; that, in seasons of suffering, thoughts do sometimes arise that are nearly allied to the question of which we have been speaking; and that, if they do not complain that they are afflicted at all, they are ready to ask why their afflictions are so complicated, or so severe; and it is in opposition to these unworthy thoughts of the divine government, that we would suggest some considerations, calculated to show the beneficent design, and the salutary tendency, of such afflictions.

In reply then to the question, why suffering should enter so largely into God's dealings with the children of men, we may observe, generally, that it is a method of procedure necessarily required by their condition and circumstances, inasmuch as in no other way could their affections be so effectually weaned

from those objects which tend to estrange the heart from God, and to disqualify them for the enjoyment of spiritual and divine things. That it is perfectly competent, indeed, for the Almighty to effect the deliverance of his people from the power and influence of sin, without the instrumentality of any painful discipline whatever, cannot admit of a moment's doubt, considered simply as a question of mere power; for nothing is more obvious, than that he might, by a single act of omnipotence, annihilate every evil propensity in human nature, and implant in their room every holy affection and heavenly desire. But it is also very obvious, that such a method of procedure would not be dealing with mankind agreeably to the constitution of their nature—that it would be nothing less than a change of that nature into another of an entirely different order,—and that having, therefore, undergone such a change, they would, in reality, cease to be human beings. Such an exercise of power might, no doubt, put an end to the disorders which sin has introduced into God's moral administration; but there would be no room, in such a case, for the display of divine wisdom, in rectifying these disorders—and it would amount, in fact, to a declaration that an evil had occurred, to which no other remedy could be applied than that of putting an end to the existing state of things, and commencing a new system of an entirely different kind. The question, therefore, is not what it is competent for the power of God to effect, but what is befitting his wisdom and rectitude to choose—not whether he could have substituted a different order of beings in the room of his apostate creatures, but whether his

perfections would not be more gloriously magnified by the recovery of the same beings from a state of moral debasement,—and nothing, we apprehend, can be more obvious, than that both in the method of their justification, and in the way by which they are progressively sanctified, there is a manifestation of the divine attributes, of which we could never otherwise have conceived. It is with the last of these, we mean the sanctification of sinners, that affliction is more immediately connected; and it is in the application of affliction, as one of the means whereby this moral transformation is effected, that the wisdom and power of God are more strikingly exhibited, than they could have been, merely by putting forth upon them an act of creating energy, whereby they might, at once, have been raised from a state of moral degradation, to a state of entire conformity to the divine image. In effecting this transformation, he not only deals with them in a manner suited to the constitution of their nature, but by employing the salutary discipline of affliction and disappointment, themselves the natural fruits of sin, he renders moral evil the instrument of its own destruction, the means of working its own overthrow; and when, in this way, believers are ultimately brought into a state of meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, it is obvious that they must have, in their own experience, and the recollection of the process through which they passed, in arriving at that state, sources of enjoyment which we cannot conceive them to have had if the change had been effected in any other way. There is, therefore, in the very nature of things, a moral necessity for the employment of suffering in the spi-

ritual regeneration of sinners—a necessity arising out of the very perfections of the divine nature, as well as the moral constitution of man; and whether we consider the subject with a reference to God, or whether we regard it as it relates to human nature, we are constrained to admit, that the Almighty cannot afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

It appears, then, that if mankind are to be dealt with as rational and accountable creatures, the method by which they are to be conformed to the divine image, is not to be a mere act of power, effecting a change upon them which is neither resisted nor acquiesced in on their part; but one which addresses itself to the moral principles of their nature, commanding the approbation of their understanding, and carrying with it the heart and affections. We find accordingly, that it is on their belief of the divine testimony concerning Christ, that their acceptance with God is made to turn; while it is by the belief of the same testimony, and the view of the divine character there unfolded to them, that the Holy Spirit subdues the enmity of their carnal minds; and it requires very little knowledge of human nature to perceive, that affliction is one of the most powerful means of disposing the mind to receive salutary impressions of the truth. Nor can we doubt that affliction is designed as well as calculated to produce this effect—that all the disappointments to which mankind are exposed, are so many intimations, that vanity and vexation of spirit must be the end of every worldly pursuit, when the object of that pursuit is put in the place of God—and that every such disappointment, therefore, is intended to draw

them away from those pursuits, and persuade them to set out in quest of another and a more permanent inheritance. Mercy, therefore, is the essential character of every such dispensation, on the part of God; and instead of finding any difficulty or perplexing doubt regarding them, as if they were irreconcilable with the divine beneficence—a careful inquirer could hardly fail to discover that they are themselves the most unequivocal expressions of that beneficence; and that, if God has so determined the constitution of things, that suffering is inseparably connected with sin, it is in great compassion that he has done so. The mercy and the wisdom of this ordination, are every day visible in the restraints which are thereby laid on the depravity of human nature; and its happy fruits are reaped by multitudes, who have never, perhaps, had the gratitude to acknowledge it, though they have thereby been prevented from running into many excesses, by which they would otherwise have been polluted and debased. Nor do these observations hold in the case of those sufferings only, that arise immediately out of the commission of sin, and by which the sinner is, at the instant, reminded that he is travelling into forbidden ground. The declaration that God afflicteth not willingly, is an unequivocal assurance, that though, to our limited apprehension of things, there may be many afflictions which do not appear to be the immediate result of any particular delinquency, yet, in the sight of Him whose all-seeing eye comprehends every circumstance in the condition of his creatures, there is an infinitely wise reason, not only why each individual should suffer, but why his suffering should be of a particu-

lar kind, rather than any other; and though, from the obtuseness of mankind to understand, and their unwillingness to acquiesce in the dispensations of Providence, the beneficent tendency of the divine administration may be frequently overlooked, when it might be perceived, yet we shall find that there are not wanting, in the experience of Christians, facts in abundance, to demonstrate the truth of these remarks.

In illustration, then, of the wisdom and mercy of God, as manifested in the employment of affliction, we may refer, in the first instance, to the circumstances in which the conversion of sinners is frequently found to take place. In taking a survey of their past lives, and of the means whereby they were awakened to anxiety about their spiritual interests, there are many who can trace their saving acquaintance with the truth to a season of personal or family affliction, as the period at which that acquaintance commenced, and as constituting an era in their history, from which they date the operation of that mighty power, whereby they have been quickened and raised to newness of life. They will not, indeed, allege, that the mere pressure of affliction, however accumulated and heavy, could ever have wrought in them a moral transformation of nature; or that the mere depression of spirits, and loss of relish for worldly enjoyments, which suffering seldom fails to bring along with it, could ever have generated in their hearts one longing desire after spiritual things: for it is a melancholy fact, that multitudes have felt that pressure in all its bitterness, and have, for a time, been weary of the world, even to

loathing, who have never thereby advanced a single step towards the choice of a better portion. It is impossible, indeed, in the nature of things, that mere suffering can, of itself, effect any spiritual renovation of the soul; and it will be found, accordingly, that the very seriousness and attention to religious duties, which, at such seasons, are manifested even by those who are still ignorant of the truth, are, in reality, little else than expressions of dissatisfaction with the divine appointments—a sort of constrained act of homage, extorted by some indistinct hope that God may thereby be prevailed upon to withdraw the hand that lies heavy upon them. But, though the salutary tendency of affliction may, in many cases, be thus counteracted and resisted, by the obstinacy of the sinner, and though believers must be pursuaded, that in no case could that affliction, of itself, produce conversion from darkness to light, yet many of them can bear witness, in their own experience, to its fitness, as an instrument in the hand of the Spirit, for effecting that conversion. They can recollect with what eagerness they listened, in the time of distress, to truths which they formerly heard with listlessness and indifference—how the glad tidings of the gospel came to them with a power which they had never before experienced, and with all the freshness of something absolutely new—and though they must be well aware that it was the truth, and not the affliction, that wrought the change which they are conscious of having undergone, yet, in as far as they can conceive of the matter, they feel so close and intimate a connection between the affliction and the change which accompanied it, that without the one,

they do not perceive how the other would have taken place. And what reply would such persons make, were they asked, whether they see any thing dark or perplexing in the afflictive dispensations of God's providence? Would they hesitate to acknowledge, that he afflicts in mercy, or would they be satisfied with a cold assent to the general proposition, that disappointment and sorrow are, in his hand, a salutary discipline? No, assuredly—it would be a feeble expression of what they feel, to say, that they were resigned to these dispensations, as if it were still a doubtful point, whether severity or kindness constituted their essential character. The affliction that has been the means of bringing them to Christ will be a subject of eternal gratitude, and growing admiration—it will continue to unfold to them new proofs of the wisdom and the mercy of God, with every new enlargement of their capacity for spiritual enjoyment—it will throw light on much that might otherwise have perplexed or distressed them in the subsequent dispensations of God's providence; and however mysterious these dispensations may at times appear, they will still have, in their own experience, a proof which they can neither question nor forget, that "God afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men."

It is not necessary, we conceive, to pursue these remarks to a greater length, in the way either of proof or of illustration; inasmuch as they will be readily assented to by all who can trace their first serious impressions of divine truth to a season of personal or family affliction. It is not, however, to such persons alone, that the wisdom of God is mani-

fested, in employing afflictive dispensations as the means of promoting the spiritual welfare of his people; for we need not hesitate to lay it down as a proposition universally applicable to the case of believers, that by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The truth of this remark is too obvious to require any proof, in those cases where Christians have been in a state of backsliding —where there has been a very palpable decline in the divine life, or a very wide departure from the path of Christian obedience—and where some worldly object had long, and but too successfully, disputed with God the sovereignty of their affections. Chastisement at such times is not only seasonable, but indispensably necessary, in the same sense as we have already endeavoured to demonstrate the necessity of affliction in general; and when that chastisement, however painful it may have been, is so blessed as to awaken believers to a sense of their delinquency, and to bring them back to God, it cannot fail, not only to command their resigned acquiescence, but to leave on their minds a deeper impression, than they ever before felt, of the care and unceasing watchfulness of their heavenly Father. But even in those cases where there has been no such visible backsliding or decline, affliction may not be less seasonable in itself, or less salutary in its consequences. Such a decline is not always accompanied with very obvious or palpable indications of a decay of Christian principle in the heart, or departure from Christian obedience in the life. No very powerful temptation may have occurred to draw believers into any flagrant act of inconsistency, or to interrupt, to any

great degree, their observance of religious duties—their seasons of spiritual exercises may be as regular, and the outward tenor of their life as uniform, as ever they were—in the eye of their fellow-Christians, every thing may wear a promising aspect—and there may be nothing to awaken in their own minds, any suspicion or doubt as to their progressive advancement in the Christian life. But the world, notwithstanding, may have been silently, though not less surely, making inroads on their spirituality of mind; a series of successful enterprises in the business of life, and the undisturbed enjoyment of accumulating comforts, may have imperceptibly stolen away their hearts from God; their affections may have been so entangled with sensible objects, as to have lost not a little of their attachment to spiritual things; and though they might still continue to travel their former round of religious observances, their views of divine truth might be all the while degenerating into something like cold speculative opinions, and their spiritual exercises partaking more of the show and form, than of the power and practice, of vital godliness. An approach, at least, to a state like this, is, we fear, no uncommon thing, even among Christians; and how frequently does it happen that the delusion is dissipated only by some disappointment or affliction, in which they are experimentally taught that they had again begun to spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. And is it not obvious, from the very constitution of our nature, that in no conceivable way could this earthly tendency of the affections be so effectually arrested and counteracted,

as by the salutary discipline of affliction; removing the object that had occupied the place which God alone ought to have held; entailing disappointment on the pursuits and enjoyments by which the heart was in the way of being brought into bondage; and giving us to feel, that vanity and vexation of spirit are all that the world has, wherewith to repay the toil and the labour of those who would make it their portion? It is possible, indeed, that the Christian, when overtaken by an unexpected calamity, may, at the moment, give way to the rebellious suggestion, that the chastisement is more severe than can be accounted for on the ground of any peculiar delinquency on his part, and that something less painful might have been sufficient to correct the worldly influence that had been gradually stealing upon him. Were it competent for him, however, to comprehend at one view all the circumstances of his condition, as they appear to the eye of Infinite Wisdom—could he estimate, as God does, the strength of the unsanctified influence that required to be subdued, the extent to which that influence had already operated upon him, and the source from which its chief strength was derived—and were he able to appreciate the full amount of the salutary effects by which his affliction is to be followed,—he would find that this affliction was nothing more than what was indispensably necessary—that it had been dealt out to him in just such a measure as his spiritual welfare required—and that any other of a less painful nature, would have fallen short of the object which it was designed to effect. And, in point of fact, the experience of Christians does frequently

bear witness that it is so. The first practical effect of affliction, and the first token of its being sanctified to the believer, is, in many cases, a returning sensibility of conscience, whereby he is awakened, as if from a dream, to a lively recollection of many things which before cost him no uneasiness, but on a review of which he now feels humbled and abased—and when he thinks of the mercy which interposed so to awaken him, and contemplates the danger from which he has thus been rescued, he will be ready to say, with all gratitude and sincerity, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."

Such is the view that we are naturally led to take of affliction, considered in the light of chastisement; and every Christian must acknowledge, that "though for the present it seemeth not to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." There is, however, another view, which we conceive the believer is warranted to take of the subject, and from which he may derive abundant consolation. Independently altogether of any thing in the past or present condition of the Christian, on account of which he may stand in need of chastening, there may be temptations awaiting him which he is but ill prepared to encounter, and circumstances about to occur, which, with a previous course of worldly prosperity and comfort, might prove injurious to his Christian character, and bring his spiritual interests into jeopardy. Affliction, therefore, may have a view to the future, as well as a reference to the past; it may be the preparation which

God in his infinite wisdom sees necessary, because he sees it the best, for putting his people into a posture of defence; it may be that which brings them into such a state of mind as renders them less accessible to the allurements by which their spiritual adversary is preparing to entangle them; and, as the means of strengthening their attachment to the truth, may prove to them the intimation of a coming danger, a signal for them, so to speak, to take to themselves the whole armour of God, that they may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. We are persuaded that there are many who must have had this view of the subject verified in their own experience;—many who can connect spiritual deliverances with former afflictions, and who have been enabled to remember God, in circumstances where, but for such previous discipline, they are conscious that they would have been in danger of forgetting him. And can such persons have any doubt or perplexity about the principle on which affliction is made to enter so largely into God's dealings with his people; or fail to perceive that, independently altogether of correction or chastisement, it is through tribulation and trial, that the Christian character is raised to an elevation which it could never otherwise have reached? Such tribulations are not only the measures which Infinite Wisdom dictates, but they become, to the eye of faith, the most unequivocal expressions whereby infinite love manifests itself; they are so many testimonies to the unceasing watchfulness of God over his children, and the provision which he is making for their deliverance, ere the hour of temptation arrives, and before they are con-

scious of its approach: and the more they reflect on the time, and the nature, and the extent of their suffering, the more firmly persuaded must they be, that "their light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for them a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory."

In the view that we have now taken of the subject of affliction, and of the place which it occupies in God's procedure towards his people, we have considered it merely with a reference to the individual afflicted, as tending, under the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God, to promote the believer's growth in the divine life. It may not, however, be uninteresting or uninstructive to the Christian, to be reminded, that it is not to the individuals alone who are actually subjected to suffering, that the salutary effects of affliction are confined. Such is the constitution of our nature, and such the circumstances in which we are placed, that we are mutually dependent on one another for not a little of what is essential for our present comfort and well-being; nor would it be easy to conceive a case in which an individual could be so entirely under the dominion of a selfish spirit,—where he could so contract the sphere of his affections, and so concentrate his regards upon himself, as that his comforts should be beyond the reach of being affected by any change in the circumstances and condition of those around him: and if a solitary instance of such an individual could be found, there are few, we are persuaded, who would hesitate to pronounce him the most desolate, and forlorn, and pitiable, of human beings. With such sympathies and feelings, then, as render it impossible for us to

remain insensible to the condition of one another, provision is thus made, by the very constitution of our nature, for giving to affliction a far more extended influence, than merely the effect which it produces on the individuals actually afflicted. However limited may be the sphere of the sufferer's relationship or acquaintance, there must be some, at least, to whom his condition cannot be a matter of indifference; and if his sufferings have been sanctified to himself, there must be something in his character and state, that has a tendency to convey salutary impressions to all with whom he may have an opportunity of holding intercourse. The effects, indeed, of such dispensations may extend far beyond what it is possible for us to conceive. We are assured in Scripture, that "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth;" and contemplating this truth, in connexion with what we are also told on the same authority, that angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation," and that "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places is known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God,"—we cannot doubt that every step of the believer's progress towards a state of meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, is a subject of interest to these holy and happy spirits. And if so, then it is impossible to determine how far the influence of the believer's holy resignation under affliction may extend, or what enlargement it may give, even to those higher intelligences who do not, and cannot, require to be themselves subjected to suffering, in their conceptions of the power of divine grace, and the riches of divine wisdom; and impos-

sible, therefore, to estimate the amount of that accession, which the humblest Christian may be the means of making, to the blessedness that is diffused through the subjects of God's holy adminstration. But, independently of the testimony that is thus borne to the faithfulness of the divine promises, and the efficacy of divine consolations, it is evident that, in every case of affliction, there must be feelings awakened, and sympathies called forth, which have themselves a most salutary tendency; that the witnesses of such afflictions are thereby reminded of death and eternal things, in a way more solemn and impressive than they could be by any other means, short of the actual experience of similar afflictions in their own person; and that, in this way, the sufferings of an individual may be made to exercise a most wholesome influence, even upon multitudes who are themselves exempted from the severity of such discipline, and who, amidst the uninterrupted enjoyment of worldly prosperity, might be in danger of forgetting their mortality and frailty.

We have thus endeavoured to suggest to the believer some considerations calculated to illustrate the Scripture declaration, that "God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men;" and to point out some of the happy effects of affliction, considered as a salutary discipline. In attempting, however, to do so, we would not have the Christian suppose, that our object has been to point out special reasons for any particular case of tribulation, as if the discovery of such reasons were necessary to command his resigned acquiescence in the divine appointments. Whether such reasons can be assigned

or not, there is one truth from which the considerations now stated derive all their force, and the belief of which can never fail to secure this resignation on the part of the Christian. If he believes and recollects that God so loved the world, guilty and apostate as it was, that he spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up to the death for us all, he can require no other argument to convince him that there is mercy in affliction, and no farther explanation of the divine procedure to reconcile him to any of God's dispensations. It is this truth indeed, and this alone, that can call forth unreserved submission to the divine will; and it is to this, therefore, that the believer betakes himself in every season of perplexity and trouble. He sees in the death of Christ the surest, because infinitely the most valuable pledge, that God himself could give, that no affliction will be employed but such as infinite love dictates, and infinite wisdom approves; and persuaded as he is, that his salvation, even the perfection and blessedness of his nature, is the end of all God's dealings with him, and the object on which God looks with complacency, he cannot but be also persuaded that his happiness is the ultimate design of every afflictive visitation. To the worldly mind, it may appear a paradox, or absolute contradiction, to say, that suffering is inflicted for the purpose of securing the happiness and the well-being of the sufferer; and the resignation, therefore, of such a mind will never be any thing more than a sullen and constrained submission to stern necessity. But it is because that mind has never seen the glory of that effulgence with which the death of Christ illuminates the divine government, and the character of

love and mercy which it impresses on every act of his administration towards the children of men; for the man who has learned to contemplate the divine procedure by the aid of this light, will believe not only that God afflicteth not willingly, but that he does so with reluctance—reluctance in this sense, and to this extent, that he pities while he afflicts, and looks upon the sufferings of his people with an infinitely more profound compassion, than ever affectionate father did on the child whom he loves, and whom that very love constrains him to chasten. It is the Christian's consolation to believe that his once tempted, and suffering, and crucified Redeemer, is now exalted to the sovereignty of the world; that to Him has been committed the administration of all things that concern the well-being of his followers; that his supremacy is unceasingly exercised in providing for their security and comfort; and that no affliction can befall them, but with his knowledge, and by his appointment. He is, moreover, assured, and he believes, however difficult and hard the saying may appear to others, that this compassionate Saviour sympathizes in the very sufferings which he himself appoints; for it is expressly said, that "we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." And with this assurance, can he doubt, that in such hands he is secure from every affliction that is not essential to his well-being? can he desire any other pledge on this point, than that it is the appointment of Him who loved his people even unto the death? or can he require any thing more to sooth and to support him, than the reflection,

that he has the sympathy and affectionate commiseration of the Lord of life? Let the believer seek to realize this truth, and it will give a meaning and a force to the subject of these remarks, which no illustration can impart to it—let him labour habitually to recollect it, and he will need no argument to convince him, that "God afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men."

With these general remarks on the subject of affliction, we would refer our readers to the following Treatises, where they will find the considerations at which we have but just hinted, fully illustrated, and most powerfully enforced. We do not, indeed, know any works better fitted to be a *companion* to the afflicted; nor can the Christian, we think, rise from the perusal of them, without some salutary impressions, calculated to sooth him under present suffering, or fit him for meeting future trials with devout acquiescence in the divine appointment. They are the works of men who knew human nature well, because they were well acquainted with their own heart; and we cannot conceive any form which dissatisfaction with the dispensations of God's providence can assume, that they have not examined and exposed. This observation is particularly applicable to the treatise by Flavel, who, with great spiritual skill, has laid open those secret feelings of discontentment with the divine procedure, of which Christians are at times hardly conscious perhaps, but which too frequently lie at the foundation of immoderate and unbecoming sorrow in seasons of affliction. In Cecil's "Visit to the House of Mourning," the Christian will find set forth, in a very impressive light, the

abundant consolation which the Gospel provides for him in the time of trouble, and such an exhibition of the divine perfections, as is admirably fitted to strengthen the conviction, that, even in the severest of his chastisements, God is still faithful to his character as a compassionate Father. But, if we might venture to single out one, among works that are all so excellent, we would especially recommend to the notice of our readers, the first of the treatises by SHAW. Independent of its general excellence, as containing a large portion of truth, condensed into a small compass, it derives a peculiar interest from the circumstances in which it was written, as embodying the experience of a man of eminent piety and spirituality of mind, while under the pressure of a very painful and trying visitation of Providence. We know scarcely any thing more impressive than his prefatory address to the reader, when he "solemnly and sincerely professes before God, and angels, and men, that he was never so much as inclined to think hardly of God, or his good and holy ways, because of his afflictive dispensation:" and while this declaration, we doubt not, will remind many of the hard thoughts, and unworthy suspicions, to which they have sometimes given way in seasons of affliction, it furnishes also an encouraging example of the maturity of strength to which the believer's faith may be brought, and after which it is alike the privilege and the duty of every Christian to aspire. But whatever may be our predilection for Shaw's work, we trust that our readers will find the whole worthy of a repeated perusal; and we may venture to apply to each of them the words of the excellent preface to this edition of

Cecil:—"The value of this work has been already well tried by the test of extended experiment; and it has found a warm friend in many a distracted heart which it has soothed, and in many an afflicted family whom it has visited with the balm of heavenly consolation. The blessing of the Great Comforter has largely accompanied it; and it has been stamped by heaven as one of the most valuable treatises of Christian truth, and Christian consolation. The unction of evangelical sentiment rests on it, and the spirit of genuine Christian sympathy pervades its every page."

R. G.

EDINBURGH, *August*, 1824.

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A

TOKEN FOR MOURNERS.

BY THE

REV. JOHN FLAVEL.

THE

EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

To his dearly-beloved Brother and Sister, Mr. J. C. and Mrs. E. C. the Author wisheth Grace, Mercy, and Peace.

Dear Friends,

The double tie of nature and grace, besides the many endearing passages, that for so many years have linked and glued our affections so intimately, cannot but beget a tender sympathy in me with you under all your troubles, and make me say of every affliction which befalls you, Half mine. I find it is with our affections, as with the strings of musical instruments, exactly set at the same height: if one be touched, the other trembles, though it be at some distance.

Our affections are one, and so in a great measure have been our afflictions also. You cannot forget, that in the year lately past, the Almighty visited my tabernacle with the rod, and, in one year, cut off from it the root and the branch, the tender mother and the only son. What the effects of these strokes, or rather of my own unmortified passions were, I

have felt, and you and others have heard. Surely I was a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; yea, I may say with them, Lam. iii. 19, 20. "Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall: my soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me."

I dare not say, that ever I felt my heart discontentedly rising and swelling against God; no, I could still justify him, when I most sensibly smarted by his hand: if he had plunged me into a sea of sorrow, yet I could say, in all that sea of sorrow there is not a drop of injustice. But it was the over-heating and over-acting of my fond and unmortified affections and passions, that made so sad impressions upon my body, and cast me under those distempers which soon imbittered all my remaining comforts to me.

It was my earnest desire, so soon as I had strength and opportunity for so great a journey, to visit you; that so (if the Lord had pleased) I might both refresh, and be refreshed by you, after all my sad and disconsolate days; and you cannot imagine what content and pleasure I projected in that visit. But it proved to us (as all other comforts of the same kind ordinarily do) more in expectation than fruition; for how soon after our joyful meeting and embraces did the Lord overcast and darken our day, by sending death into your tabernacle, to take away the desire of your eyes with a stroke! to crop off that sweet and only bud, from which we promised ourselves so much comfort: but no more of that, I fear I have gone too far already. It is not my design to exasperate your troubles, but to heal them; and for that

purpose have I sent you these papers, which I hope may be of use, both to you and many others in your condition, since they are the after-fruits of my own troubles; things that I commend not to you from another hand, but which I have (in some measure) proved and tasted in my own trials.

But I will not hold you longer here: I have only a few things to desire for and from you, and I have done.

The things I desire are,

First, That you will not be too hasty to get off the yoke which God hath put upon your neck. Remember, when your child was in the womb, neither of you desired it should be delivered thence, till God's appointed time was fully come; and now that you travail again with sorrow for its death, O desire not to be delivered from your sorrow one moment before God's time for your deliverance be also fully come! Let patience have its perfect work; that comfort which comes in God's way and season will remain by you, and do you good indeed.

Secondly, I desire, that though you and your affliction had a sad meeting, yet you and they may have a comfortable parting. If they effect that upon your hearts for which God has sent them, I doubt not but God will give them a fair testimony when they go off. If they obtain God's blessing upon them in their operation, surely they will have your blessing too at their valediction. And what you entertained with fear, you will dismiss with praise. How sweet is it to hear the afflicted soul say, when God is loosing his bands, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted!"

Thirdly, I heartily wish that these searching afflictions may make the most satisfying discoveries, that you may now see more of the evils of sin, the vanity of the creature, and the fulness of Christ, than ever you yet saw. Afflictions are searchers, and put the soul upon searching and trying its way. When our sins find us out by affliction, happy are we, if by the light of affliction we find out sin. Blessed is the man whom God chasteneth, and teacheth out of his law. There are unseen causes, many times, of our troubles; you have an advantage now to sift out the seeds and principles from which they spring.

Fourthly, I wish that all the love and delight you bestowed upon your little one, may now be placed to your greater advantage upon Jesus Christ; and that the stream of your affection to him may be so much the stronger, as there are now fewer channels for it to be divided into. If God will not have any part of your happiness to lie in children, then let it wholly lie in himself. If the jealousy of the Lord hath removed that which drew away too much of heart from him, and hath spoken by his rod, saying, "Stand aside child; thou art in my way, and fillest more room in thy parent's heart than belongs to thee"—O then deliver up all to him, and say, Lord, take the whole heart entirely and undividedly to thyself. Henceforth, let there be no parting, sharing, or dividing of the affections betwixt God and the creature, let all the streams meet and centre in thee only.

Fifthly, That you may be strengthened with all might in the inner man to all patience, that the peace of God may keep your hearts and minds, labour

to bring your hearts to a meek submission to the rod of your Father. "We had fathers of the flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much more be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?" Is it comely for children to contest and strive with their father? or is it the way to be freed from the yoke, by struggling under it? O that your hearts may be in a like state with his who said, "Lord, thou shalt beat, and I will bear!" It was a good observation that one made—"The soul grows wise by sitting still and quiet under the rod." And the apostle calls those excellent fruits which the saints gather from their sanctified afflictions, "The peaceable fruits of righteousness."

Lastly, My heart's desire and prayer to God for you is, that you may die daily to all visible enjoyments, and by these frequent converses with death in your family, you may be prepared for your own change and dissolution when it shall come.

O friends! how many graves have you and I seen opened for our dear relations! How oft hath death come up into your windows, and summoned the delight of your eyes! It is but a little while and we shall go to them; we and they are distinguished but by short intervals.

Our dear parents are gone; our lovely and desirable children are gone; our bosom relations, who were as our own souls, are gone! And do not all these warning-knocks at our doors acquaint us, that we must prepare to follow shortly after them?

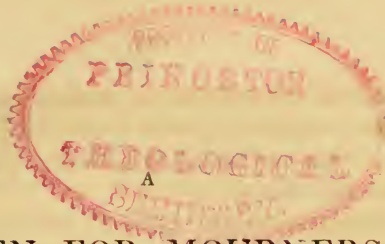
O that by these things our own death might be both more familiar and easy to us! The oftener it visits us, the better we should be acquainted with it;

and the more of our beloved relations it removes before us, the less of either snares or entanglement remains for us when our turn comes.

My dear friends, my flesh and my blood, I beseech you, for religion's sake, for your own sake, and for my sake, whose comfort is in a great part bound up in your prosperity and welfare, that you read frequently, ponder seriously, and apply believingly, these Scripture consolations and directions, which, in some haste, I have gathered for your use; and the God of all consolation be with you.

I am, your most endeared Brother,

JOHN FLAVEL.



A

TOKEN FOR MOURNERS.

LUKE vii. 13.

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

To be above the stroke of passions, is a condition equal to angels; to be in a state of sorrow, without the sense of sorrow, is a disposition beneath beasts: but duly to regulate our sorrows, and bound our passions under the rod, is the wisdom, duty, and excellency of a Christian. He who is without natural affections, is deservedly ranked among the worst of heathens; and he who is able rightly to manage them, deserves to be numbered with the best of Christians. Though, when we are sanctified, we put on the divine nature—yet, till we are glorified, we put not off the infirmities of our human nature.

Whilst we are within the reach of troubles, we cannot be without the danger, nor ought not to be without the fear of sin; and it is as hard for us to escape sin being in adversity, as to be calm in prosperity.

How apt are we to transgress the bounds both of reason and religion under a sharp affliction, appears

in most men's experience, so in this woman's example, to whose excessive sorrow Christ puts a stop in the text: "He saw her, and had compassion on her, and said to her, Weep not."

The lamentations and wailing of this distressed mother, moved the tender compassions of the Lord in beholding them, and stirred up more pity in his heart for her, than could be in her heart for her dear and only son.

In the words, we are to consider both the condition of the woman, and the counsel of Christ with respect to it.

I. The condition of this woman, which appears to be very dolorous and distressed. Her groans and tears moved and melted the very heart of Christ to hear and behold them: "When he saw her, he had compassion on her."

How sad an hour it was with her when Christ met her, appears by what is so distinctly marked by the Evangelist in verse 12. where it is said, "Now, when they came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city were with her."

In this one verse, divers heart-piercing circumstances of this affliction are noted.

1. It was the death of a son. To bury a child, any child, must needs rend the heart of a tender parent; for what are children but the parents multiplied? A child is part of the parent made up in another skin. But to lay a son in the grave, a son who continues the name, supports the family—this was ever accounted a very great affliction.

2. This son was not carried from the cradle to the coffin, nor stripped out of its swathing to be wrapped in his winding-cloth. Had he died in infancy, before he had engaged affection, or raised expectation, the affliction had not been so pungent and cutting as now it was: death smote this son in the flower and prime of his life. He was "a man," saith the Evangelist, verse 12.—"a young man," as Christ calls him, verse 14.—he was now arrived at that age which made him capable of yielding his mother all that comfort which had been the expectation and hope of many years, and the reward and fruit of many cares and labours: yet then, when the endearments were greatest, and her hopes highest, even in the flower of his age, he is cut off.

Thus Basil bewailed the death of his son: "I once had a son, who was a young man, my only successor, the solace of my age, the glory of his kind, the prop of my family, arrived to the endearing age; then was he snatched from me by death, whose lovely voice but a little before I heard, who lately was a pleasant spectacle to his parent."

Reader, if this had been thine own condition, as it hath been his who writes it, I need say no more to convince thee, that it was a sorrowful state indeed in which Christ met this tender mother.

3. And what is yet more, he was not only a son, but an only son: so you find in verse 12. "He was the only son of his mother." One in whom all her hopes and comforts of that kind were bound up. For, as in Virgil, *Omnis in Ascanio, stat chari cura parentis.* All her affections were contracted into this one object. If we have ever so many children, we

know not which of them to spare. If they stand like olive plants about our table, it would grieve us to see the least twig among them broken down. But surely the death of one out of many, is much more tolerable than of all in one.

Hence it is noted in Scripture as the greatest of earthly sorrows—"O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes; make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation." Yea, so deep and penetrating is this grief, that the Holy Ghost borrows it to express the deepest spiritual troubles by it—"They shall mourn for him, (namely, Christ whom they pierced,) as one mourneth for an only son."

4. And yet to heighten the afflictions, it is superadded, verse 12. "And she was a widow." So that the staff of her age, on whom she leaned, was broken. She had now none left to comfort or assist her in her helpless, comfortless state of widowhood; which is a condition not only void of comfort, but exposed to oppression and contempt.

Yea, and being a widow, the whole burden lay upon her alone: she had not a husband to comfort her, as Elkanah did Hannah—"Why weepest thou, and why is thy heart grieved? am not I more to thee than ten sons?" This would have been a great relief, but her husband was dead as well as her son; both gone, and she only surviving to lament the loss of those comforts that once she had. Her calamities came not single, but one after another, and this reviving and aggravating the former. This was her case and condition when the Lord met her.

II. Let us consider the counsel which Christ

gives her, with respect to this her sad and sorrowful case: "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not." Relieving and supporting words! wherein we shall consider,

1. The occasion.
2. The motive.
3. The counsel itself.

1. The occasion of it; and that was his seeing of her. This meeting at the gate of the city, how accidental and occasional soever it seems, yet, without doubt, it was providentially suited to the work intended to be wrought. The eye of his omniscience foresaw her, and this meeting was by him designed as an occasion of that famous miracle which he wrought upon the young man. Christ hath a quick eye to discern poor mourning and disconsolate creatures. And though he be now in heaven, and stands out of their sight, so that we see him not, yet he sees us; and his eye (which is upon all our troubles) still affects his heart, and moves his bowels for us.

2. The motive stirring him up to give this relieving and comfortable counsel to her, was his own compassion. She neither expected nor desired it from him; but so full of tender pity was the Lord toward her, that he prevents her with unexpected consolation: her heart was nothing so full of compassion for her son, as Christ was for her: he bore our infirmities, even natural as well as moral ones, in the days of his flesh; and though he be now exalted to the highest glory, yet still he continues as merciful as ever, and is apt to be touched with the sense of our miseries.

3. The counsel itself, "Weep not;" herein fulfilling the office of a comforter to them that mourn, whereunto he was anointed. Yet the words are not an absolute prohibition of tears and sorrow; he doth not condemn all mourning as sinful, or all expressions of grief for dead relations as uncomely. No, Christ would not have his people stupid and insensible; he only prohibits the excess and extravagancies of our sorrow for the dead; that it should not be such a mourning for the dead as is found among the heathen, who sorrow without measure, because without hope, being ignorant of that grand relief, by the resurrection which the gospel reveals.

The resurrection of her son from the dead, is the ground upon which Christ builds her consolation and relief. Well might he say, "Weep not," when he intended quickly to remove the cause of her tears by restoring him again to life.

Now, though there be somewhat in this case extraordinary and peculiar,—for few or none that carry their dead children to the grave, may expect to receive them again from the dead immediately, by a special resurrection, as she did: I say, this is not to be expected by any that now lose their relations; the occasions and reasons of such miraculous special resurrections being removed, by a sufficient and full evidence and confirmation of Christ's divine power and Godhead;—yet those that now bury their relations, if they be such as die in Christ, have as good and sufficient reason to moderate their passions as this mourner had, and do as truly come within the reach and compass of this, Christ's comfortable and supporting counsel, "Weep not," as she did: for do

but consider what of support or comfort can a particular and present resurrection from the dead give us, more than that it is, and as it is, a specimen, a handsel, or pledge of the general resurrection? It is not the returning of the soul to its body, to live an animal life again in this world of sin and sorrow, and shortly after to undergo the agonies and pains of death again, that is in itself any such privilege as may afford much comfort to the person raised, or his relations. It is no privilege to the person raised, for it returns him from rest to trouble, from the harbour back again into the ocean. It is matter of trouble to many dying saints, to hear of the likelihood of their returning again, when they are got so nigh to heaven.

It was once the case of a godly minister of this nation, who was much troubled at his return, and said, "I am like a sheep driven out of the storm almost to the fold, and then driven back into the storm again: or a weary traveller that has come near his home, and then must go back to fetch somewhat he had forgotten; or an apprentice, whose time is almost expired, and then must begin a new term."

But to die, and then return again from the dead, hath less of privilege, than to return only from the brink of the grave: for the sick hath not yet felt the agonies and last struggle or pangs of death, but such have felt them once, and must feel them again; they must die twice, before they can be happy once: and besides, during the little time they spend on earth, betwixt the first and second dissolution, there is a perfect forgetfulness and insensibleness of all that which they saw or enjoyed in their state of separation:

it being necessary both for them and others, that it should be. For themselves it is necessary, that they may be content to live and endure the time of separation from that blessed and ineffable state, quietly and patiently; and for others, that they may live by faith, and not by sense, and build upon divine, and not human authority and report.

So that here, you see, their agonies and pangs are doubled, and yet their life not sweetened by any sense of their happiness, which returns and remains with them; and therefore it can be no such privilege to them.

And for their relations, though it be some comfort to receive them again from the dead, yet the consideration, that they are returned to them in the stormy sea, to partake of new sorrows and troubles, from which they were lately free; and in a short time they must part with them again, and feel the double sorrows of a parting pull, which others feel but once, surely such a particular resurrection, considered in itself, is no such ground of comfort as at first we might imagine it to be.

It remains, then, that the ground of all solid comfort and relief against the death of our relations, lies in the general and last resurrection; and what is in a particular one, is but, as it were, a specimen and evidence of the general: and there the apostle places our relief: That we shall see and enjoy them again at the Lord's coming,—and surely this is more than if, with his mother, (in the text,) we should presently receive them from the dead, as she did her son. And if we judge not so, it is because our hearts are carnal, and measure things rather by time and sense, than by faith and eternity.

Thus you see the counsel, with its ground, which for the most part is common to other Christian mourners with her; the difference being but inconsiderable, and of little advantage.

Here, then, you find many aggravations of sorrow meeting together: a son, an only son, is carrying to the grave; yet Christ commands the pensive mother not to mourn. Hence we note,

Doct. *That Christians ought to moderate their sorrows for their dead relations, how many afflicting circumstances and aggravations soever do meet together in their death.*

It is as common with men, yea, with good men, to exceed in their sorrows for dead relations; and both of the one and other, we may say as they say of waters, it is hard to confine them within their bounds. It is, therefore, a grave advice which the apostle delivers in this case—"But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and those that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not." As if he had said, The floating world is near its port, God hath contracted the sails of man's life: it is but a point of time we have to live, and shortly it will not be a point to choose whether we had wives or not, children or not. All these are time-eaten things, and before the expected fruit of these comforts be ripe, we ourselves may be rotten. It is therefore a high point of wisdom to look upon things which shortly will not be, as if already they were not, and to behave ourselves in the loss of these carnal enjoyments, as the natural man behaves himself in the use of spiritual

ordinances: he hears, as if he heard not; and we should weep, as if we wept not: their hearts are a little moved sometimes by spiritual things, but they never lay them so to heart, as to be broken-hearted for the sin they hear of, or deeply affected with the glory revealed; we also ought to be sensible of the stroke of God upon our dear relations; but yet still we must weep, as if we wept not; that is, we must keep due bounds and moderation in our sorrows, and not be too deeply concerned for these dying short-lived things.

To this purpose is the apostle's exhortation, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither faint when thou art rebuked of him." These are two extremes, despising and fainting: when God is correcting, to say, I do not regard it, let God take all, if he will: if my estate must go, let it go; if my children die, let them die: this is to despise the Lord's chastening; and God cannot bear it, that we should bear it thus lightly.

There is also another extreme, and that is fainting: if when goods are taken away, the heart be taken away; and when children die, then the spirit of the parent dies also: this is fainting under the rod. Thou lamentest, saith Seneca, thy deceased friend; but I would not have thee grieve beyond what is meet: that thou shouldst not grieve at all, I dare not require thee; tears may be excused, if they do not exceed: let thine eyes, therefore, be neither wholly dry, nor yet let them overflow; weep thou mayest, but wail thou must not.

Happy man, that still keeps the golden bridle of moderation upon his passions and affections, and still

keeps the possession of himself, whatsoever he lose the possession of!

Now, the method in which I propose to proceed, shall be,

I. To discover the signs,

II. To dissuade from the sin,

III. To remove the pleas, and,

IV. To propose the cure, of immoderate sorrow.

I. (1.) I shall give you the signs of immoderate sorrow, and show you when it exceeds its bounds, and becomes sinful, even a sorrow to be sorrowed for; and, for clearness' sake, I will first allow what may be allowed to the Christian mourner, and then you will the better discern wherein the excess and sinfulness of your sorrow lies.

1. How much soever we censure and condemn immoderate sorrow, yet the afflicted must be allowed and awakened under a tender sense of the Lord's afflicting hand upon them. It is no virtue to bear what we do not feel. Yea, it is a most unbecoming temper not to tremble when God is smiting.

The Lord saith to Moses, in the case of Miriam, "If her father had spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?" The face is the table and seat of beauty and honour; but when it is spit upon, it is made the sink of shame. Had her own father spit upon her face when she had displeased him, would she not have gone aside as one ashamed by such a rebuke, and not have shown her face to him again in seven days? How much more should she take it to heart, and be sensible of this rebuke of mine, who have filled her face with leprous spots,

the signs of my displeasure against her? Surely God will be ashamed of those that are not ashamed when he rebukes them.

It is not magnanimity, but stupidity, to make light of God's correction; and for this the afflicted are smartly taxed: "I have smitten them, but they have not grieved." When God smote Job in his person, children, and estate, he arose and rent his mantle, and put dust upon his head, to show he was not senseless and unaffected, and yet blessed the afflicting God, which as plainly showed he was not contumacious and unsubmissive.

2. We must allow the mourning afflicted soul a due and comely expression of his grief and sorrow, in his complaints both to God and men.

It is much more becoming a Christian ingenuously to open his troubles, than sullenly to smother them. There is no sin in complaining to God, but much wickedness in complaining of him. Griefs are eased by groans, and heart-pressures relieved by utterance. This was David's course, and constant way, who was a man of affliction: "I poured out my complaint before him; I showed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path."

To whom should children go but to their father, to make their moan? whence may they expect relief and comfort, but from him? Psalm cii. is entitled, "A Psalm for the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord."

And happy were it, if every afflicted soul would choose this way to express his sorrows! Did we complain more to God, God would complain less of

us, and quickly abate the matters of our complaint. O, you cannot think how moving, how melting, how prevailing it is with God, when his poor burdened and afflicted people, in a day of distress and despondency, when deep calleth unto deep, and one wave drives another, then for the oppressed soul, with humility, filial confidence, and faith, to turn itself to the Lord, and thus bespeak him:—

"Father, what shall I do? My soul is greatly bowed down by trouble; I am full to the brim; my vain heart hath looked for relief this way and that way, but none comes; every door of comfort is shut up against me. Thou hast multiplied my sorrows, and renewed thy witness against me: comfort is removed from my outward, and peace from my inner man. Sharp afflictions without, and bitter reflections within. O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me. Fathers of the flesh pity their distressed children, when they complain to them, and wilt not thou, O Lord, whose compassions as far exceed creature-compassions, as the sea exceeds a drop? O my Father, pity me, support me, deliver me!"

Oh! how acceptable is this to God! how advantageous to the soul!

We may also make our complaint to men; so did Job: "Have pity, have pity on me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me." And it is a mercy, if we have any friends that are wise, faithful, and experienced. They are born for such a time as this: "A brother is born for adversity." But be they what they will, they cannot pity as God, relieve and succour as he; and oftentimes we may say with Job, "As for me, is my complaint to men? and

if it were, why should not my spirit be troubled?" As if he should say, What great advantage can I get by these complaints? I may burden the heart of my friend, but how little doth that ease my own? Yet the very opening of the heart to an experienced tender Christian is some relief, and the engaging his prayers is more. Thus far you moan safely: in all this there is no danger.

3. The afflicted person may ordinarily accuse, judge, and condemn himself, for being the cause and procurer of his own troubles. He may lawfully be discontented, and vexed with himself for his own folly, when the iniquity of his heels compasseth him about. And truly, it is but seldom that any great affliction befalls a gracious person, but he saw the need of such a rod before he felt it.

Hath God smitten thy child or friend, and didst thou not foresee some sharp trial coming? Did not thy fond, secure, carnal temper, need such a scourge, to awaken, quicken, and purge thee? Or if thou didst not foresee it, it is now your duty to search and examine yourselves. So the church, in their affliction, resolved—"Let us search and try our ways." When God is smiting, we should be searching: surely our iniquities will inquire after us, if we will not inquire after them. Yea, in the day of affliction, a gracious soul is inquisitive about nothing more than the procuring and provoking cause of his troubles: "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me?" As if he should say, Lord, what special corruption is it that this rod is sent to rebuke? What sinful neglect doth it come to humble me for? O discover it now to me, and recover me now from it!

And having found the root and cause of their troubles, ingenuous souls will shame themselves for it, and give glory to God by an humble submission, and vindication of the equity of his proceedings: "I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, thou preserver of men?" He thinks it no shame freely to discover unto God, and deeply to abase himself before him for his folly.

I remember a choice note that Mr. Brightman hath in his Commentary upon the Canticles.

"Holy men," saith he, "after their hearts are renewed by repentance, are not ashamed to remember and confess their slips and shameful falls, to the glory of God; for they account that glory which such confessions take from them is not lost, while it goes to the glory of God. If his glory may rise out of our shame, how willing should we be to take such shame to us!" Holy David was not ashamed to acknowledge, "My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness." He is the wisest man that thus abases himself before God.

It is true, God may afflict from prerogative, or for trial: but we may always see cause enough in ourselves, and it is safest to charge it upon our own folly.

4. The afflicted Christian may, in an humble submissive manner, plead with God, and be earnest for the removal of the affliction.

When affliction presseth us above strength, when it disables us from duty, or when it gives advantage to temptation, then we may say, with David, "Remove thy stroke from me, I am consumed by the blow of thine hand." Even our Lord Jesus Christ, in the day of his troubles, poured out his soul with

strong cries and many tears, saying, " Father, if thou be willing, let this cup pass from me." Oppressed nature desires ease; and even our renewed nature desires freedom from those clogs and temptations which hinder us in duty, or expose us to snares. Thus far we may safely go.

(2.) But sorrow then becomes sinful and excessive, when,

1. It causes us to slight and despise all our other mercies and enjoyments, as small things in comparison of what we have lost.

It often falls out, that the setting of one comfort clouds and benights all the rest. Our tears for our lost enjoyment so blind our eyes, that we cannot see the many other mercies which yet remain. We take so much notice of what is gone, that we take little or no notice of what is left. But this is very sinful; for it involves in it, both ignorance, ingratitude, and great provocation.

It is a sin springing from ignorance. Did we know the desert of our sin, we would rather wonder to see one mercy left, than that twenty are cut off. They that know they have forfeited every mercy, should be thankful that they enjoy any, and patient when they lose any of their comfort.

Did we know God, even that sovereign Lord, at whose disposal our comforts come and go, who can the next moment blast all that remain, and turn you into hell afterwards, you would prize the mercies he yet indulges to you at a higher value. Did you understand the fickle vanishing nature of the creature, what a flower, what a bubble it is, Oh, how thankful would you be to find so many yet left in your possession!

Did you know the case of thousands, as good, yea, better than you, whose whole harvest of comfort in this world is but a handful to the gleanings of the comforts ye still enjoy, who in all their lives never were owners of such comfortable enjoyments as you now overlook, surely you would not act as you do.

Besides, what vile ingratitude is in this? What! are all your remaining mercies worth nothing? You have buried a child, a friend. Well, but still you have a husband, a wife, other children: or if not, you have comfortable accommodations for yourselves, with health to enjoy them; or if not, yet have you ordinances of God; it may be an interest in Christ, and in the covenant, pardon of sin, and hopes of glory. What! and yet sink at this rate, as if all your mercies, comforts, and hopes, even in both worlds, were buried in one grave? Must Ichabod be written upon your best mercies, because mortality is written upon one? What shameful ingratitude is here!

And really, friend, such a carriage as this under the rod is no small provocation to the Lord, to go on in judgment, and make a full end of all that remains, so that affliction shall not rise up the second time.

What if God, taking notice how little thou regardest the many undeserved favours thou yet possessest, should say—"Well, if thou thinkest them not worth the owning, neither do I think them worth the continuing. Go, death, there is a husband, a wife, other children yet left, smite them all. Go, sickness, and remove the health of his body yet left. Go, reproach, and blast his reputation, which is yet sweet." What would you think of this? And

yet, if you are out of Christ, you are in danger of a far sadder stroke than any, or all yet mentioned. What if God should say—" Prizest thou not my mercy? Hast thou no value for my goodness and forbearance towards thee? Is it nothing that I have spared thee thus long in thy sins and rebellions? Well then, I will stretch out my hand upon thy life, cut off that thread which hath kept thee so many years from dropping into hell."

O think, then, what you have done, by provoking the Lord through your vile ingratitude! It is a dangerous thing to provoke God, when he is already in a way of judgment. And if you be his own people, and so out of the danger of this last and worst stroke; yet know, you have better mercies to lose than any you have yet lost. Should God cloud your soul with doubts, let loose Satan to buffet you, remove joy and peace from your inner man, how soon would you be convinced, that the funeral of your dearest friend is but a trifle to this?

Well then, whatever God takes, be still thankful for what he leaves. It was the great sin of Israel in the wilderness, that though God had delivered them from their cruel servitude in Egypt, miraculously fed them in the desert, and was leading them on to a land flowing with milk and honey; yet, as soon as any want did but begin to pinch them, presently all these mercies were forgotten and slighted. " Would to God," say they, " we had died in Egypt." And, " There is nothing at all beside this manna." Beware of this, O ye mourning and afflicted ones! you see both the sin that is in it, and the danger that attends it.

2. And no less sinful are our sorrows, when they so wholly ingulf our hearts, that we either mind not at all, or are little or nothing sensible of, the public evils and calamity which lie upon the church and people of God.

Some Christians have such public spirits, that the church's troubles swallow up their personal trouble. Melancthon seemed to take little notice of the death of his child, which he dearly loved, being almost overwhelmed with the miseries lying on the church.

And it was a good evidence of the graciousness and publicness of Eli's spirit, who, sitting in the gate anxiously waiting for tidings from the army, when the tidings came that Israel fled before the Philistines, that his two sons Hophni and Phineas were dead, and that the ark of God was taken: just at the mention of that word, the ark of God, before he heard out the whole narration, his mind quickly presaging the issue, he sunk down and died. O that was the sinking, the killing word! Had the messenger stopped at the death of his two sons, like enough he had supported that burden, but the loss of the ark was more to him than sons or daughters.

But how few such public spirits appear even among professors in this selfish generation! May we not with the apostle complain, "All seek their own, and not the things that are Christ's?" Few men have any great cares or designs lying beyond the bounds of their own private interest. And what we say of cares, is as true of sorrows: if a child die, we are ready to die too, but public calamities pierce us not.

How few suffer either their domestic comforts to be swallowed up in the church's troubles, or their

domestic troubles to be swallowed up by the church's mercies! Now, when it is thus with us—when we little regard what mercies or miseries lie upon others, but are wholly intent upon our own afflictions—this is a sinful sorrow, and ought to be sorrowed for.

3. Our sorrows then become sinful and exorbitant, when they divert us from, or distract us in, our duties, so that our intercourse with heaven is stopped and interrupted by them.

How long can we sit alone musing upon a dead creature! Here our thoughts easily flow, but how hard to fix them upon the living God! When our hearts should be in heaven with our Christ, they are in the grave with our dead. May not many afflicted souls justly complain, that their trouble had taken away their Christ from them, (I mean, as to sweet sensible communion,) and laid the dead child in his room?

Poor creature, cease to weep any longer for thy dead relation, and weep rather for thy dead heart. Is this thy compliance with God's design in afflicting thee? What, to grow a greater stranger to him than before! Or is this the way to thy cure and comfort in affliction, to refrain prayer, and turn thy back upon God?

Or, if thou darest not wholly neglect thy duty, yet the affliction spoils the success and comfort of it; thy heart is wandering, dead, distracted in prayer and meditation, so that thou hast no relief or comfort from it.

Rouse up thyself, Christian, and consider this is not right. Surely the rod works not kindly now. What! did thy love to God expire when thy friends

expired? Is thy heart as cold in duty as his body is in the grave? Hath natural death seized him, and spiritual deadness seized thee? Surely, then, thou hast more reason to lament thy dead heart, than thy dead friend. Divert the stream of thy troubles speedily, and labour to recover thyself out of this temper quickly; lest sad experience shortly tell thee, that what thou now mournest for, is but a trifle to what thou shalt mourn for hereafter. To lose the heavenly warmth and spiritual liveliness of thy affections, is undoubtedly a far more considerable loss, than to lose the wife of thy bosom, or the sweetest child that ever a tender parent laid in the grave.

Reader, if this be thy case, thou hast reason to challenge the first place among the mourners. It is better for thee to bury ten sons, than to remit one degree of love or delight in God. The end of God in smiting, was to win thy heart nearer to him, by removing that which estranged it: how then dost thou cross the very design of God in this dispensation? Must God then lose his delight in thy fellowship, because thou hast lost thine in the creature? Surely, when thy troubles thus accompany thee to thy closet, they are sinful and extravagant troubles.

4. Then you may also conclude your sorrows to be excessive and sinful, when they so overload and oppress your bodies, as to endanger your lives, or render them useless and unfit for service.

Worldly sorrow works death; that is, sorrow after the manner of worldly men, sorrow in a mere carnal natural way, which is not relieved by any spiritual reasonings and considerations. This falls so heavy sometimes upon the body, that it sinks under the

weight, and is cast into such diseases as are never more wrought off, or healed in this world. Heaviness in the heart of a man makes it stoop, saith Solomon. The stoutest body must stoop under heart pressures.

"It is with the mind of man," saith one, "as with the stone tyrhenus—as long as it is whole, it swimmeth; but once broken, it sinks presently." Grief is a moth, which, getting into the mind, will, in a short time, make the body, be it ever so strong and well wrought a piece, like an old seary garment.

Philosophers and physicians generally reckon sorrow among the chief causes of shortening life. Christ was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs: and this, some think, was the reason that he appeared as a man of fifty, when he was little more than thirty years old. But his sorrows were of another kind.

Many a man's soul is to his body, as a sharp knife to a thin sheath, which easily cuts it through: and what do we, by poring and pondering upon our troubles, but cut the deeper and quicker? Of all the creatures that ever God made, (devils only excepted,) man is the most able and apt to be his own tormentor.

How unmercifully do we load them in times of affliction! How do we not only waste their strength by sorrow, but deny relief and necessary refreshment! They must carry the load, but be allowed no refreshment: if they can eat the bread of affliction, and drink tears, they may feed at full; but no pleasant bread, no quiet sleep is permitted them. Surely you would not burden a beast, as you do your own bodies; you would pity and relieve a brute beast groaning and sinking under a heavy burden, but you will not pity nor relieve your own bodies.

Some men's souls have given such deep wounds to their bodies, that they are never like to enjoy many easy or comfortable days more, whilst they dwell in them.

Now, this is very sinful, and displeasing to God; for if he have such a tender care for our bodies, that he would not have us swallowed up of overmuch grief, no, though it be for sin, 2 Cor. ii. 7. but even to that sorrow sets bounds; how much less with outward sorrow for temporal loss? May not your stock of natural strength be employed to better purposes, think you, than these? Time may come, that you may earnestly wish you had that health and strength again to spend for God, which you now so lavishly waste, and prodigally cast away upon your troubles, to no purpose or advantage. It was therefore a high point of wisdom in David, and recorded no doubt for our imitation, who, when the child was dead, ceased to mourn, but arose, and washed himself, and eat bread.

5. When affliction sours the spirit with discontent, and makes it inwardly grudge against the hand of God, then our trouble is full of sin, and we ought to be humbled for it before the Lord.

Whatever God doth with us or ours, still we should maintain good thoughts of him. A gracious heart cleaves nearer and nearer to God in affliction, and can justify God in his severest strokes, acknowledging them to be all just and holy:—"I know also that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." And hereby the soul may comfortably evidence to itself its own uprightness and sincere love to God. Yea, it hath been

of singular use to some souls, to take right measures of their love to God in such trials: to have lovely and well-pleased thoughts of God, even when he smites us in our nearest and dearest comforts, argues plainly, that we love him for himself, and not for his gifts only; and that his interest in the heart is deeper than any creature-interest is. And such is the comfort that hath resulted to some, from such discoveries of their own hearts, by close smarting afflictions, that they would not part with it, to have their comforts (whose removal occasioned them) given back in lieu of it.

But to swell with secret discontent, and have hard thoughts of God, as if he had done us wrong, or dealt more severely with us than any—O this is a vile temper, cursed fruit springing from an evil root; a very carnal, ignorant, proud heart; or, at least, from a very distempered, if renewed heart. So it was with Jonah, when God smote his gourd—"Yea," saith he, "I do well to be angry even unto death." Poor man, he was highly distempered at this time, and out of frame: this was not his true temper, or ordinary frame, but a surprise; the effect of a paroxysm of temptation, in which his passions had been overheated.

Few dare to vent it in such language. But how many have their hearts imbittered by discontent, and secret risings against the Lord! which, if ever the Lord open their eyes to see, will cost them more trouble than ever that of affliction did, which gave the occasion of it.

I deny not, but the best heart may be tempted to think and speak frowardly concerning these works of

the Lord: that envious adversary, the devil, will blow the coals, and labour to blow up our spirits at such a time into high discontent. The temptation was strong even upon David himself, to take up hard thoughts of God, and to conclude, "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain." As if he had said, How little privilege from the worst of evils hath a man by his godliness! But he soon suppressed such motions: "If I should say thus, I should offend against the generation of my children:" meaning that he would condemn the whole race of godly men through the whole world; for who is there among them all, but is, or hath been, or may be, afflicted as severely as myself?

"Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more." Whatever God doth with you, speak well, and think well, of him and his works.

6. Our sorrows exceed due bounds, when we continually excite and provoke them by willing irritations.

Grief, like a lion, loves to play with us before it destroys us. And strange it is that we should find some kind of pleasure in rousing our sorrows. It is Seneca's observation, and experimentally true, "That even sorrow itself hath a certain kind of delight attending it."

The Jews that were with Mary in the house to comfort her, "when they saw that she went out hastily, followed her, saying, She goeth to the grave, to weep there." "As they do," saith Calvin, "that seek to provoke their troubles, by going to the grave, or often looking upon the dead body."

Thus we delight to look upon the relics of our

deceased friends, and often to mention their actions and sayings, not so much for any matter of holy and weighty instruction, or imitation—for that would warrant and commend the action; but rather to rub the wound, and fetch fresh blood from it, by piercing ourselves with some little trials, yet wounding circumstances. I have known many that will sit and talk of the features, actions, and sayings of their children, for hours together, and weep at the rehearsal of them, and that for many months after they are gone; so keeping the wound continually open, and excruciating their own hearts without any benefit at all by them. A lock of hair, or some such trifle, must be kept for this purpose, to renew their sorrow, by daily looking on it. On this account Jacob would not have his son called Benoni, lest it should renew his sorrow, but Benjamin.

I am far from commending a brutish oblivion of our dear relations, and condemn it as much as I do this childish and unprofitable remembrance. O, friends, we have other things to do under the rod than these! Were it not better to be searching our hearts and houses, when God's rod is upon us, and studying how to answer the end of it, by mortifying those corruptions which provoke it? Surely the rod works not kindly till it comes to this.

7. Our sorrows may then be pronounced sinful, when they deafen our ears to all the wholesome and seasonable words of counsel and comfort, offered us for our relief and support. "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted for her children, because they were not." She will

admit no comfort, her disease is curable by no other means but the restoration of her children: give her them again, and she will be quiet, else you speak unto the air, she regards not whatever you say.

Thus Israel, in the cruel bondage in Egypt:—Moses brings them the glad tidings of deliverance; "but they hearkened not to him, because of the anguish of spirit, and their cruel bondage."

Thus obstinately fixed are many in their trouble, that no words of advice or comfort find any place with them; yea, I have known some exceeding quick and ingenious, even above the rate of their common parts and abilities, in inventing shifts, and framing objections, to turn off comfort from themselves, as if they had been hired to plead against their own interest; and if they be driven from those pleas, yet they are settled in their troubles, too fast to be moved: say what you will, they mind it not, or at most it abides not upon them. Let proper seasonable advice or comfort be tendered, they refuse it: your counsel is good, but they have no heart to it now. "My soul refused to be comforted."

To want comfort in time of affliction, is an aggravation of our affliction: but to refuse it when offered us, wants not sin. Time may come when we would be glad to receive comfort, or hear a word of support, and shall be denied it.

Oh, it is a mercy to the afflicted to have Barnabas with them, an interpreter, one among a thousand! and it will be the great sin and folly of the afflicted, to spill those excellent cordials prepared and offered to them, like water upon the ground, out of a froward or dead spirit under trouble. Say not with

them, "My hope is perished from the Lord: remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall." It is a thousand pities the wormwood and gall of affliction should so disgust a Christian, as that he should not at any time be able to relish the sweetness that is in Christ, and in the promises.—And thus I have despatched the first part of my design, in showing you wherein the sin of mourners doth not lie, and in what it doth.

II. Having cleared this, and shown you wherein the sin and danger lies, my way is prepared to the second thing proposed, namely, To dissuade mourners from the sinful excesses of sorrows, and keep the golden bridle of moderation upon their passions in times of affliction. And O that my words may be as successful upon those pensive souls that shall read them, as Abigail's were to David, who, when he perceived how proper and sensible they were, said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent thee this day to meet me, and blessed be thy advice!"

I am sensible how hard a task it is I here undertake: to charm down, and allay mutinous, raging, and tumultuous passions; to give a check to the torrent of passion, is ordinarily but to provoke it, and make it rage and swell the more.

The work is the Lord's, and wholly depends upon his power and blessing. He that saith to the sea, when the waves thereof roar, "Be still," can also quiet and compose the stormy and tumultuous sea that rages in the breasts of the afflicted, and casts up nothing but the froth of vain and useless complaints of our misery, or the dirt of sinful and wicked complaints of the dealings of the Lord with us.

The rod of affliction goes round, and visits all sorts of persons without difference. It is upon the tabernacles of the just and of the unjust, the righteous and the wicked; both are mourning under the rod. The godly are not so to be minded, as that the other be wholly neglected: they have as strong and tender, though not as regular affections to their relations, and must not be wholly suffered to sink under their unrelieved burdens.

Here, therefore, I must have respect to two sorts of persons, whom I find in tears upon the same account, I mean the loss of their dear relations—the regenerate and the unregenerate. I am a debtor to both, and shall endeavour their support and assistance: for even the unregenerate call for help and pity, and must not be neglected and wholly slighted in their afflictions. We must pity them that cannot pity themselves. The law of God commands us to help a beast, if fallen under its burden—how much more a man sinking under a load of sorrows.

I confess, uses of comfort to the unregenerate are not (ordinarily) in use among us, and it may seem strange whence any thing of support should be drawn for them that have no special interest in Christ or the promises.

I confess, also, I find myself under great disadvantages for this work. I cannot offer them those reviving cordials that are contained in Christ, and the covenant for God's afflicted people: but yet, such is the goodness of God, even to his enemies, that they are not left wholly without support, or means to allay their sorrow.

If this, therefore, be thy case, who readest these

lines—afflicted and unsanctified, mourning bitterly for thy dead friends—thou hast more cause to mourn for thy dead soul, Christless and graceless, as well as childless or friendless; no comfort in hand, nor yet in hope; full of trouble, and no vent by prayer or faith to ease thy heart.

Poor creature, thy case is sad; but yet do not wholly sink, and suffer thyself to be swallowed up of grief. Thou hast laid thy dear one in the grave, yet throw not thyself headlong into the grave after him; that will not be the way to remedy the misery; but sit down a while, and ponder these three things:—

1. That of all persons in the world, thou hast more reason to be tender over thy life and health, and careful to preserve it: for if thy troubles destroy thee, thou art eternally lost, undone for ever. "Worldly sorrow," saith the apostle, "works death." And if it works thy death, it works thy damnation also; for hell follows that pale horse. If a believer dies, there is no danger of hell to him—the second death hath no power over him; but woe to thee if it overtake thee in thy sin; beware, therefore, what thou dost against thy health and life. Do not put the candle of sorrow too near that thread, by which thou hangest over the mouth of hell. Oh, it is far better to be childless or friendless on earth, than hopeless and remediless in hell!

2. Own and admire the bounty and goodness of God manifested to thee in this affliction; that, when death came into thy family to smite and carry off one, it had not fallen to thy lot to be the person: thy husband, wife, or child is taken, and thou art left; had thy name been in the commission, thou hadst been now past hope.

O the sparing mercy of God! the wonderful long-suffering of God towards thee! Possibly that poor creature that is gone never provoked God as thou hast done; thy poor child never abused mercies, neglected calls, treasured up the thousandth part of that guilt thou hast done: so that thou mightest well imagine it might rather have cut thee down, thou hast so provoked God, than thy poor little one.

But O the admirable patience of God! O the riches of his long-suffering! Thou art only warned, not smitten by it. Is there nothing in this worth thankful acknowledgment? Is it not better to be in black for another on earth, than in the blackness of darkness for ever? Is it not easier to go to the grave with thy dead friend, and weep there, than to go to hell among the damned, where there is "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth?"

3. This affliction, for which thou mournest, may be the greatest mercy to thee that ever yet befell thee in this world. God hath now made thy heart soft by trouble, showed thee the vanity of this world, and what a poor trifle it is which thou madest thy happiness: there is now a dark cloud spread over all thy worldly comforts. Now, O now! if the Lord would but strike in with this affliction, and by it open thine eyes to see thy deplorable state, and take off thy heart for ever from the vain world which thou now seest hath nothing in it; and cause thee to choose Christ, the only abiding good, for thy portion: if now thy affliction may but bring thy sin to remembrance, and thy dead friend may but bring thee to a sense of thy dead soul, which is as cold to God and spiritual things, as his body is to thee, and more

loathsome in his eyes than that corpse is, or shortly will be, to the eyes of men,—then this day is certainly a day of the greatest mercy that ever yet thou sawest. O happy death, that shall prove life to thy soul!

Why, this is sometimes the way of the Lord with men: "If they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction, then he showeth them their work, and their transgressions, that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth them that they return from iniquity."

O consider, poor pensive creature! that which stole away thy heart from God is now gone: that which eat up thy time and thoughts, that there was no room for God, soul, or eternity, in them, is gone: all the vain expectations that thou raisest up to thyself, from that poor creature which now lies in the dust, are in one day perished. O what an advantage hast thou now for heaven, beyond whatever thou yet hadst! if God will but bless this rod, thou wilt have cause to keep many a thanksgiving day for this day.

I pray let these three things be pondered by you. I can bestow no more comforts upon you—your condition bars the best comforts from you—they belong to the people of God, and you have yet nothing to do with them.

I shall, therefore, turn from you to them, and present some choicer comforts to them, to whom they properly belong, which may be of great use to you in reading; if it be but to convince you of the blessed privilege and state of the people of God in the greatest plunges of troubles in this world, and what advantages their interest in Christ gives them for peace and settlement, beyond that state you are in.

And here I do, with much more freedom and hope of success, apply myself to the work of counselling and comforting the afflicted.—You are the fearers of the Lord, and tremble at his word—the least sin is more formidable to you than the greatest affliction. Doubtless you would rather choose to bury all your children, than provoke and grieve your heavenly Father. Your relations are dear, but Christ is dearer to you by far.

Well, then, let me persuade you to retire a while into your closets, redeem a little time from your unprofitable sorrows, ease and empty your hearts before the Lord, and beg his blessing upon the relieving, quieting, and heart-composing considerations that follow; some of which are more general and common, some more particular and special; but all of them such as, through the blessing of God, may be very useful at this time to your souls.

Consideration 1. Consider, in this day of sorrow, who is the framer and author of this rod by which you now smart. Is it not the Lord? And if the Lord hath done it, it becomes you meekly to submit: "Be still, and know that I am God."

Man and man stand upon even ground: if your fellow-creature do any thing that displeases you, you may not only inquire, who did it? but, why he did it? You may demand his ground and reasons for what he hath done; but you may not do so here: it is expected that this one thing, "The Lord hath done it," should, without any further disputes or contests, silence and quiet you, whatever it be that he hath done. "Why dost thou strive against him? For he giveth not an account of any of his matters."

The supreme Being must needs be an unaccountable and uncontrollable Being.

It is a shame for a child to strive with his father; a shame for a servant to contend with his master: but for a creature to quarrel and strive with the God that made him, O how shameful is it! Surely it is highly reasonable that you be subject to that will whence you proceeded, and that he who formed you and yours should dispose of both as seemeth him good. It is said, "That whatsoever the king did pleased all the people." And shall any thing the Lord doth displease you? He can do no wrong. If we pluck a rose in the bud, as we walk in our gardens, who shall blame us for it? It is our own, and we may crop it off when we please. Is not this the case? Thy sweet bud, which was cropped off before it was fully blown, was cropped off by him that owned it, yea, him that formed it. If his dominion be absolute, surely his disposal should be acceptable.

It was so to good Eli—"It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." And it was so to David—"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." O let it be for ever remembered, that "he whose name alone is Jehovah, is the Most High over all the earth!"

The glorious sovereignty of God is illustriously displayed in two things: his decrees, and his providence. With respect to the first, he saith, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." Here is no ground of disputing with him; for so it is said, "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God, Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it,

Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay?"

And as to his providence, wherein his sovereignty is also manifested, it is said, "Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: for he is raised up out of his habitation." It is spoken of his providential working in the changes of kingdoms, and desolations that attend them.

Now, seeing the case stands thus, that the Lord hath done it, it is his pleasure to have it so; and if it had not been his will, it could never have been as it is: he that gave thee (rather, lent thee) thy relation, hath taken him. O how quiet should this consideration leave thee! If your landlord, who hath many years suffered you to dwell in his house, do at last warn you out of it, though he tell you not why, you will not contend with him, or say he hath done you wrong; much less if he tell you it will be more for his profit and accommodation to take it into his own hand, than let it to you any longer.

Doubtless, reason will tell you, you ought quietly to pack up and quit it. It is your great Landlord from whom you hold (at pleasure) your own, and your relations' lives, that hath now warned you out from one of them. It being more for his glory (it may be) to take it into his own hand by death; and must you dispute the case with him?

Come, Christian, this no way becomes thee; but rather, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Look off from a dead creature,—lift up thine eyes to the sovereign, wise, and holy pleasure, that ordered this affliction: consider who he is, and what thou art;

yea, pursue this consideration till thou canst say, I am filled with the will of God.

Consideration 2. Ponder well the quality of the comfort you are deprived of, and remember, that when you had it, it stood but in the rank and order of common and inferior comforts.

Children, and all other relations, are but common blessings, which God indifferently bestows upon his friends and enemies, and by the having or losing of them, no man knows either love or hatred. It is said of the wicked, That they are full of children, yea, and of children that survive them too; for they leave their substance to their babes. Full of sin, yet full of children; and these children live to inherit their parents' sins and estates together.

It is the mistaking of the quality and nature of our enjoyments, that so plunges us into trouble when we lose them. We think there is so necessary a connection betwixt these creatures and our happiness, that we are utterly undone when they fail us.

But this is our mistake. There is no such necessary connection or dependence: we may be happy without these things. It is not father, mother, wife, or child, in which our chief good and felicity lies: we have higher, better, and more enduring things than these: all these may perish, and yet our souls secure and safe; yea, and our comfort in the way, as well as end, may be safe enough though these be gone. God hath better things to comfort his people with than these, and worse rods to afflict you with than the removal of these: had God let your children live and flourish, and given you ease and rest in your tabernacle, but in the meantime inflicted

spiritual judgments upon your souls, how much more sad had your case been!

But as long as our best mercies are all safe, the things that have salvation in them remain, and only the things that have vanity in them are removed: you are not prejudiced or much hindered as to the attainment of your last end by the loss of these things.

Alas! it was not Christ's intention to purchase for you a sensual content in the enjoyment of these earthly comforts, but to redeem you from all iniquity, purge your corruptions, sanctify your natures, wean your hearts from this vain world, and so to dispose and order your present condition, that, finding no rest and content here, you might the more ardently pant and sigh after the rest which remains for the people of God. And are you not in as probable a way to attain this end now, as you were before? Do you think you are not as likely, by these methods of providence, to be weaned from the world, as by more pleasant and prosperous ones? Every wise man reckons that station and condition to be best for him, which most promotes and secures his last end and great design.

Well then, reckon you are as well without these things as with them; yea, and better too: if they were but clogs and snares upon your affections, you have really lost nothing, if the things wherein your eternal happiness consisteth be yet safe. Many of God's dearest children have been denied such comforts as these; and many have been deprived of them, and yet never the farther from Christ and heaven for that.

Consideration 3. Always remember, that how soon and unexpected soever your parting with your relations was, yet your lease was expired before you lost them, and you enjoyed them every moment of the time that God intended them for you.

Before this relation, whose loss you lament, was born, the time of your enjoyment and separation was unalterably fixed and limited in heaven, by the God of the spirits of all flesh: and although it was a secret to you whilst your friend was with you, yet now it is a plain and evident thing, that this was the time of separation before appointed, and that the life of your friend could by no means be protracted or abbreviated, but must keep your company just so far, and then part with you.

This position wants no full and clear Scripture authority for its foundation: how pregnant and full in that text—"Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee: thou hast appointed him his bounds, which he cannot pass."

The time of our life, as well as the place of our habitation, was fixed before we were born.

It will greatly conduce to your settlement and peace to be well established in this truth, That the appointed time was fully come, when you and your dear relation parted; for it will prevent and save a great deal of trouble which comes from our after reflections.

Oh, if this had been done, or that omitted, had it not been for such miscarriages and oversights, my dear husband, wife, or child, had been alive at this day! No, no; the Lord's time was fully come, and all things concurred and fell in together, to bring

about the pleasure of his will: let that satisfy you. Had the ablest physicians in the world been there, or had they that were there prescribed another course, as it is now, so it would have been, when they had done all. Only it must be precautioned, that the decree of God no way excuses any voluntary sinful neglects or miscarriages. God overrules these things to serve his own ends, but no way approves them; but it greatly relieves, against all our involuntary and unavoidable oversights and mistakes about the use of means, or the timing of them; for it could not be otherwise than now it is.

Objection. But many things are alleged against this position, and that with much seeming countenance, from such scriptures as these: "Blood-thirsty men shall not live out half their days." "Why shouldst thou die before thy time?" "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days." "The fear of the Lord prolongeth days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened."—It is demanded, what tolerable sense we can give these scriptures, while we assert that the term of death is unalterably fixed?

Ans. The sense of these scriptures will be cleared up to full satisfaction, by distinguishing death and the terms of it.

1. We must distinguish death into natural and violent.

The wicked and blood-thirsty man shall not live out half his days; that is, half so long as he might live, according to the course of nature, to the vigour and soundness of his natural constitution: for his wickedness either drowns nature in an excess of riot

and luxury, or exposes him to the hand of justice, which cuts him off for his wickedness before he hath accomplished half his days.

2. Again, we must distinguish of the term or limit for death, which is either general or special.

The general limit is now seventy or eighty years: "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow." To this short limit, the life of man is generally reduced since the flood: and though there be some few exceptions, yet the general rule is not thereby destroyed.

The special limit is that proportion of time which God, by his own counsel and will, hath allotted to every individual person: and it is only known to us by the event. This we affirm to be a fixed and immoveable term: with it all things shall fall in, and observe the will of God in our dissolution at that time. But because the general limit is known, and this special limit is a secret hid in God's own breast —therefore man reckons by the former account, and may be said, when he dies at thirty or forty years old, to be cut off in the midst of his days: for it is so, reckoning by the general account; though he be not cut off till the end of his days, reckoning by his special limit.

Thus, he that is wicked dies before his time; that is, the time he might attain to in an ordinary way; but not before the time God hath appointed. And so in all other objected scripture.

It is not at all proper, in a subject of this nature, to digress into a controversy. Alas! the poor

mourner, overwhelmed with grief, hath no pleasure in that: it is not proper for him at this time; and therefore I shall, for the present, waive the controversy, and wind up this consideration with an humble and serious admonition to the afflicted, that they will wisely consider the matter. The Lord's time was come; your relations lived with you every moment that God intended them for you, before you had them.

O parents! mind this, I beseech you: the time of your child's continuance in the womb was fixed to a minute by the Lord; and when the parturient fulness of that time was come, were you not willing it should be delivered thence into the world? The tender mother would not have it abide one minute longer in the womb, how well soever she loved it; and is there not the same reason we should be willing, when God's appointed time is come, to have it delivered by death out of this state which, in respect of the life of heaven, is but as the life of a child in the womb, to its life in the open world.

And let none say, The death of children is a premature death. God hath ways to ripen them for heaven, whom he intends to gather thither betimes, which we know not: in respect to fitness, they died in a full age, though they be cut off in the bud of their time.

He that appointed the seasons of the year, appointed the seasons of our comforts in relations. And as those seasons cannot be altered, no more can these. All the course of providence is guided by an unalterable decree; what falls out casually to our apprehension, yet falls out necessarily in respect of

God's appointment. O, therefore, be quieted in it; this must needs be as it is!

Consideration 4. Hath God smitten your darling, and taken away the delight of your eyes with this stroke? Bear this stroke with patience and quiet submission; for how know you but your trouble might have been greater from the life, than it is now from the death, of your children?

Sad experience made a holy man once to say, It is better to weep for ten dead children, than for one living child: a living child may prove a continual dropping, yea, a continual dying to the parent's heart. What a sad word was that of David to Abishai! "Behold," saith he, "my son, which came out of my bowels, seeketh my life." I remember Seneca, in his consolatory epistle to his friend Marullus, brings in his friend thus aggravating the death of his child: "O," saith Marullus, "had my child lived with me, to how great modesty, gravity, and prudence, might my discipline have formed and moulded him!" "But," saith Seneca, (which is more to be feared,) "he might have been, as mostly others are; for look," saith he, "what children come even out of the worthiest families: such who exercise both their own and others' lusts: in all whose life, there is not a day without the mark of some notorious wickedness upon it."

I know your tender love to your children will scarce admit such jealousies of them: they are, for the present, sweet, lovely, innocent companions; and you doubt not, but by your care of their education, and prayer for them, they might have been the joy of your hearts.

Why, doubtless, Esau, when he was little, and in his tender age, promised as much comfort to his parents as Jacob did; and I question not but Isaac and Rebecca (a gracious pair) spent as many prayers, and bestowed as many holy counsels upon him as they did upon his brother: but when the child grew up to riper years, then he became a sharp affliction to his parents; for it is said, that when Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, which was a great grief to the mind of Isaac and Rebecca. The word in the original, comes from a root that signifies to imbitter: this child imbittered the minds of his parents by his rebellion against them, and despising their counsels.

And I cannot doubt but Abraham disciplined his family as strictly as any of you. Never man received a higher encomium from God upon that account: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." Nor can I think, but he presented as many and frequent prayers for his children, and particularly for his Ishmael, as any of you: we find one, and that a very pathetical one, recorded—"O that Ishmael might live before thee!" and yet you know how he proved a son that yielded him no more comfort than Esau did to Isaac and Rebecca.

O how much more common is it for parents to see the vices and evils of their children, than their virtues and graces! And where one parent lives to rejoice in beholding the grace of God shining forth in the life of his child, there are twenty, it may be a

hundred, that live to behold, to their vexation and grief, the workings of corruption in them.

It is a note of Plutarch, in his morals—"Nicoles," saith he, "lived not to see the noble victory obtained by his son Themistocles; nor Miltiades to see the battle his son Cimon won in the field; nor Xantippus to hear his son Pericles preach and make orations. Ariston never heard his son Plato's lectures and disputations. But men," saith he, "commonly live to see their children fall a gaming, revelling, drinking, and whoring: multitudes live to see such things to their sorrow." And if thou be a gracious soul, O what a cut would this be to thy very heart! to see those (as David spake of his son Absalom) that came out of thy bowels, to be sinning against God, that God whom thou lovest, and whose honour is dearer to thee than thy very life.

But admit they should prove civil and hopeful children, yet mightest thou not live to see more misery come upon him than thou couldst endure to see? O think what a sad and doleful sight was that to Zedekiah—the king of Babylon brought his children and slew them before his eyes! Horrid spectacle! And that leads to

Consideration 5. How know you, but by this stroke, which you so much lament, God hath taken them away from the evil to come?

It is God's usual way, when some extraordinary calamities are coming upon the world, to hide some of his weak and tender ones out of the way by death: "Merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." He leaves some, and removes others, but

taketh care for the security of all. He provideth a grave for Methuselah before the flood. The grave is a hiding-place to some, and God sees it better for them to be under ground, than above ground, in such evil days.

Just as a careful and tender father, who hath a son abroad at school, hearing the plague is broken out in or near the place, sends his horse presently to fetch home his son, before the danger and difficulty be greater. Death is our Father's pale horse, which he sends to fetch home his tender children, and carry them out of harm's way.

Surely, when national calamities are drawing on, it is far better for our friends to be in the grave in peace, than exposed to the miseries and distresses that are here, which is the meaning of Jeremiah—"Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country."

And is there not a dreadful sound of troubles now in our ears? Do not the clouds gather blackness? Surely all things round about us seem to be preparing and disposing themselves for affliction. The days may be nigh in which you shall say, "Blessed is the womb that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck."

It was in the day wherein the faith and patience of the saints were exercised, that John heard a voice from heaven saying to him, "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth."

Thy friend, by an act of favour, is disbanded by death, whilst thou thyself art left to endure a great fight of affliction. And now, if troubles come, thy

cares and fears will be so much the less, and thy own death so much the easier to thee, when so much of thee is in heaven already. In this case the Lord, by a merciful dispensation, is providing both for their safety, and thy own easier passage to them.

In removing thy friends beforehand, he seems to say to thee, as he did to Peter, "What I do thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt know it." The eye of Providence hath a prospect far beyond thine; it would be, in probability, a harder task for thee to leave them behind, than to follow them.

A tree that is deeply rooted in the earth, requires many strokes to fell it; but when its roots are loosened beforehand, then an easy stroke lays it down upon the earth.

Consideration 6. A parting time must needs come, and why is not this as good as another?

You know beforehand, your child or friend was mortal, and that the thread that linketh you together must be cut. "If any one," saith Basil, "had asked you, when your child was born, What is that which is born? what would you have answered, Would you not have said, It is a man? And if a man, then a mortal vanishing thing. And why, then, are you surprised with wonder to see a dying thing dead?"

"He," saith Seneca, "who complains that one is dead, complains that he was a man." All men are under the same condition: to whose share it falls to be born, to him it remains to die.

We are indeed distinguished by the intervals, but equalized in the issue: "It is appointed to all men once to die." There is a statute law of heaven in the case.

Possibly you think this is the worst time for parting that could be; had you enjoyed it longer, you could have parted easier: but how are you deceived in that! The longer you had enjoyed it, the more loath still you would have been to leave it; the deeper it would have rooted itself in your affection.

Had God given you such a privilege as was once granted to the English Parliament—that the union betwixt you and your friend should not be dissolved, till you yourself were willing it should be dissolved—when, think you, would you have been willing it should be dissolved?

It is well for us and ours that our times are in God's hand, and not in our own. And how immature soever it seemed to be when it was cut down, yet it "came to the grave in a full age, as a shock of corn in its season." They that are in Christ, and in the covenant, never die unseasonably: "Whensoever they die," saith one upon the text, "they die in a good old age; yea, though they die in the spring and flower of youth, they die in a good old age; that is, they are ripe for death whenever they die. Whenever the godly die, it is harvest time with him: though in a natural capacity, he be cut down while he is green, and cropped in the bud or blossom; yet, in his spiritual capacity, he never dies before he is ripe. God can ripen his speedily; he can let out such warm rays and beams of his Spirit upon them, as shall soon maturate the seeds of grace into a preparedness for glory."

It was doubtless the most fit and seasonable time for them that ever they could die: and as it is a fit time for them, so for you also. Had it lived longer,

it might either have engaged you more, and so your parting would have been harder; or else have puzzled and stumbled you more, by discovering its natural corruption; and then what a stinging aggravation of your sorrow would that have been!

Surely the Lord of time is the best judge of time; and in nothing do we more discover our folly and rashness, than in presuming to fix the times either of our comforts or troubles. As for our comforts, we never think they can come too soon; we would have them presently, whether the season be fit or not: "Heal her now, Lord." O let it be done speedily! we are in post haste for our comforts: and for our afflictions, we never think they come late enough: Not at this time, Lord, rather at any other time than now.

But it is good to leave the timing both of the one and the other to Him, whose works are all beautiful in their seasons, and never doth any thing in an improper time.

Consideration 7. Call to mind, in this day of trouble, the covenant you have made with God, and what you solemnly promised him in the day you took him for your God.

It will be very seasonable and useful for thee, Christian, at this time, to reflect upon these transactions, and the frame of thy heart in those days, when a heavier load of sorrow pressed thy heart than thou now feelest.

In those your spiritual distresses, when the burden of sin lay heavy, the curse of the law, the fear of hell, the dread of death and eternity, beset thee on every side, and shut thee up to Christ, the only door of hope—ah! what good news wouldst thou then

have accounted it, to escape that danger, with the loss of all earthly comforts!

Was not this thy cry in those days,—'Lord, give me Christ, and deny me whatever else thou pleasest. Pardon my sin, save my soul; and, in order to both, unite me with Christ, and I will never repine or open my mouth. Do what thou wilt with me: let me be friendless, let me be childless, let me be poor, let me be any thing rather than a Christless, graceless, hopeless soul.'

And when the Lord hearkened to thy cry, and showed thee mercy; when he drew thee off from the world into thy closet, and there treated with thee in secret; when he was working up thy heart to the terms of his covenant, and made thee willing to accept Christ upon his own terms—O then, how heartily didst thou submit to his yoke, as most reasonable and easy at that time it seemed to thee!

Call to mind these days, the secret places where Christ and you made the bargain. Have not these words, or words to this sense, been whispered by thee into his ears with a dropping eye, and melting heart?—

'Lord Jesus, here am I, a poor guilty sinner, deeply laden with sin, fear, and trouble, upon one hand; and there is a just God, a severe law, and everlasting burning, upon the other hand,—but blessed be God, O blessed be God for Jesus the Mediator, who interposeth betwixt me and it! Thou art the only door of hope at which I can escape; thy blood, the only means of my pardon and salvation. Thou hast said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden." Thou hast promised, that he that cometh to thee shall in nowise be cast out.

'Blessed Jesus, thy poor creature cometh to thee upon these encouragements. I come: O but it is with many staggerings, with many doubts and fears of the issue! yet I am willing to come and make a covenant with thee this day.

'I take thee this day to be my Lord, and submit heartily to all thy disposals: do what thou wilt with me, or with mine; let me be rich or poor, any thing or nothing, in this world. I am willing to be as thou wouldst have me. And I do likewise give myself to thee this day, to be thine: all I am, all I have, shall be thine; thine to serve thee, and thine to be disposed at thy pleasure. Thou shalt henceforth be my highest Lord, my chiefest good, my last end.'

Now, Christian, make good to Christ what thou so solemnly promised him. He, I say, he hath disposed of this thy dear relation as pleased him; and is thereby trying thy uprightness in the covenant which thou madest with him: now, where is the satisfaction and content thou promised to take in all his disposals? Where is that covenanted submission to his will? Didst thou expect this affliction that is come upon thee? Didst thou tell him, Lord, I will be content thou shalt, when thou pleasest, take any thing I have, save only this husband, this wife, or this dear child: I reserved this out of the bargain; I shall never endure that thou shouldst kill this comfort? If so, thou didst in all this but prove thyself a hypocrite: if thou wast sincere in thy covenant, as Christ had no reserves on his part, so thou hadst none on thine.

It was all, without any exception, thou then

resignedst to him ; and now, wilt thou go back from thy word, as one that had out-promised himself, and repents the bargain ? or, at least as one that hath forgotten these solemn transactions in the days of thy distress ? Wherein hath Christ failed in one tittle that he promised thee ? Charge him, if thou canst, with the least unfaithfulness : he hath been faithful to a tittle, on his part, O be thou so upon thine ! This day it is put to the proof ; remember what thou hast promised him.

Consideration 8. But if thy covenant with God will not quiet thee, yet methinks God's covenant with thee might be presumed to do it.

Is thy family, which was lately hopeful and flourishing, a peaceful tabernacle, now broken up and scattered—thy posterity, from which thou raisest up to thyself great expectations of comfort in old age, cut off,—so that thou art now like neither to have a name nor memorial left thee in the earth ?

Dost thou sit alone, and mourn, to think whitherto thy hopes and comforts are now come ?

Dost thou read over these words of Job, chap. xxix. 1—5. and comment upon them with many tears ? " Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me ; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness ; as I was in the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle ; when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me !"

Yet let the covenant God hath made with thee, comfort thee in this thy desolate condition.

You know what domestic troubles holy David met

with in a sad succession, not only from the death of children, but, which was much worse, from the wicked lives of his children. There was incest, murder, and rebellion in his family—a far sorer trial than death in their infancy could have been; and yet see how sweetly he relieves himself from the covenant of grace: "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow."

I know this place principally refers to Christ, who was to spring out of David's family, according to God's covenant made with him in that behalf. And yet I doubt not but it hath another, though less principal aspect upon his own family; over all the afflictions and troubles whereof, the covenant of God with him did abundantly comfort him.

And as it comforted him, although his house did not increase, and those that were left were not such as he desired—so it may abundantly comfort you also, whatever troubles or deaths be upon your families, who have an interest in the covenant. For,

1. If you be God's covenant people, though he may afflict, yet he will never forget you: "He is ever mindful of his covenant." You are as much upon his heart in your deepest afflictions, as in the greatest flourish of your prosperity.

You find it hard to forget your child, though it be now turned to a heap of corruption, and loathsome rottenness. O how doth your mind run upon it night and day! your thoughts tire not upon that subject. Why, surely it is much more easy for you

to forget your child, whilst living and most endearing, (much more when dead and undesirable,) than it is for your God to forget you. " Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee:" Isa. xlix. 15.

" Can a woman," the more affectionate sex, " forget her sucking child," her own child, and not a nursing child; her own child, whilst it hangs on the breast, and, together with the milk from the breast, draws love from its mother's heart; can such a thing as this be in nature? Possibly it may; for creature-love is fickle and variable: but " I will not forget thee;" it is an everlasting covenant.

2. As he will never forget you in your troubles, so he will order all your troubles for your good: it is a well-ordered covenant, or a covenant orderly disposed; so that every thing shall work together for your good.

The covenant so orders all your trials, ranks and disposes your various troubles so, as they shall in their orders and places sweetly co-operate, and join their united influences to make you happy.

Possibly you cannot see how the present affliction should be for your good: you are ready to say with Jacob, " Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me." But could you once see how sweetly and orderly all these afflictions work, under the blessing and influence of the covenant, to your eternal good, you would not only be quiet, but thankful for that which now so much afflicts and troubles you.

3. This covenant is not only well-ordered in all

things, but sure: the mercies contained in it, are called "the sure mercies of David." Now, how sweet, how seasonable a support, doth this consideration give to God's afflicted under the rod! You lately made yourself sure of that creature-comfort which hath forsaken you. It may be you said of your child which is now gone, as Lamech said of his son Noah—"This same shall comfort us concerning our work, and toil of our hands." Meaning that his son should not only comfort them, by assisting them in the works of their hands, but for enjoying the fruit of their toil and pains for him.

Probably such thoughts you have had, and raised up to yourselves great expectations of comforts in your old age from it: but now you see you build upon the sand: and where were you now, if you had not a firmer bottom to build upon? But, blessed be God, the covenant-mercies are more sure and solid: God, Christ, and heaven, never start or fade as these things do.

The sweetest creature-enjoyments you ever had, or have in this world, cannot say to you, as your God doth, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." You must part with your dear husband, how well soever you love them; you must bid adieu to the wife of your bosom, how nearly soever your affections be linked, and heart delighted in her. Your children and you must be separated, though they be to you as your own soul.

But though these vanish away, blessed be God there is something that abides. Though "all flesh be as grass, and all the goodliness of it as the flower of the field—though the grass withereth, and the

flower thereof fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it—yet the word of our God shall stand for ever." There is so much of support contained in this one consideration, that, could but your faith fix here, to realize, and apply it, I might lay down my pen at this period, and say, The work is done, there needs no more.

Consideration 9. The hope of the resurrection should powerfully restrain all excesses of sorrow in those that do profess it.

Let them only mourn without measure, who mourn without hope. The husbandman doth not mourn when he casts his seed-corn into the earth, because he sows in hope—commits it to the ground with an expectation to receive it again with improvement. Why, thus stands the case here, and just so the apostle states it—" But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

As if he should say, Look not upon the dead as a lost generation: think not that death hath annihilated and utterly destroyed them. O no! they are not dead, but only asleep; and if they sleep, they shall awake again. You do not use to make outcries and lamentations for your children and friends, when you find them asleep upon their beds. Why, death is but a longer sleep, out of which they shall as surely awake as ever they did in the morning in this world.

I have often wondered at that golden sentence in Seneca—" My thoughts of the dead," saith he,

" are not as others are: I have fair and pleasant apprehensions of them; for I enjoyed them as one that reckoned I must part with them; and I part with them as one that makes account to have them."

He speaks, no doubt, of that enjoyment of them, which his pleasant contemplations of their virtuous actions could give him; for he was wholly unacquainted with the comfortable and heart-supporting doctrine of the resurrection. Had he known the advantages which result from thence, at what a rate may we think he would have spoken of the dead and of their state? but this you profess to believe, and yet sink at a strange rate. O suffer not Heathenism to outvie Christianity! Let not Pagans challenge the greatest believers, to outdo them in a quiet and cheerful behaviour under afflictions.

I beseech thee, reader, if thy deceased friend have left thee any solid ground of hope that he died interested in Christ and the covenant, that thou wilt directly ponder these admirable supports which the doctrine of the resurrection affords:—

1. That the same body which was so pleasant a spectacle to thee, shall be restored again; yea, the same *numerically*, as well as the same specifically: so that it shall not only be *what* it was, but the *who* it was. " These eyes shall behold him, and not another." The very same body you laid, or are now about to lay in the grave, shall be restored again: thou shall find thy own husband, wife, or child, or friend again: I say, the self-same, and not another.

2. And farther, this is supporting, that as you shall see the same person that was so dear to you, so you shall know them to be the same that were once endeared to you on earth in so near a tie of relation.

Indeed you shall know them no more in any carnal relation; death dissolved that bond: but you shall know them to be such, as once were your dear relations in this world; and be able to single them out among that great multitude, and say, This was my father, mother, husband, wife, or child: this was the person for whom I made supplication, who was an instrument of good to me, or to whose salvation God then made me instrumental.

For we may allow in that state all that knowledge which is cumulative and perfective, whatsoever may enlarge and heighten our felicity and satisfaction, as this must needs be allowed to do. Luther's judgment in this point being asked by his friends at supper, the evening before he died, replied thus—"What," said he, "befell Adam? He never saw Eve, but was in a deep sleep when God formed her; yet, when he awaked and saw her, he asked not, what she was, nor whence she came? But saith, 'She was flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone.' Now, how knew he that? He being full of the Holy Ghost, and endued with the knowledge of God, spake thus." After the same manner, we also shall be in the other life renewed by Christ, and shall know our parents, our wives, and children.

And this, among other things, was that with which Augustine comforted the lady Italica, after the death of her husband, telling her, "That she should know him in the world to come, among the glorified saints." Yea, and a greater than either of these, I mean Paul, comforted himself, that the Thessalonians, whom he had converted to Christ, "should be his joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus

Christ at his coming." Which must needs imply his distinct knowledge of them in that day, which must be many hundred years after death had separated them from each other. Whether this knowledge shall be by the glorified eyes discerning any lineaments or property of individuality remaining upon the glorified bodies of our relations, or whether it shall be by immediate revelation, as Adam knew his wife, or as Peter, James, and John, knew Moses and Elias in the mount,—as it is difficult to determine, so it is needless to puzzle ourselves about it.

It is the concurrent judgment of sound divines, and it wants not countenance from Scripture and reason, that such a knowledge of them shall be in heaven: and then the sadness of this parting will be abundantly recompensed by the joy of that meeting. Especially considering,

3. That at our next meeting they shall be unspeakably more desirable, sweet and excellent, than ever they were in this world. They had a desirableness in them here, but they were not altogether lovely, and in every respect desirable: they had their infirmities, both natural and moral; but all these are removed in heaven, and for ever done away: no natural infirmities hang about glorified bodies; nor sinful ones upon perfect spirits of the just. O what lovely creatures will they appear to you then, "when that which is sown now in dishonour, shall be raised in honour!" And then, to crown all,

4. You shall have an everlasting enjoyment of them in heaven, never to part again. The children of the resurrection can die no more. You shall kiss their pale lips and cold cheeks no more: you shall

never fear another parting pull, but be together with the Lord for ever. And this the apostle thought an effectual cordial in this case, when he exhorted the Thessalonians to " comfort one another with these words."

Consideration 10. The present felicity into which all that die in Christ are presently admitted, should abundantly comfort Christians over the death of such, as either carried a lively hope out of the world with them, or have left good grounds of such a hope behind them.

Some there are that carried a lively hope to heaven with them, who could evidence to themselves and friends their interest in Christ and in the covenant. Yea, though they had died in silence, yet their conversations would speak for them, and the tenor of their lives leaves no ground of doubting, touching their death. Others dying in their infancy or youth, though they carried not such an actual hope with them, yet they have left grounds of hope behind them.

Parents, now ponder these grounds: you have prayed for them, you have many times wrestled with the Lord on their behalf: you have taken hold of God's covenant for them, as well as for yourselves, and dedicated them to the Lord: and they have not, by any actions of theirs, destroyed those grounds of your hope, but that you may with much probability conclude they are with God.

Why, if the case be so, what abundant reason have you to be quiet and well satisfied with what God hath done! Can they be better than where they are? Had you better provisions and enter-

tainments for them here, than their heavenly Father hath above?

There is no Christian parent in the world, but would rejoice to see his child outstrip and get before him in grace, that he may be more eminent in parts and service than ever he was; and what reason can be given why we should not as much rejoice to see our children get before us in glory as in grace? They are gone to heaven a few years before you, and is that matter of mourning? Would not your child (if he were not ignorant of you) say, as Christ did to his friends a little before his death, when he saw them cast down at the thoughts of parting—"If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I go unto the Father?" As if he should say, Do you value your own sensible comforts from my bodily presence with you, before my glory and advancement in heaven? Is this love to me? Or is it not rather self-love?

So would your departed friend say to you—'You have professed much love all along to me, my happiness seemed to be very dear to you: how comes it to pass, then, that you mourn so exceedingly now? This is rather the effect of a fond and fleshly, than of rational and spiritual love: if ye loved me with a pure spiritual love, ye would rejoice that I am gone to my Father. It is infinitely better for me to be here, than with you on earth, under sin and sorrow: weep not for me, but for yourselves.'

Alas! though you want your friend's company, he wants not yours: your care was to provide for this child, but Jesus Christ hath provided infinitely better for it than you could: you intended an estate, but he a kingdom for it: you thought upon such or such

a match, but Christ hath forbid all others, and married your child to himself. Would you imagine a higher preferment for the fruit of your bodies?

A King from heaven hath sent for your friend, and do you grudge at the journey? O think, and think again, what an honour it is to you, that Christ hath taken them out of your bosom, and laid them in his own; stripped them out of those garments you have provided, and clothed them in white robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb! Let not your hearts be troubled; rather rejoice exceedingly, that God made you instruments to replenish heaven, and bring forth an heir for the kingdom of God.

Your child is now glorifying God in a higher way than you can: and what though you have lost his bodily presence for a time? Yet I hope you do not reckon that to be your loss, which turns to God's greater glory.

When Jacob heard his Joseph was lord of Egypt, he rather wished himself with Joseph, than his Joseph with him, in wants and straits. So should it be with you. You are yet rolling and tossing upon a tempestuous sea; but your friend is gone into the quiet harbour: desire rather to be there, than that he were again at sea with you.

Consideration 11. Consider how vain a thing all your troubles and self-vexation is: it no way betters your case, nor eases your burden.

As a bullock, by wrestling and sweating in the furrow, makes his yoke to be more heavy, and galls his neck, and spends his strength the sooner, and no way helps himself by that; why, thus stands the case with thee, if thou be as a bullock unaccustomed to

the yoke. What Christ saith of *caring*, we may say of *grieving*—" Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature?"

Cares may break our sleep, yea, break our hearts; but they cannot add to our stature, either in a natural or in a civil notion: so your sorrowing may sooner break your hearts, than the yoke God hath laid on you.

Alas! what is all this, but as the fluttering of a bird in the net, which, instead of freeing, doth but the more entangle itself? It was therefore a wise resolution of David, in this very case, when the will of God was signified in the death of his child—" But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Can I bring him back again? No, I can no more alter the work and purpose of God, than I can change the seasons of the year, or alter the course of the sun, moon, and stars, or disturb the order of the day and night: which are all unalterably established by a firm constitution and ordinance of heaven.

As these seasons cannot be changed by men, so neither can this course and way of his providences be changed: " He is of one mind, and who can turn him?" And what his soul desireth, even that he doth. Indeed, while his pleasure and purpose are unknown to us, there is room for fasting and prayer to prevent the thing we fear; but when the purpose of God is manifested in the issue, and the stroke is given, then it is the vainest thing in the world to fret and vex ourselves, as David's servants thought he would do, as soon as he should hear the child

was dead: but he was wiser than do so; his tears and cries to God before, had the nature and use of the means to prevent the affliction; but when it was come, and could not be prevented, then they were of no use, to no purpose in the world. "Wherefore should I fast?" as if he should have said, To what end, use, or purpose will it be now?

Well, then, cast not away your strength and spirits to no advantage; reserve them for future exercises and trials. Time may come that you may need all the strength you have, and much more, to support greater burdens than this.

Consideration 12. The Lord is able to restore all your lost comforts in relations, double to you, if you meekly submit to him, and patiently wait upon him under the rod.

When Esau had lost his blessing, he said, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father?" But your Father hath more blessings for you than one; his name is, "The Father of Mercies." He can beget and create as many mercies for you as he pleaseth: relations, and the comforts of them, are at his command.

It is but a few months or years past, and these comforts, whose loss you now lament, were not in being; nor did you know whence they should arise to you; yet the Lord gave the word, and commanded them for you: and if he please, he can make the death of these but like a scythe to the meadow that is mown down, or a razor to the head that is shaved bare; which, though it lay you under the present trouble and reproach of barrenness, yet doth but make way for a double increase, a second spring with advantage.

So that, as it was with the captive church in respect of her special children in the days of her captivity and reproach, the Lord made up all with advantages to her—even to her own astonishment: "The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thy ears, The place is too strait for me, give place for me that I may dwell."

Thus may he deal with you as to your natural children and relations. So that what the man of God said to Amaziah, may be applied to the case in hand: "Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this."

O say not, What shall I do for friends and relations? Death hath robbed me of all my comfort in them. Why, the Lord is able to give you much more. But then, as ever you expect to see your future blessings multiplied, look to it, and be careful that you neither dishonour God, nor grieve him by your unsubmissive and impatient carriage under the present rod.

God took away all Job's children, and that at one stroke, and the stroke immediate and extraordinary: and that when they were grown up, and planted (at least some of them) in distinct families; yea, whilst they were endearing each other by the mutual expressions of affection. This must be yielded to be an extraordinary trial; yet he meekly receives, and patiently bears it from the hand of the Lord.

"You have heard of the patience of Job," saith the apostle James, "and seen the end of the Lord."

Not only the gracious end or intention of the Lord in all his afflictions, but the happy end and issue the Lord gave to all his afflictions, of which you have the account—"The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." The number of his children was not double to what he had, as all his other comforts were; but though the Lord only restored the same number to him again that he took away, yet it is probable, the comfort he had in these latter children was double to what he had in the former. There is nothing lost by waiting patiently and submitting willingly to the Lord's disposal.

It is as easy with the Lord to revive, as it is to remove, your comforts in relations. There is a sweet expression to this purpose in Psalm xviii. 28. "For thou, Lord, wilt light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness."

Every comfortable enjoyment, whether it be in relations, estate, health, or friends, is a candle lighted by Providence, for our comfort in this world; and they are but candles, which will not always last, and those that last longest, will be consumed and wasted at last: but oftentimes it falls out with them as with candles, they are blown out before they are half consumed; yea, almost as soon as lighted up, and then we are in darkness for the present.

It is a dark hour with us when these comforts are put out: but David's faith did, and ours may, comfort us with this, that he that blew out the candle can light up another: "Thou, Lord, shalt light my candle; the Lord my God shall enlighten my darkness;" that is, the Lord will renew my comforts, after the present sad estate I am in, and chase away

that trouble and darkness which at present lies upon me. Only beware of offending him, at whose will your lights and comforts come and go. Michal displeased the Lord, and therefore "had no child unto the day of her death."

Hannah humbly waited upon the Lord for the blessing of children, and the Lord remembered her —he enlightened her condition with that comfort when she was as a lamp despised. There is no comfort you have lost, but God can restore it; yea, double it in kind, if he seeth it convenient for you. And if not, then,

Consideration 13. Consider, though he should deny you any more comforts of that kind, yet he hath far better to bestow upon you, with which such as these deserve not to be named.

You have an excellent scripture to this purpose: "For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even to them will I give in my house, and within my walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off."

Men's names are said to be continued in their issue, in their male issue especially, and consequently to fail in such as wanted issue: and a numerous issue is deemed no small honour. God, therefore, promised here to supply and make good the want of issue, and whatsoever, either honour here, or memorial hereafter, might from it have accrued to them, by bestowing upon them matter of far greater honour, and more durable: a name better, or before the name of sons or daughters.

It is a greater honour to be the child of God, than to have the greatest honour or comfort that ever children afforded their parents in this world.

Poor heart! thou art now dejected by this affliction that lies upon thee, as if all joy and comfort were now cut off from thee in this world.

A cloud dwells upon all other comforts: this affliction hath so imbittered thy soul, that thou tastest no more in any other earthly comforts than in the white of an egg. O that thou didst but consider the consolations that are with God for such as answer his ends in affliction, and patiently wait on him for their comfort! He hath comforts for you far transcending the joy of children.

This some have found when their children have been cut off from them, and that in so eminent a degree, that they have little valued their comfort in children in comparison with this comfort.

I will therefore set down a pregnant instance of the point in hand, as I find it recorded by the grave and worthy author of that excellent book, entitled, "The Fulfilling of the Scripture:"—

"Another notable instance of grace, with a very remarkable passage in his condition, I shall here mention. One Patrick Mackewrath, who lived in the west parts of Scotland, whose heart in a remarkable way the Lord touched, and after his conversion (as he showed to many Christian friends) was in such a frame so affected with a new world, wherein he was entered, the discoveries of God, and of a life to come, that for some months together he did seldom sleep, but was still taken up in wondering. His life was very remarkable for tenderness and near converse

with God in his walk; and, which was worthy to be noticed, one day after a sharp trial, having his only son suddenly taken away by death, he retired alone for several hours, and when he came forth did look so cheerfully, that to those who asked him the reason thereof, and wondered at the same in such a time, he told them he had got that in his retirement with the Lord, that to have it afterward renewed, he would be content to lose a son every day."

O what a sweet exchange had he made! Surely he had gold for brass, a pearl for a pebble, a treasure for a trifle: for so great, yea, and far greater is the disproportion betwixt the sweet light of God's countenance, and the faint, dim light of the best creature-enjoyment.

Would it please the Lord to make this sun arise and shine upon you, now when the stars that shined with a dim and borrowed light are gone down, you would see such gain by the exchange, as would quickly make you cast in your votes with him we now mentioned, and say, Lord, let every day be such as this funeral day; let my hours be as this, so that I may see and taste what I now do. How gladly would I part with the dearest and nearest creature-comfort I own in this world!

The gracious and tender Lord hath his divine cordial reserved on purpose for such sad hours: these are sometimes given before some sharp trial, to prepare for it, and sometimes after, to support under it.

I have often heard it from the mouth, and found it in the diary, of a sweet Christian, now with God, that a little before the Lord removed her dear husband by death, there was such an abundant out-let

of the love of God unto her soul, for several days and nights following, that when the Lord took away her husband by death, though he were a gracious and sweet-tempered, and by her, most tenderly-beloved husband, she was scarce sensible of the stroke, but carried quite above all earthly things, their comforts and their troubles; so that she had almost lost the thought of her dear husband in God. And had not the Lord taken this course with her, she concluded that blow had not been possible to be borne by her, she must have sunk without such a preparative.

A husband, a wife, a child, are great, very great things, as they stand by other creatures; but surely they will seem little things, and next to nothing, when the Lord shall set himself by them before the soul. And how know you, but God hath bid these earthly comforts stand aside this day, to make way for heavenly ones? It may be, God is coming to communicate himself more sweetly, more sensibly than ever to your souls, and these are the providences which must cast up and prepare the way of the Lord. Possibly God's meaning in their death is but this: Child, stand aside, thou art in my way, and fillest my place in thy parent's heart.

Consideration 14. Be careful you exceed not in your grief for the loss of earthly things; considering that Satan takes the advantage of all extremes.

You cannot touch any extreme, but you will be touched by that enemy, whose greatest advantages lie in assaulting you here.

Satan is called "the ruler of the darkness of this world;" that is, his kingdom is supported by dark-

ness. Now, there is a twofold darkness, which gives Satan great advantage: the darkness of the mind, to wit, ignorance; and the darkness of the condition, to wit, trouble and affliction. Of the former, the apostle speaks chiefly in that text: but the latter also is by him often improved, to carry on his designs upon us: when it is a dark hour of trouble with us, then it is his fittest season to tempt.

That cowardly spirit falls upon the people of God when they are down and low in spirit as well as state. Satan would never have desired that the hand of God should have been stretched out upon Job's person, estate, and children; but he promised himself a notable advantage, therein to poison his spirit with vile thoughts of God: "Do this," saith he, "and he will curse thee to thy face."

What the Psalmist observes of natural, is as true of metaphorical darkness: "Thou makest darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth; the young lions roar after their prey."

When it is dark night with men, it is noon-day with Satan; that is, our suffering time is his busiest working time: many a dismal suggestion he then plants and grafts upon our affliction, which are much more dangerous to us than the affliction itself.

Sometimes he injects desponding thoughts into the afflicted soul: "Then said I, I am cut off from before thine eyes," and "my hope is perished from the Lord, remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall."

Sometimes he suggests hard thoughts of God: "The Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me." Yea, that he hath dealt more severely with us than

any other: "See and behold, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

And sometimes murmuring and repining thoughts against the Lord: the soul is displeased at the hand of God upon it. Jonah was angry at the hand of God, and said, "I do well to be angry, even unto death." What dismal thoughts are these! And how much more affecting to a gracious soul than the loss of any outward enjoyment in this world!

And at times very irreligious and atheistical thoughts, as if there were no privilege to be had by religion, and all our pains, zeal, and care about duty, were little better than lost labour. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning."

By these things Satan gets no small advantage over the afflicted Christian: for albeit these thoughts are his burden, and God will not impute them to the condemnation of his people; yet they rob the soul of peace, and hinder it from duty, and make it act uncomely under affliction, to the stumbling and hardening of others in their sin: beware, therefore, lest by your excesses of sorrow ye give place to the devil; we are not ignorant of his devices.

Consideration 15. Give no way to excessvie sorrows upon the account of the affliction, if ye have any regard to the honour of God and religion, which will thereby be exposed to reproach.

If you slight your own honour, do not slight the honour of God and religion too. Take heed how

you carry it in a day of trouble; many eyes are upon you. It is a true observation that a late worthy author hath made upon this case: "What will the atheist, and what will the profane scoffer say, when they shall see this? So sottish and malicious they are, that if they do but see you in affliction, they are straightway scornfully demanding, Where is your God?

"But what will they say, if they should hear you yourselves unbelievingly cry out, Where is our God? Will they not be ready to cry, This is the religion they make such boast of: you see how little it does for them in a day of extremity: they talk of promises, rich and precious promises; but where are they now? or to what purpose do they serve? They said they had a treasure in heaven; what ails them to mourn so then, if their riches be there?"

O beware what you do before the world! they have eyes to see what you can do, as well as ears to hear what you can say. And as long as your carriage under troubles is so much like their own, they will never think your principles are better than theirs. Carnal worldlings will be drawn to think, that, whatever fine talk you might have about God and heaven, your hearts were most upon the same things that theirs were, since your grief for their removal is as great as theirs.

They know by experience what a stay it is to the heart to have an able, faithful friend to depend upon, or to have hopes of a great estate shortly to fall to them; and they will never be persuaded you have any such ground of comfort, if they see you as much cast down as they that pretend to no such matters.

By this means, the precepts of Christ to constancy and contentment in all estates, will come to be looked upon (like those of the Stoics) only as brave words, but such as are impossible to be practised; and the whole of the gospel will be taken for an airy notion, since they that profess greatest regard to it, are no more helped thereby.

O what a shame is it that religion should in this case make no more difference betwixt man and man! Wherefore, show to the world, (whatever their common censures are,) that it is not so much your care to differ from them in some opinion, and a little strictness, as in humility, contempt of the world, and heavenly-mindedness: and now let these graces display themselves by your cheerful, patient deportment, under all your grievances.

Wherefore hath God planted those excellent graces in your soul, but that he might be glorified, and you benefited, by the exercises of them in tribulation? Should these be suppressed and hid, and nothing but the pride, passion, and unmortified earthliness of your hearts set on work, and discovered in time of trouble—what a slur, what a wound will you give to the glorious name which is called upon by you! And then, if your hearts be truly gracious, that will pierce you deeper than ever your affliction which occasioned it did.

I beseech you, therefore, be tender of the name of God, if you will not be so of your own peace and comfort.

Consideration 16. Be quiet, and hold your peace; you little know how many mercies lie in the womb of this affliction.

Great at times are the benefits of a sharp rousing affliction to the people of God: and all might have them at all times, were they more careful to improve them. Holy David thankfully acknowledgeth, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

And surely there is as much good in them for you as for him, if the Lord sanctify them to such ends and uses as his were sanctified unto.

Such a smarting rod as this came not before there was need enough of it, and possibly you saw the need of some awakening providence yourselves; but if not, the Lord did: he took not up the rod to smite you, till his faithfulness and tender love to your souls called upon him to correct you.

You now sit pensive under the rod, sadly lamenting and deploring the loss of some earthly comfort; your heart is surcharged with sorrow, your eyes run down upon every mention and remembrance of your dear friend. Why, if there were no more, this alone may discover the need you have of this rod; for doth not all this sorrow at parting plainly speak how much your heart was set upon, how fast your heart was glued to this earthly comfort?

Now you see that your afflictions were sunk many degrees deeper into the creature than you are aware of. And what should God do in this case by you? Should he suffer you to cleave to the creature more and more? Should he permit it to purloin and exhaust your love and delight, and steal away your heart from himself? This he could not do and love you. The more impatient you are under this affliction, the more need you had of it.

And what if by this stroke the Lord will awaken

your drowsy soul, and recover you out of that pleasant but dangerous spiritual slumber, into which you were fallen, whilst you had pillowed your head upon this pleasant, sensible creature-enjoyment? Is not this really better for you, than if he should say, 'Sleep on: he is joined to idols, let him alone: he is departing from me, the fountain, to a broken cistern; let him go?'

Yea, what if by this stroke upon one of the pleasantest things you had in the world, God will discover to you more sensibly and effectually than ever, the vanity both of that and all other earthly comforts, so as that you shall from henceforth never let forth your hearts, your hope, your love, and delight, to any of them, as you did before? You could talk before of the creature's vanity; but I question whether ever you had so clear and convincing a sight of its vanity as you have this day: and is not this a considerable mercy in your eyes?

Now, if ever God is weaning you from all fond opinions, and vain expectations from this world, by this your judgment of the creature is rectified, and your affections to all other enjoyments on earth moderated: and is this nothing? O, doubtless, it is a greater mercy to you than to have your friend alive again.

And what if by this rod your wandering, gadding heart shall be driven home to God, your neglected duties revived, your decayed communion with God restored, a spiritual heavenly frame of heart recovered? What will you say then?

Surely you will bless that merciful hand which removed the obstructions; and adore the divine wisdom and goodness, that, by such a device as this, recovered

you to himself. Now you can pray more constantly, more spiritually, more affectionately, than before. O blessed rod, which buds and blossoms with such fruits as these! Let this be written among your best mercies; for you shall have cause to adore and bless God eternally for this beneficial affliction.

Consideration 17. Suffer not yourselves to be transported by impatience, and swallowed up of grief, because God hath exercised you under a smarting rod; for, as smarting as it is, it is comparatively a gentle stroke to what others as good as yourselves have felt.

Your dear relation is dead; be it so: here is but a single death before you; but others have seen many deaths combined into one upon their relation, to which yours is nothing.

Zedekiah saw his children murdered before his eyes, and then had those eyes (alas! too late) put out. —The worthy author of that excellent book * forementioned, tells us of a choice and godly gentlewoman in the north of Ireland, who, when the rebellion broke out there, fled with three children, one of them upon the breast. They had not gone far, before they were stripped naked by the Irish, who, to their admiration, spared their lives. (It is like, they concluded that cold and hunger would kill them.) Afterwards, going on to the foot of a river which runs to Lochneach, others met them, and would have cast them into the river; but this godly woman, not dismayed, asked a little liberty to pray; and as she lay naked on the frozen ground, got resolution not to go on her feet to so unjust a death; upon which,

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* "The Fulfilling of the Scriptures."

having called her, and she refusing, was dragged by the heals along that rugged way, to be cast in with her little ones in company. But she then turned, and, on her knees, says, "You should, I am sure, be Christians, and men I see you are. In taking away our miserable lives, you do us a pleasure; but know, that as we never wronged you nor yours, you must remember to die also yourselves, and one day give an account of this cruelty to the Judge of heaven and earth." Hereupon they resolved not to murder them with their own hands, but returned them all naked upon a small island in the river, without any provision, there to perish.

The next day, the two boys, having crept aside, found the hide of a beast which had been killed at the root of a tree; which the mother cast over them, lying upon the snow. The next day a little boat goes by, unto whom she calls for God's sake to take them out; but they, being Irish, refused. She desired a little bread, but they said they had none; then she begs a coal of fire, which she obtained; and thus, with some fallen chips, made a little fire; and the children, taking a piece of the hide, laid it on the coals, and began to gnaw the leather: but, without any extraordinary divine support, what could this do?

Thus they lived ten days, without any visible means of help, having no bread but ice and snow, nor drink, but water. The two boys being nearly starved, she pressed them to go out of her sight, not being able to see their death; yet God delivered them as miraculously at last, as he had supported them all the while.

But judge whether a natural death, in an ordinary way, be comparable to such a trial as this; and yet thus the Lord did by this choose an eminently gracious woman.

And Mr. Wall, in his "None but Christ," relates a sad passage of a poor family in Germany, who were driven to that extremity in the famine, that at last the parents made a motion one to the other, to sell one of their children for bread to sustain themselves and the rest; but when they came to consider which child it should be, their hearts so relented and yearned upon every one, that they resolved rather all to die together. Yea, we read in Lam. iv. 10. "The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children."

But why speak I of these extremities? How many parents, yea, some godly ones too, have lived to see their children dying in profaneness, and some by the hand of justice, lamenting their rebellions with a rope about their necks!

Ah, reader, little dost thou know what stings there are in the afflictions of others! Surely you have no reason to think the Lord hath dealt more bitterly with you than any: it is a gentle stroke, a merciful dispensation, if you compare it with what others have felt.

Consideration 18. If God be your God, you have really lost nothing by the removal of any creature-comfort.

God is the fountain of all true comfort: creatures, the very best and sweetest, are but cisterns to receive and convey to us what comfort God is pleased to communicate to them; and if the cistern be bro-

ken, or the pipe cut off, so that no more comf
be conveyed to us that way, he hath other ways and mediums to do it by, which we think not of; and if he please, he can convey his comforts to his people without any of them: and if he do it more immediately, we shall be no losers by that; for no comforts in the world are so delectable and ravishingly sweet, as those that flow immediately from the fountain. And it is the sensuality of our hearts that causes us to affect them so inordinately, and grieve for the loss of them so immoderately, as if we had not enough in God without these creature-supplements.

Is the fulness of the fountain yours? and yet do you cast down yourselves, because the broken cistern is removed? The best creatures are no better. Cisterns have nothing but what they receive, and broken ones cannot hold what is put into them. Why then do ye mourn, as if your life were bound up in the creature? You have as free an access to the fountain as you had before. It is the advice of a heathen, (and let them take the comfort of it,) to repair, by a new earthly comfort, what we have lost in the former.

"Thou hast carried forth him whom thou lovedst," saith Seneca; "seek one whom thou mayest love in his stead: it is better to repair than bemoan thy loss."

But if God never repair your loss, in things of the same kind, you know he can abundantly repair it in himself.

Ah, Christian! is not one kiss of his mouth, one glimpse of his countenance, one seal of his Spirit, a more sweet and substantial comfort than the sweetest

relation in this world can afford you? If the stream fail, repair to the fountain: there is enough still; God is where he was, and what he was, though the creature be not.

Consideration 19. Though you may want a little comfort in your life, yet surely it may be recompensed to you by a more easy death.

The removal of your friends before you, may turn to your great advantage, when your hour is come that you must follow them. Oh! how have many good souls been clogged and ensnared in their dying hours, by the love, cares, and fears they have had about those they must leave behind them in a sinful world! Your love to them might have proved a snare to you, and caused you to hang back as loath to go hence; for these are the things that make men loath to die. And thus it might have been with you, except God had removed them beforehand, or should give you in that day such sights of heaven, and tastes of divine love, as should master and mortify all your earthly affections to these things.

I knew a gracious person, now in heaven, who, for many weeks in her last sickness, complained that she found it hard to part with a dear relation, and that there was nothing proved a greater clog to her soul than this. It is much more easy to think of going to our friends, who are in heaven before us, than of parting with them, and leaving our desirable and dear ones behind us.

And who knows what cares and distracting thoughts we then may be pestered and distracted with on their account? What shall become of these when I am gone? I am now to leave them, God knows to

what want, miseries, temptations, and afflictions, in the midst of a deceitful, defiling, dangerous world.

I know it is our duty to leave our fatherless children and friendless relations with God; to trust them with him who gave them to us: and some have been enabled cheerfully to do so when they were parting with them. Luther could say, "Lord, thou hast given me a wife and children: I have little to leave them; nourish, teach, and keep them, O thou Father of the fatherless, and Judge of the widow!" But every Christian hath not Luther's faith. Some find it a hard thing to disentangle their affections at such a time: but now, if God hath sent all yours before you, you have so much the less to do: death may be easier to you than others.

Consideration 20. But if nothing that hath been yet said will stick with you, then, lastly, remember that you are near that state and place which admits no sorrows, nor sad reflections, upon any such accounts as these.

Yet a little while, and ye shall not miss them, ye shall not need them; but ye shall live as the angels of God. We now live partly by faith, partly by sense; partly upon God, and partly upon the creature: our state is mixed, therefore our comforts are so too. But when God shall be all in all, and we shall be as the angels of God in the way and manner of our living, how much will the case be altered with us then, from what it is now!

Angels neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither shall the children of the resurrection: when the days of our sinning are ended, the days of our mourning shall be so too. No graves were opened

till sin entered, and no more shall be opened when sin is excluded.

Our glorified relations shall live with us for ever: they shall complain no more, die no more; yea, this is the happiness of that state to which you are passing on, that your souls being in the nearest conjunction with God, the fountain of joy, you shall have no concernment out of him. You shall not be put upon these exercises of patience, nor subjected to such sorrow as you now feel, any more. It is but a little while, and the end of all these things will come. Oh, therefore, bear up as persons that expect such a day of jubilee at hand!

And thus I have finished the second general head of this discourse, which is a dissuasive from the sin of immoderate sorrow.

III. I now proceed to the third thing proposed, namely, To remove the pleas and excuses for this immoderate grief. It is natural to men, yea, to good men, to justify their excesses, or at least extenuate them, by pleading for their passions, as if they wanted not cause and reason enough to excuse them. If these be fully answered, and the soul once convinced, and left without apology for its sins, it is then in a fair way for its cure, which is the last thing designed in this treatise.

My present business, therefore, is to satisfy those objections, and answer those reasons, which are commonly pleaded in this case, to justify our excessive grief for lost relations. And though I shall carry it in that line of relation to which the text directs, yet it is equally applicable to all others.

Plea 1. You press me, by many great considerations, to meekness and quiet submission under this heavy stroke of God; but you little know what a sting my soul feels now in it.

This child was a child of many prayers; it was a Samuel begged of the Lord, and I concluded, when I had it, that it brought with it the returns and answers of many prayers. But now I see it was nothing less: God had no regard to my prayer about it; nor was it given me in that special way of mercy that I was imagining it to be. My child is not only dead, but my prayers in the same day shut out and denied.

Ans. 1. That you prayed for your children before you had them, was your duty; and if you prayed not for them submissively, referring it to the pleasure of God to give or deny them, to continue or remove them, as should seem good to him, that was your sin: you ought not to limit the Holy One of Israel, nor prescribe to him, nor capitulate with him, for what term you should enjoy your outward comforts. If you did so, it was your evil, and God hath justly rebuked it by this stroke: if you pray conditionally and submissively, referring both the mercy asked and continuance of it, to the will of God, as you ought to do, then there is nothing in the death of your child that crosses the true scope and intent of your prayer.

Ans. 2. Your prayers may be answered, though the thing prayed for be withheld; yea, or though it should be given for a little while, and snatched away from you again. There are four ways of God's answering prayers:—By giving the thing prayed for presently,—or by suspending the answer for a time,

and giving it afterwards,—or by withholding that mercy which you ask, from you, and giving you a much better mercy in the room of it,—or, lastly, by giving you patience to bear the loss and want of it: "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Now, if the Lord hath taken away your child or friend, and in lieu thereof given you a meek, quiet, submissive heart to his will, you need not say he hath shut out your cry.

Plea 2. But I have lost a lovely, obliging, and most endearing child, one that was beautiful and sweet; it is a stony heart that would not dissolve into tears for the loss of one so desirable, and so engaging, as this was. Ah! it is no common loss.

Ans. 1. The more lovely and engaging your relation was, the more excellent will your patience and contentment with the will of God in its death be: the more loveliness the more self-denial; and the more self-denial, the more grace. Had it been a thousand times more endearingly sweet than it was, it was not too good to deny for God. If, therefore, obedience to the will of God do indeed master natural affections, and that you look upon patience and contentment as much more beautiful than the sweetest and most desirable enjoyment on earth, it may turn to you for a testimony of the truth and strength of grace, that you can, like Abraham, part with a child whom you so dearly love, in obedience to the will of your God, whom you love infinitely more.

Ans. 2. The loveliness and beauty of our children and relations, though it must be acknowledged a good gift from the hand of God, yet it is but a common gift, and oftentimes becomes a snare, and is

in its own nature but a transitory, vanishing thing, and therefore no such aggravation of the loss as is pretended.

I say it is but a common gift: Eliab, Adonijah, and Absalom, had as lovely presences as any in their generation. Yea, it is not only common to the wicked with the godly, but to brute animals, as well as men; and to most that excel in it, it becomes a temptation: the souls of some had been more beautiful and lovely, if their bodies had been less so. Besides, it is but a flower which flourishes in its month, and then fades. This, therefore, should not be reflected on as so great a circumstance, to aggravate your trouble.

Ans. 3. But if your relation sleep in Jesus, he will appear ten thousand times more lovely in the morning of the resurrection, than ever he was in this world. What is the exactest, purest beauty of mortals, to the incomparable beauty of the saints in the resurrection? "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." In this hope we part with them; therefore act suitably to your hopes.

Plea 3. O but my child was nipped off by death in the very bud; I did but see, and love, and part. Had I enjoyed it longer, and had time to suck out the sweetness of such an enjoyment, I could have borne it easier; but its months or years with me were so few, that they only served to raise an expectation, which was quickly, and therefore the more sadly disappointed.

Ans. 1. Did your friend die young, or was the bond of any other relation dissolved almost as soon

as made? Let not this seem so intolerable a load to you; for if you have ground to hope they died in Christ, then they lived long enough in this world.* It is truly said, "He hath sailed long enough, that hath won the harbour; and he hath fought long enough, that hath obtained the victory: he hath run long enough, that hath touched the goal; and he hath lived long enough on earth, that hath won heaven, be his days ever so few."

Ans. 2. The sooner your relation died, the less sin hath been committed, and the less sorrow felt. What can you see in this world but sin or sorrow? a quick passage through it to glory, is a special privilege. Surely the world is not so desirable a place, that Christians should desire an hour's time longer in it for themselves or theirs, than serves to fit them for a better.

Ans. 3. And whereas you imagine the parting would have been easier, if the enjoyment had been longer, it is a fond and groundless suspicion. The longer you had enjoyed them, the stronger would the endearments have been. A young and tender plant may be easily drawn up by a single hand; but when it hath spread and fixed its roots many years in the earth, it will require many a strong blow and hard tug to root it up: affections, like those under-ground roots, are fixed and strengthened by nothing more than consuetude and long possession: it is much easier parting now, than it would be hereafter, whatever you think. However, this should satisfy, that God's time is the best time.

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* Vide Baxter's Epistle to the Life of Mr. John Janeway.

Plea 4. O but I have lost all in one: it is my only one; I have none left in its room to repair the breach, and make up the loss. If God had given me other children to take comfort in, the loss had not been so great; but to lose all at one stroke is insupportable.

Ans. 1. Religion allows not to Christians a liberty of expressing the death of their dear relations, by so hard a word as the loss of them is. They are not lost, but sent before you. And it is a shameful thing for a Christian to be reproved for such an uncomely expression by a heathen. It is enough to make us blush to read what a heathen said in this case: "Never say thou hast lost any thing," saith Epictetus, "but that it is returned. Is thy son dead? He is only restored. Is thy inheritance taken from thee? It is also returned." And a while after he adds, "Let every thing be as the gods will have it."

Ans. 2. It is not a fit expression, to say you have lost all in one, except that one be Christ; and he being once yours, can never be lost. Doubtless your meaning is, you have lost all your comfort of that kind: and what though you have? Are there not multitudes of comforts yet remaining of a higher kind, and more precious and durable nature? If you have no more of that sort, yet so long as you have better, what cause have you to rejoice!

Ans. 3. You too much imitate the way of the world in this complaint: they know not how to repair the loss of one comfort, but by another of the same nature, which must be put in its room to fill up the vacancy. But have you no other way to supply

your loss? Have you not a God that fills the place of any creature that leaves you? Surely this would better become a man whose portion is in this life, than one who professes God is his all in all.

Plea 5. O but my only one is not only taken away, but there remains no expectation or probability of any more: I must now look upon myself as a dry tree, never to take comfort in children any more, which is a cutting thought.

Ans. 1. Suppose what you say, that you have no hope nor expectation of another child remaining to you; yet if you have a hope of better things than children, you have no reason to be cast down: bless God for higher and better hopes than these. The Lord comforts them that have no expectations of sons or daughters with this: "That he will give unto them in his house, and within his walls, a place and a name better than of sons and daughters; even an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off." There are better mercies and higher hopes than these: though your hopes of children, or from children, should be cut off, yet, if your eternal hope be secure, and such as shall not make you ashamed, you should not be so cast down.

Ans. 2. If God will not have your comforts to lie any more in children, then resolve to place them in himself, and you shall never find cause to complain of loss by such an exchange. You will find that in God which is not to be had in the creature: one hour's communion with him should give you that which the happiest parent never yet had from his children: you will exchange brass for gold, perishing vanity for solid and abiding excellency.

Plea 6. But the suddenness of the stroke is amazing. God gave little or no warning to prepare for this trial; death executed its commission as soon as it opened it. My dear husband, wife, or child, was snatched unexpectedly out of my arms by an unexpected stroke; and this makes my stroke heavier than my complaint.

Ans. 1. That the death of your relation was so sudden and surprising, was much your own fault, who ought to have lived in the daily sense of his vanity, and the expectation of your separation from him: you knew it to be a dying comfort in its best estate; and it is no such wonderful thing to see that dead, which you knew before to be dying: besides, you heard the changes ringing round about you in other families; you frequently saw other parents, husbands, and wives, carrying forth their dead; and what are all these but warnings given you to prepare for the like trials? Surely, then, it was your own security and regardlessness that made this affliction so surprising to you; and who is to be blamed for that you know.

Ans. 2. There is much difference betwixt the sudden death of infants, and that of grown persons: the latter may have much work to do, many sins actually to repent of, and many evidences of their interest in Christ to examine and clear, in order to their more comfortable death; and so, sudden death may be deprecated by them. But the case of infants, who exercise not their reason, is far different; they have no such work to do, but are purely passive: all that is done in order to their salvation, is done by God immediately upon them. So it comes all to one, whether their death be more quick or slow.

Ans. 3. You complain of the suddenness of the stroke; but, another will be ready to say, 'Had my friend died in that manner, my affliction had been nothing to what now it is: I have seen many deaths combined into one: I saw the gradual approaches of it upon my dear relation, who felt every tread of death, as it came on toward him, who often cried with Job, "Wherefore is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul; who long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the grave?"'

That which you reckon the sting of your affliction, others would have reckoned a favour and privilege. How many tender parents, and other relations, who loved their friends as dearly as yourselves, have been forced to their knees upon no other errand but this, to beg the Lord to hasten the separation, and put an end to that sorrow, which to them was much greater than the sorrow for the dead!

Plea 7. You press me to moderation of sorrows, and I know I ought to show it; but you do not know how the case stands with me: there is a sting in this affliction, that none feels but myself; and O how intolerable it is now! I neglected proper means in season to preserve life, or miscarried in the use of means. I now see such a neglect, or such a mistake about the means, as I cannot but judge greatly to contribute to that sad loss which I now, too late, lament.

O my negligence! O my rashness and inconsiderateness! How doth my conscience now smite me for my folly; and by this aggravate my burden,

beyond what is usually felt by others! Had I seasonably applied myself to the use of proper means, and kept strictly to such courses and counsels as those who are able and skilful might have prescribed, I might now have had a living husband, wife, or child: whereas I am now not only bereaved, but am apt to think I have bereaved myself of them. Surely there is no sorrow like unto my sorrow!

Ans. 1. Though it be an evil to neglect and slight the means ordained by God for the recovery of health, yet it is no less evil to ascribe too much to them, or rely too much on them. The best means in the world are weak and ineffectual without God's assistance and concurrence, and they never have that assistance and concurrence when his time is come; and that it was fully come in your friend's case, is manifested now by the event. So that, if your friend had had the most excellent helps the world affords, they would have availed nothing. This consideration takes place only in your case, who see what the will of God is by the issue, and may not be pleaded by any whilst it remains dubious and uncertain, as is generally done in time of sickness.

Ans. 2. Do you not unjustly charge and find fault with yourselves for that which is not really your fault or neglect? How far you are chargeable in this case, will best appear by comparing the circumstances you are now in, with those you were in when your relation was only arrested by sickness, and it was dubious to you what was your duty and best course to take.

Possibly you had observed so many perish in physicians' hands, and so many recover without them, that you judged it safer for your friend to be without

those means than to be hazarded by them. Or, if divers methods and courses were prescribed and persuaded to, and you now see your error in preferring that which was most improper, and neglecting what was more safe and probable—yet, as long as it did not so appear to your understanding at that time, but you followed the best light you had to guide you at that time, it were most unjust to charge the fault upon yourselves, for choosing that course that then seemed best to you, whether it were so in itself or not.

To be angry with yourselves for doing or omitting what was then done, or omitted, according to your best discretion and judgment, because you now see it by the light of the event far otherwise than you did before—it is to be troubled that you are but men, or that you are not as God, who only can foresee issues and events; and that you acted as all rational creatures are bound to do, according to the best light they have, at the time and season of action.

Ans. 3. To conclude, Times of great affliction are ordinarily times of great temptation, and it is usual with Satan then to charge us with more sins than we are really guilty of; and also makes those things seem to be sins, which, upon impartial examination, will not be found to be so.

Indeed, had your neglect or miscarriage been known or voluntary, or had you really preferred a little money (being able to give it) before the life of your relation, and did deliberately choose to hazard this, rather than part with that, no doubt, then, but there had been much evil of sin mixed with your afflictions; and your conscience may justly smite you for it, as your sin. But in the other case,

which is more common, and I presume yours, it is a false charge, and you ought not to abet the design of Satan in it.

Judge by the sorrow you now feel for your friend, in what degree he was dear to you, and what you could not willingly give to ransom his life, if it could be done with money. Judge, I say, by this, how groundless the charge is that Satan now draws up against you, and you are but too ready to yield to the truth of it.

Plea 8. But my troubles are upon a higher score and account. My child or friend has passed into eternity, and I know not how it is with his soul. Were I sure my relation was with Christ, I should be quiet; but my fears, on the contrary, are overwhelming: O it is terrible to think of the damnation of one so dear to me!

Ans. 1. Admit what the objection supposes, that you have real grounds to fear the eternal condition of your dear relation; yet it is utterly unbeseeming you, even in such a case as this, to dispute with, or repine against the Lord.

I do confess it is a sore and heavy trial, and that there is no case more sad and sinking to the spirit of a gracious person. Their death is but a trifle to this; but yet, if ye be such as fear the Lord, methinks his indisputable sovereignty over them, and his distinguishing love and mercy to you, should at least silence you in that matter.

1. His indisputable sovereignty over them: "Who art thou, O man, who disputest with God?" He speaks in the matters of eternal election and reprobation. What if the Lord will not be gracious to those

who are so dear to us? Is there any wrong done to them or us thereby? Aaron's two sons were cut off in the act of sin by the Lord's immediate hand, and yet he held his peace. God told Abraham plainly, that the covenant should not be established with Ishmael, for whom he so earnestly prayed, "O let Ishmael live before thee!" and he knew that there was no salvation out of the covenant, and yet he sits down silent under the word of this fear.

2. But if this do not quiet you, yet methinks his distinguishing love and mercy to you should do it. O what do you owe to God, that root and branch hath not been cast together into the fire! that the Lord hath given you good hope, through grace, that it shall be well with you for ever! Let this stop your mouth, and quiet your spirit, though you would have grounds for this fear.

Ans. 2. But pray examine the grounds of your fear, whether it may not proceed from the strength of your affections to the eternal welfare of your friend, or from the subtlety of Satan, designing hereby to overwhelm and swallow you up in supposed, as well as from just grounds and causes. In two cases, it is very probable your fear may proceed only from your own affections, or Satan's temptations:

1. If your relation died young, before it did any thing to destroy your hopes. Or,

2. If grown, and in some good degree hopeful; only he did not in life, or at death, manifest and give evidence of grace with that clearness as you desired.

As to the case of infants in general, it is none of our concern to judge their condition; and as for those that sprang from covenanted parents, it becomes us

to exercise charity towards them: the Scripture speaks very favourably of them.

And as for the more adult, who have escaped the pollutions of the world, and made conscience of sin and duty, albeit they never manifested what you could desire they had; yet in them, as in young Abijah, "may be found some good things toward the Lord," which you never took notice of. Reverence of your authority, bashfulness, and shamefacedness, reservedness of disposition, and many other things, may hide those weak and small beginnings of grace that are in children, from the observations of the parents. God might see in them what you never saw: he despiseth not the day of small things.

However it may be, it is now out of your reach: your concern rather is to improve the affliction to your own good, than judge and determine their condition, which belongs not to you, but God.

Plea 9. O but I have sinned in this relation, and now God hath punished my sin in dissolving it. O, saith one, my heart was set too much upon it: I even idolized it; that was my sin: and, saith another, I wanted due affections, and did not love my relation, at least not so spiritually as I ought; that was my sin. Now God is visiting me for all the neglects and defects that have been in me towards my relation.

Ans. 1. There is no man so thoroughly sanctified, as not to fail and come short in many things pertaining to his relative duties. And to speak as the thing is, the corruptions of the holiest persons are as much discovered in this, as in any other thing whatsoever: and it is a very common thing for conscience, not only to charge their failures upon us, but to aggravate

them to the utmost when God hath made the separation. So that this is no more than what is usual and very common with persons in your case.

Ans. 2. Admit that which the objection supposes —that God had afflicted you for your sins, and removed that comfort from you which you idolized, and too much doted on; yet there is no reason you should be so cast down under your affliction; for all this may be, and probably is, the fruit of his love to, and care of your soul. He tells the afflicted, for their comfort, "Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten." Rev. iii. 19. How much better is it to have an idolized enjoyment taken from you in mercy, than if God should say concerning you, as he did of Ephraim, "He is joined to idols, let him alone!"

O it is better for you that your Father now reckons with you for your follies with the rod in his hand, than to say, as he doth of some, Let them go on, I will not hinder them in, or rebuke them for, their sinful courses; but will reckon with them for all together in hell at last!

Ans. 3. And as to what you now charge upon yourself, that the neglect of duty did spring from the want of love to your relations—your sorrow at parting may evidence that your relation was rooted deep in your affection: but if your love was not so spiritual and pure, to love and enjoy them in God, that was undoubtedly your sin, and is the sin of most Christians; for which, both you and all others ought to be humble.

Plea 10. God hath blessed me with an estate, and outward comforts in the world, which I reckoned to have left to my posterity: and now I have none

to leave it with, nor have I any comfort to think of it; the purposes of my heart are broken off, and the comfort of all my other enjoyments blasted by this stroke in an hour. How are the pains and cares of many years perished!

Ans. 1. How many are there in the world, yea, of our own acquaintance, whom God hath either denied, or deprived, both of the comforts of children and of estates too! If he have left you those outward comforts, you ought to acknowledge his goodness therein, and not to slight these, because he hath deprived you of the other.

Ans. 2. Though your children be gone, yet God hath many children left in the world: those bowels you may refresh with what he hath bestowed upon you, and your charity to them will doubtless turn to a more comfortable account, than if you had left a large estate to your own posterity.

Surely we are not sent into this world to heap up great estates for our children: and if you have been too eager in this design, you may now read God's just rebuke of your folly. Bless God, you have yet an opportunity to serve him eminently by your charity: and if God deny you other executors, let your own hands be your executors, to distribute to the necessity of the saints; that the blessings of them that are ready to perish may come upon you.

Plea 11. O but the remembrance of its witty words and pretty actions are wounding.

Ans. 1. Let it rather lift up your heart to God in praise, that gave you so desirable a child, than fill your heart with discontent at his hand in removing it. How many parents are there in the world, whose

children God hath deprived of reason and understanding, so that they only differ from the beasts in external shape and figure! And how many show betimes so perverse a temper, that little comfort can be expected from them!

Ans. 2. These are but small circumstances and trivial things in themselves; but by these little things Satan manages a great design against your soul, to deject or exasperate it. And surely this is not your business at this time: you have greater things than the words and actions of children to mind: to search out God's end in the affliction—to mortify the corruption it is sent to rebuke—to quiet your heart in the will of God: this is your work.

Plea 12. Lastly, It is objected, O but God hides his face from me in mine affliction; it is dark within as well as without: and this makes my case most deplorable, greatly afflicted, and sadly deserted.

Ans. 1. Though you want a present sensible comfort, yet you have reason to be thankful for gracious supports. Though the light of God's countenance shine not upon you, yet you find the everlasting arms are underneath you; the care of God worketh for you, when the consolations of God are drawn from you.

Ans. 2. To have God hide his face in the time of trouble, is no new or unusual thing: God's dearest saints, yea, his own Son hath experienced it; who, in the depths of inward and outward trouble, when wave called unto wave, felt not those sweet sensible influences of comfort from God, which had always filled his soul formerly. If Christ cry in extremity, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

then sure we need not wonder, as if some strange thing had happened to us.

Ans. 3. May not your unsubmissive carriage under the rod, provoke God to hide his face from you? Pray consider it well, nothing is more probable than this, to be the cause of God's withdrawment from you. Could you in meekness and quietness receive that cup your Father hath given you to drink—accept the punishment of your iniquities—say, 'Good is the word of the Lord—It is the Lord, let him do what he will,'—you would soon find the case altered with you; but the comforting Spirit finds no delight or rest in a turbulent and tumultuous breast.

And thus I have satisfied the most considerable pleas urged in justification of our excesses.

IV. I come now to the last thing proposed; namely, The means of curing and preventing these sinful excesses of sorrow for the death of our dear relations.

And although much hath been said already to dissuade from this evil, and I have enlarged already much beyond my first intention, yet I shall cast in some farther help and assistance towards the healing of this distemper, by prescribing the following rules:—

Rule 1. If you would not mourn excessively for the loss of creature comforts, then beware that you set not your delight and love excessively or inordinately upon them whilst you enjoy them.

Strong affections make strong afflictions; the higher the tide, the lower the ebb. According to the measure of our delight in the enjoyment, is our grief in the loss of these things. The apostle knits

these two graces, temperance and patience, together in the precept: and it is very observable, how intemperance and impatience are inseparably linked in experience; yea, the experience of the best men. You read, how "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours."

This was the darling: Jacob's heart was exceedingly set upon him; his very life was bound up in the life of the lad. Now, when the supposed death of his child was brought to him, how did he carry it? "And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, For I will go down to the grave to my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him."

Here, as in a glass, are the effects of excessive love to a child represented. Here you may see what work immoderate love will make, even in a sanctified heart. O, therefore, let your moderation be known to all men, in your delights and sorrows about earthly things! for ordinarily the proportion of the one is answerable to the other.

Rule 2. If you would not be overwhelmed with grief for the loss of your relations, be exact and careful in discharging your duties to them while you have them.

The testimony of your conscience, that you have laboured, in all things, to discharge the duties you owe to your relations, whilst they were with you, will prove an excellent allay to your sorrows for them, when they are no longer yours. It is not so much

the single affliction, as the guilt charged upon us in times of affliction, that makes our load so heavy.

O what a terrible thing it is to look upon our dead friend, whilst conscience is accusing and upbraiding us for our duties neglected, and such or such sins committed! O you little think how dreadful a spectacle this will make the dead body of thy friend to thee!

Conscience, if not quite stupid or dead, will speak at such a time. O, therefore, as ever you would provide for a comfortable parting at death, or meeting again at judgment, be exact, punctual, and circumspect in all your relative duties!

Rule 3. If you would not be overwhelmed by trouble for the loss of dear relations, then turn to God under your trouble, and pour out your sorrows by prayer into his bosom.

This will ease and allay your troubles. Blessed be God for the ordinance of prayer: how much are all the saints beholden to it at all times, but especially in heart-sinking and distressful times! It is some relief, when in distress we can pour out our trouble into the bosom of a wife, or faithful friend: how much more when we leave our complaint before the gracious, wise, and faithful God! I told you before of that holy man, who, having lost his dear and only son, got to his closet, there poured out his soul freely to the Lord, and when he came down to his friends that were waiting below to comfort him, and fearing how he would bear that stroke, he came from his duty with a cheerful countenance, telling them, "He would be content to bury a son (if it were possible) every day, provided he might enjoy such comforts as his soul had enjoyed in that private hour."

Go thy way, Christian, to thy God, get thee to thy knees in the cloudy and dark day: retire from all creatures, that thou mayest have thy full liberty with God, and there pour out thy heart before him, in free, full, and broken-hearted confessions of sins—judge thyself worthy of hell, as well as of this trouble—justify God in all his smartest strokes—beg him, in this distress, to put under the everlasting arms—entreat one smile, one gracious look, to enlighten thy darkness, and cheer thy drooping spirit. Say, with the prophet Jeremiah, "Be not thou a terror to me: thou art my hope in the day of evil." And try what relief such a course will afford thee. Surely, if thy heart be sincere in this course, thou shalt be able to say, with the Psalmist, "In the multitude of my thoughts which I had within me, thy comforts delighted my soul."

Rule 4. If you would bear the loss of your dear relations with moderation, eye God in the whole process of the affliction more, and secondary causes and circumstances of the matter less.

"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." Consider the hand of the Lord in the whole matter: and that,

1. As a sovereign hand, which hath right to dispose of thee and all thy comforts without thy leave or consent.

2. As a Father's hand, correcting thee in love and faithfulness: "Whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth, as a father the son in whom he delighteth." O if once you could but see affliction as a rod in a father's hand, proceeding from his love, and intended for your eternal good, how quiet would you then be!

And surely if it draw your heart nearer to God, and mortify it more to this vain world, it is a rod in the hand of special love: if it end in your love to God, doubt not but it comes from God's love to you.

3. As a just and righteous hand. Hast not thou procured this to thyself by thy own folly? Yea, the Lord is just in all that is come upon thee: whatever he hath done, yet he hath done thee no wrong.

4. As a moderate and merciful hand, that hath punished thee less than thine iniquities deserved. He hath cast thee into affliction, he might justly have cast thee into hell. It is of the Lord's mercy that thou art not consumed. Why doth the living man complain?

Rule 5. If you would bear your affliction with moderation, compare it with the affliction of other men, and that will greatly quiet your spirits.

You have no cause to say, God hath dealt bitterly with you, and that there is no sorrow like your sorrow. Look round about you, and impartially consider the condition that others are in; and they nothing inferior to you in any respect. You had one dead child; Aaron had two at a stroke, Job all at one stroke; and both these by an immediate stroke from the hand of God. Some godly parents have lived to see their children die in their sin by the hand of justice. Others have seen them live to the dishonour of God, and breaking of their own spirits; and would have esteemed it a mercy if they had died from the womb, and given up the ghost when they came out of the belly, as Job speaks.

In what misery hath some parents seen their children lie? God holding them as so many terrible

spectacles of misery before their eyes; so that they have begged the Lord, with importunity, to let loose his hands and cut them off; death being, in their esteem, nothing to those continual agonies in which they have seen them weltering from day to day. O! you little know what a bitter cup others have had given them to drink! Surely, if you compare, you may say, The Lord hath dealt gently and graciously with me.

Rule 6. Carefully shun and avoid whatsoever may renew your sorrow, or provoke you to impatience.

Increase not your sorrow by the sight of, or discourses about, sad objects; and labour to avoid them, as occasions presented by the enemy of your souls, to draw forth the corruption of your heart.

I told you before, why Jacob would not have the child of which Rachel died, called after the name his wife had given, Benoni, "The son of my sorrow:" lest it should prove a daily occasion of renewing his trouble for the loss of his dear wife; but he called his name Benjamin.

Your patience is like tinder or gunpowder: so long as you can prevent the sparks from falling on it, there is no great danger; but you that carry such dangerous prepared matter in your own hearts, cannot be too careful to prevent them. Do by murmuring, as you do by blasphemous thoughts—think quite another way, and give no occasion.

Rule 7. In the day of your mourning for the death of your friends, seriously consider your own death as approaching, and that you and your dead friends are distinguished by a small interval and point of time. "I shall go to him." 2 Sam. xii. 23. Surely

the thoughts of your own death, as approaching also, will greatly allay your sorrows for the dead that are gone before you.

We are apt to fancy a long life in the world; and then the loss of those comforts, from which we promised ourselves so much of the sweetness and comfort of our lives, seems an intolerable thing.

But would you realize your own death more, you would not be so deeply concerned for their deaths as you are. Could you but look into your own graves more seriously, you would be able to look into your friend's grave more composedly.

And thus I have finished what I designed from this scripture. The Father of mercies, and God of all comforts, whose sole prerogative it is to comfort them that are cast down, write all his truths upon your hearts, that they abide there, and reduce your disordered affections to that frame which best suits the will of God, and the profession you make of subjection and resignation thereunto.

A

FRIENDLY VISIT

TO THE

HOUSE OF MOURNING.

BY THE

REV. RICHARD CECIL, A. M.

PREFACE.

THE reflecting mind is at a loss to know, why the *evidence of experiment*, which is allowed in all the departments of art and of science, should be rejected in matters of religion. In estimating the value of a mechanical contrivance, or in ascertaining the strength of a principle in philosophy, the question is uniformly proposed—How does the contrivance succeed? or, how does the scheme work? or, in what precise mode and measure may the boasted principle admit of a practical application? If the device of the mechanic, or the scheme of the philosopher, is found to succeed admirably, when applied to real use—or is ascertained by actual experiment to be highly beneficial in solving difficulties, and in illustrating the beauty and harmony of nature—he must be a hardy sceptic indeed, who will question the value of the one, or the truth of the other. Why, then, ought it not to be so in matters of moral and religious truth? The revelation of God is expressly designed for practical application, and it may be reasonably expected to fulfil the ends at which it aims. Circumstances, indeed, there may be, in the moral constitution and

state of man, which may operate in preventing even the best selected means from being successful in the attainment of their ends. The religion of the Saviour may commend itself to the approbation of every impartial judge, by its admirable adaptation to the wants of man; and yet, in consequence of his blindness, and prejudices, and depraved affections, it may fail in gaining access to his heart, or it may be rejected as unsuitable to his case. We are not at liberty therefore to argue *against* religion, because, in consequence of circumstances which counteract its influence, the effects which it undertakes to accomplish have not been produced. But we may contend most strenuously and successfully *for* religion, on the ground, that notwithstanding all the obstacles which stand in its way, it has triumphed signally, and has gained, in no inconsiderable measure, the grand object which it is designed to accomplish.

Is it then true, that the religion of the gospel has been tried by the test of experiment, fairly and impartially applied? And what has been the result, even in a state of things not altogether favourable to the issue expected? We answer, without hesitation, in the affirmative. Christianity has been tried by the test of experiment, and it has come forth like gold from the furnace. It undertakes to enlighten the minds of men, by communicating the clearest and most enlarged ideas of the character and government of God: and is it not a fact, that its humblest disciples possess infinitely more correct and sublime conceptions of these subjects, than were possessed by the most learned and profound of the philosophers of antiquity? Christianity exhibits human nature as

in a degraded state; alienated from God; disinclined to his love and worship; opposed to the spirituality of his law, and habitually prone to iniquity: and has not the experience of men, in every age, and the impartial testimony of recorded history, proved, beyond the reach of contradiction, the truth and exactness of the representation? Christianity unfolds a method of reconciliation with God, through the merits and mediation of a Divine Redeemer: and have not facts innumerable combined to prove, that this method is admirably adapted to the state of man, and calculated at once to promote the glory of God, and the best interests of his creatures? But, farther, Christianity undertakes to provide the best means for rescuing man from the bondage of corruption, and forming him to the resemblance, and the love, and the practice, of whatsoever is lovely, and morally pure in character and in conduct: and has not its tendency, in this point of view, been put to the test of experiment? and has it not been found, that while every system of human contrivance leaves men as it found them, the system of the gospel has been wonderfully efficacious in changing the character of man, transforming the very aspect of human society, and rearing, on the dreary wastes of the moral wilderness, the fair and attractive fruits of righteousness, and godliness, and charity?

It has been said, that the evidence in favour of the gospel, arising from its experimental application, can prove satisfactory to those alone who have *actually believed* the gospel, and have felt its renovating power; and that the experience of one man can be no rule for guiding the judgment of another. There

may be some truth in this; but it is by no means true to the extent to which our opponents would wish us to believe. Unquestionably, that man alone knows fully the nature and value of the testimony which revelation bears to itself, who has received it in faith and love, and who, under its transforming influence, has been "brought out of darkness into marvellous light." Like the blind man in the gospel, he has ascertained the fitness of the means employed for effecting the cure of his spiritual disease, by the simple fact of the actual accomplishment of the cure itself. And this is a very plain reason why we ought to urge on men the importance of guarding against speculative notions of truth, and of seeking a personal application of it to their own hearts and consciences in the sight of God. But let it not be thought, that practical religion is entirely a matter of feeling; and that the individual who cherishes it can alone be competent to judge of its tendencies and effects. Religion, unquestionably, is a matter between God and conscience, and the affections of the renewed heart are the property of that heart alone. Still it is plain, that the *effects* of religious principle, and of religious affections, may be exhibited in outward life, and may be judged of by those who neither profess the principle, nor cherish the affections. From the effect, we may judge of the cause: and as, in Natural Theology, we proceed from the evidences of wisdom in the natural world, to the inference that a wise architect must have been employed in their production, so, in the case before us, we may reasonably argue, that results so very different from what the history of man, in any other cir-

cumstances, has been found to present, must have proceeded from a cause altogether remote from any hitherto recognised in the experience, or in the history of mankind. Are we not competent to recognise the change which has passed upon a man, when, from a drunkard, he becomes the pattern of temperance? —when, from licentious indolence, he passes into the regions of purity and of holiness?—when, from the towering heights of ambition, or pride, or vainglory, he descends into the mild and retiring shades of humility and resigned contentment? The change which passes on the character is a phenomenon open to all; and the evidence which it furnishes in favour of the cause in which that change has originated, is perfectly conclusive. The gospel is thus proved, by experimental induction, to be admirably adapted to the state of man, as a moral but fallen being; and its spiritual results, in life and in character, bear testimony to the divinity of its original. Deism denies or obscures the moral attributes of God: Christianity illustrates and exalts them. Deism frowns on some of the noblest virtues that adorn and dignify the character: Christianity, with all its practical influence, enforces and cherishes them. Deism supplies no effectual motives to holy obedience: Christianity furnishes such motives as tend, in the highest degree, to promote the hatred of sin and the culture of holiness. Deism has no power to change the habits and the pursuits of men: Christianity infuses into the souls of its recipients a principle of life, which triumphs over the strongest propensities, and the most inveterate prejudices. Deism leaves man as it finds him, the victim of moral disease and death: Chris-

tianity raises to new life, introduces into a new world, and transforms the soul into the image of its Maker. "Philosophy may place us on the top of Pisgah; but there, like Moses, we must die: the gospel alone puts us in possession of the good land." It presents to the trembling aspirant after happiness, the noblest of all prospects; and it says to him, in the language of encouragement, "All is yours."

There is one branch of the experimental evidence of the gospel, which is plainly within the reach of every man's examination, and which must ever carry along with it a mildly persuasive influence. We allude to that peculiar feature of the religion of Jesus, which qualifies it for discharging the valuable and endearing office of a comforter to man, amid all the trials of his journey through life. If you examine the diversified religions of ancient and modern paganism, you will find them utterly destitute of any system of means for alleviating the sorrows of mortality: and if you trace the history of paganism, even in its most attractive forms, you will find, that, *in fact*, the ills of life were little regarded, and very slenderly sympathized with, among the votaries of heathen mythology. Wherever the dreary wilderness of idolatry and superstition extends itself, there you look in vain for the charities which endear, and the sympathies which sweeten life. A cold and repulsive misanthropy presides in malignant authority. The genius of benevolence has taken his flight; and selfishness and cruelty fill the whole sphere of vision. A pagan, whether of the ancient or of the modern school, is, in sickness and at death, the deserted and solitary victim of cold and freezing neglect. His

views of the future are dark and disheartening; and of his surrounding attendants, if he has any, it may be fitly said, "Miserable comforters are ye all; physicians of no value."

The deficiencies of paganism are not supplied by the infidel philosophy. It presents to the mind no such enlarged and cheering views of the divine character and government, as will soothe and support amid the anxieties of nature. It leaves us altogether at a loss to know whether or not Mercy finds a place in the government of God. It interposes an awful blank between the Creator and the creature; and attempts in vain a reply to the all-important inquiry, How shall man be just with God? It leaves its votaries helpless and forlorn, at the very time when consolation is most required. We have heard and read the melancholy lamentations of the licentious and infidel Chesterfield, over the wretched inanity of a worldly and sensual life; and the public prints have lately exhibited the affecting, but edifying correspondence between two American Statesmen of great name, now sinking in the vale of years—without any soothing recollections,—anticipating death "without God, and without hope."*

Let an infidel philosopher be introduced into the secret retirement of a friend who has been just visited with some of the most painful of human vicissitudes —who has lost, by death, the partner of his days, or the children of his hopes; and whose outward circumstances have undergone a painful reverse. How

* See the Letters of President Jefferson and President Adams, which lately appeared in several of the American newspapers and periodical publications.

will he feel? How will he express himself? How will he attempt the office of a comforter? Does he attempt it at all? Yes; but listen to his words:—"Friend, you have been sorely tried. I sympathize with you. This is a strange world, and many are the trials with which we are all visited. Such appears to be the universal law of nature; and we must submit to it, however reluctantly. Departed friends we cannot recall, and it is needless to distress ourselves with unavailing sorrow. Take courage. Show your fortitude. Mingle in society, and you will soon forget it all. Take care lest you injure your health by indulging overmuch grief. At all events, do accept of the condoling sympathies of your friends." If this is not literally his language, is it not, at least, the sum and substance of his communications? and can we say, that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the votaries of the world furnish for one another any thing better than this? "Rouse up your courage, and die like an old Roman," was the advice of one of them to his dying friend. Said Marmontel to Voltaire, on his death-bed, "Think of your laurels; remember the success of your late tragedy."—"You talk to me of literary glory," replied the expiring infidel, "while I am dying in frightful tortures."

It would be edifying to trace a contrast between the "*Consolations of Philosophy*," and the "*Friendly Visit to the House of Mourning*." No man who has read the one, will hesitate to acknowledge the absolute impotence of mere reason and nature to dispel the gloom which hovers around the prospects of man; and he will sigh over the vain attempts of a

mere philosopher to alleviate the pressure of human woe, and to gild the cloud which overhangs the grave. No man who, with suitable feelings, peruses the other, will hesitate to give God thanks for such sources of comfort laid open to man, and to pray, with fervour of soul, "May these consolations abound toward me." The value of this work has been already well tried by the test of extended experiment; and it has found a warm friend in many a distracted heart which it has soothed, and in many an afflicted family whom it has visited, with the balm of heavenly consolation. The blessing of the Great Comforter has largely accompanied it; and it has been stamped by Heaven as one of the most valuable treatises of Christian truth and Christian consolation. The unction of evangelical sentiment rests on it, and the spirit of genuine Christian sympathy pervades its every page.

R. B.

Paisley, July, 1823.

A

FRIENDLY VISIT

TO THE

HOUSE OF MOURNING.

Your present affliction, my dear friend, demands something more than the usual forms of condolence. Sorrow which, like yours, cannot be prevented, may yet be alleviated and improved. This is my design in addressing you; and if I seem to intrude upon your retirement, let my motive be my apology. Having felt how much "better it is to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting"—having received my best lessons, companions, and even comforts in it—I would administer from my little stock of experience: and while I thus endeavour to assist your meditations, shall rejoice if I may contribute, though but a mite, to your comfort.

Were I, indeed, acquainted with the peculiar circumstances of your loss, I should employ particular considerations; but my present address can have only a general aim—which is, to acquaint the heart, at a favourable moment, with its grand concerns; to give it a serious impression when softened, and a heavenly direction when moved. Let us, therefore,

sit down humbly together in this house of mourning. If "the heart of the wise be found" here, your experience I hope will prove, that here also it is formed: and let us calmly contemplate some momentous objects intimately connected with it, and viewed with peculiar advantage from it.

Our GOD is the first of these objects: with him we seldom form any close acquaintance till we meet him in trouble. He commands silence now, that he may be heard; and removes intervening objects, that he may be seen. A SOVEREIGN DISPOSER appears, who, as Lord of all, hath only resumed what he lent; whose will is the law of his creatures; and who expressly declares his will in the present affliction. We should seriously consider, that all allowed repugnance to the determinations of his government (however made known to us) is sin; and that every wish to alter the appointments of his wisdom is folly, —we know not what we ask. When God discovers himself in any matter, those who know him "will keep silence before him." Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? How just was the reply! "Behold I am vile! what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth."

This silent submission under trying dispensations, is variously exemplified as well as inculcated in the Scriptures. An awful instance of sin and sorrow occurs in the family of Aaron: his sons disregarded a divine appointment, and "there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them; but Aaron held his peace." Eli, in similar circumstances, silenced his heart with this single but sufficient consideration, "It is the Lord." David, under a stroke which

he declares consumed him, observes, " I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it. And Job, when stripped of every comfort, blessed the name of him who took away as well as gave. Whatever be the nature of your calamity, may it be attended with such an humble and child-like spirit as these possessed!

But the Sovereign Disposer is also the COMPASSIONATE FATHER. Among other instances of his tenderness, you may have observed the peculiar supports he affords under peculiar trials. Let us mark, and acknowledge the hand which mingles mercy with judgment, and alleviation with distress. The parents I have just mentioned, lost their children under circumstances far more distressing than yours. The desire of your eyes (if not the idol of your heart) was, perhaps, almost a stranger: you strove hard to detain it, but He, who took the young children into his arms, and blessed them, took yours; and taking it, seemed to say, " What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Patiently " suffer this little one to come unto me, for of such is my kingdom" composed. " Verily I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father!" If I take away your child, I take it to myself. Is not this infinitely beyond any thing you could do for it? Could you say to it, if it had lived, " Thou shalt weep no more, —the days of thy mourning are ended?" Could you show it any thing in this world like " the glory of God and of the Lamb?" Could you raise it to any honour here, like " receiving a crown of life?"

The voice of a " Father of mercies, and of a God

of all comfort," speaks as distinctly in the death, as in the birth of an infant:—" A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, refused to be comforted, because they were not." Thus saith the Lord, " Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border. It is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish."

Is it a pious friend that has just yielded up his breath? The same voice seems to say, 'Turn from him, or rather, turn from his clay,—his faded garment. He himself is taken from the evil to come; he is entered into peace.'

When the able minister, the exemplary parent, or the faithful partner depart, a consternation often seizes the circles which they blessed. We are so stunned by the sudden blow, or occupied with the distressing circumstances, that we scarcely can hear God saying, 'Fear not; I, even I, am he that comforteth you: I, your Father, am yet alive; I gave you your departed friend; I sent every benefit which was conveyed through him: trust me for blessings yet in store; trust me with him, and with yourselves.'

Whatever notions one who lives without God in the world may form of dying, we should learn from his word to regard it merely as a translation,—a change, in which nothing is lost which is really valuable. As surely as we " believe that Jesus died and rose again," so surely do we believe that " them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Taught of God, we should view losses, sickness, pain, and death, but as the several trying stages by which a good man, like Joseph, is conducted from a tent to a court. Sin his disorder; Christ his physician: pain his medicine; the Bible his support: the grave his bed; and death itself an angel, expressly sent to release the worn-out labourer, or crown the faithful soldier. "I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them."

But, admitting the state of your departed friend to be doubtful, yet, in all cases that are really so, let us cultivate honourable thoughts of God; let us remember the FAITHFUL CREATOR. Righteousness is his throne, though clouds surround it. Whatever he has left obscure, we may safely leave him to explain. Let us recollect, that, amidst innumerable obscurities, he hath made things clear in proportion as they are important; and, therefore, repeatedly urges it upon our conscience, that the door is still open to us; that it is awful to stand before it unresolved; that we must trust him to-day; and that to-morrow he will equally remove our conjectures and our complaints.

Perhaps you are ready to reply, 'I have heard many such things; and I also could speak as you do, if your soul were in my soul's stead: but my heart and my expectations are so crushed by this blow, that I can hear nothing but "thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound grievous; thou hast no healing medicines."'

Beware, however, of falling into their sin who "limited the Holy One of Israel." This is a charge continually brought against man, that, in his troubles, the Source and the Resource are equally forgotten. Though affliction cometh not forth of the dust, yet none saith, "Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?" Endeavour then, in extremities, to recollect an ALL-SUFFICIENT FRIEND—a very present HELP in trouble. He, at least, may add, (as he does in the passage just alluded to,) "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord." Cannot the voice which rebuked a tempestuous sea, calm our troubled spirits? Is his hand shortened at all, that he cannot "bless our latter end, like Job's, more than the beginning?" Is it not the Lord "that maketh poor, and maketh rich; that bringeth low, and lifteth up?" Many, whose hearts have been desolate like yours, while they have looked around, have at length looked upward "unto him, and been lightened." A single promise has afforded them not only relief, but strong consolation.

Let us, therefore, my dear friend, "turn again to this stronghold as prisoners of hope: even to-day can he render double to us." Let us look to Abraham's God, and his encouragement is ours—"Fear not: I am God Almighty,"—as if he should say, I am all-sufficient in all cases: I am enough; "and able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think." I have taken away thy gourd, but dost thou well to be angry? have I left nothing for thankfulness? This world, however, cannot be your home, nor its objects your consolation: they are all

too poor for the soul of man. "Look unto me, and be saved: acquaint thyself with me, and be at peace: follow me, and you shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." However dark and distressing the present state of things may appear, "commit thy fatherless children to my care, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me."

Still the beloved object is gone, and your heart follows it. You can scarcely receive counsel from infinite Wisdom, or comfort from Omnipotence. To every fresh encouragement you are ready to reply, "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise, and praise thee? shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction?" His word repeatedly assures you they shall; and that "all that are in the grave shall hear his voice:" but it informs you also, that He can do abundantly more for the living than merely restore their dead friends, or revive their fainting spirits: it teaches you that He can sanctify the separation—that He can give a divine life to the survivor, "though dead in trespasses and sins," and inseparably unite both in his kingdom. If the Comforter could make up for the loss of Christ's bodily presence; yea, make it even expedient that He "should go away:" how much more can he supply the place of every creature?

May this COMFORTER, writing his word in your mind, help you to say, with a confidence highly honourable to himself and his gospel—'My poor perishing gourd is, indeed, withered a day before I expected it; my broken reed is gone; but God is left "a father to the fatherless, a husband to the widow.

And now, Lord, what wait I for? truly my hope is in thee." Thou canst give me, "in thine house, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters; even an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off:" and, therefore, "though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."'

Once more; let us endeavour, at such seasons as these, to recognise a GRACIOUS MONITOR. Whenever the Lord strikes, he speaks. Let us listen at such a time as this, with humble attention, yet with holy confidence; for it is the voice of a Friend—a wonderful Counsellor. Let us, with the prophet, resolve to ascend the tower of observation, and observe "what he will say unto us, and what we shall answer when we are reproved." If with him we thus watch our dispensations, "at the end, like his, it shall speak."

God is continually raising up witnesses, and sending them in his name to "sound the alarm in Sion." He charges them to admonish the wise, as well as the foolish virgin, to beware of slumbering, since the bridegroom is at hand: and when one is called away, to cry to those that remain, "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." Some, indeed, like the sons of Lot, desperately scorn the admonition, and treat it as the fear of dotage. Some, like those in the Acts, are in doubt, saying one to another, "What meaneth this?" and others, mocking, reply, "These men are full of new wine." But truth, like a rock furiously assaulted, but unshaken, remains to scorn its scorn-

ers: and, while the witnesses continue to bear a faithful and consistent testimony, God, sooner or later, appears in vindication of their integrity and his own word. Entering a careless family, he smites the first-born; and, as one that will be heard, calls aloud, "Awake thou that sleepest; arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

And is it not, my afflicted friend, an infinite mercy, if, by any means, God will enter with such a light,—that he will rouse such a sleeper?—that, by his minister death, he will arrest the attention of him who has slighted every other minister? What patience! what long-suffering! to take such a one apart; bring him from noise and occupation, into the secret and silent chamber: speak to his heart, and seal the most important truths on it by the most affecting impressions! Is it not saying, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim! how shall I make thee as Admah!" Certain it is, that questions, which before only reached the ear, often now, like barbed arrows, remain fixed in the conscience. Conscience, no longer stifled or amused, discovers the Contender, and, trembling before him, cries, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God."

This, I say, is often the case; and should it be realized in yours, as it has been in that of your present Visitor—if, instead of flying for relief to every object but God, you are brought humbly to his feet with patient submission, serious inquiry, fervent prayer, holy resolution, and firm reliance—if, in a word, by the severest stroke, the enchantment is also broken, your soul "escaped as a bird out of the snare

of the fowler," and returned to its proper rest,—what reason will you have to say,

> Those we call *wretched* are a chosen band.—
> Amid my list of blessings infinite,
> Stand this the foremost—' That my heart has bled.'
> For *all* I bless Thee;—most for the severe;
> *Her* death, *my own* at hand———

But death at hand (as an old writer expresses it) should be death in view, and lead us to consider, next,

Our PROSPECTS from this house of sorrow, as the inhabitants of a present and future world. Many suppose that they can best contemplate the *present world*, by crowding the "house of mirth." Their whole deportment, however, shows that it makes them much too giddy for serious observation; "having eyes, they see not."

Look at the deceased, and contemplate present things. His days, a hand-breadth; his beauty, consumed like the moth-fretten garment; his cares and pleasures, a dream; his attainments, as the grass, which flourisheth in the morning, and in the evening is cut down, and withereth; his years, a tale; his strength, labour and sorrow. So soon is the whole cut off and fled, that we cannot help repeating with the Psalmist, Verily, every man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity,—or "a vapour that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away."

Few, perhaps, reflect, when they follow a friend to his grave, that life itself exhibits little more than a funeral procession, where friend follows friend, weeping to-day, and wept for to-morrow. While we are talking of one, another passes; we are alarmed, but

behold a third! There is, however, relief in this very reflection: 'My friend is gone; but am I weeping as if I were to stay? Is he sent for in the morning? in the afternoon I shall certainly be called.' Inconsolable distress, therefore, may ungird our loins, may waste our hours, and cause us to make fatal mistakes in the journey, but does not bring us forward a single step towards meeting our friends in that state, where present joys and sorrows will be recollected only as the dream of a distempered night.

If, after many former admonitions, an enemy still urged us to climb; and, as we ascended, pointed "to the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them"—if our hearts have been the dupes of the vanishing prospect, and our ears eagerly heard the proposal, "All these things will I give thee,"—let us now hear the voice of a Friend, calling us, though in an unexpected way, "to commune with our heart, and be still;" to know, "at least in this the day of our visitation, the things which belong to our peace;" and also what those things are "which hide them from our eyes."

It is at such seasons as these, that we more clearly detect the lies of life. It is in the house of mourning that what the Scripture calls lying vanities, lie peculiarly naked and exposed. Let us here examine what so lately dazzled us. Where now is the "purple and fine linen" that caught our eye? What is it to fare sumptuously only for a day? Who is he that cries, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry?" I trust you now feel the deep misery and utter ruin of that dying creature, who can say nothing

better to his soul than this. You can scarcely help crying out, ‘ What sottishness, what madness this, in a moment so interesting as life !—with a prospect so awful as eternity !’

The truth is, God speaks variously and incessantly to man respecting his prospects, both present and future; but present things seize his heart, blind his eyes, stupify his conscience, and carry him away captive. Now “ affliction is God speaking louder,” and striving with the heart of man; crying, as he has lately in your house, ‘ Arise and depart, this is not your rest: it is polluted, and, if you persist in attempting to make a rest of it, will destroy you with a sore destruction.’

Our plan, indeed, is the very reverse of his: we love our native soil, and try to strike our roots deeper and deeper into it: firmly fixed in earth, we would fain draw our whole life, strength, and nourishment from it. And here we should not only “ fade as a leaf,” but, with “ every tree that beareth not good fruit, be hewn down, and cast into the fire,” did not mercy interpose.

We seldom, however, discern mercy in its first approach. ‘ Is it mercy,’ say you, ‘ that tears me up by the roots; that cuts the fibres of sweetest union? Does it prune away the finest branches, nip the loveliest buds, and cover the earth with blossoms?’ Yes, verily, since the very life of the whole often depends on the removal of a part, mercy will wound to heal; regard to the tree will strip off its most flourishing suckers: the great Husbandman will not fail to adopt the sharpest means for the improvement of his choicest plants; for “ every branch

that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Though the Lord cause grief, yet it is in compassion, and according to the multitude of his mercies: for he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; but, soon or late, instructs all his children to say, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."

Let not, therefore, the change of the present scene discompose, but direct us: it changes in order to present the only unchangeable one. By thus rending the veils which men try to throw over a dying state, and discovering TEKEL (that is, "wanting," Dan. v. 27.) written on every creature, the most careless are often so roused, that they seem to awake and recover themselves: they appear, for a time at least, to become wise to understand these things, and seriously to consider their latter end. May this salutary impression, however, my dear friend, never be worn from your mind, but lead you habitually to look from this fading, to that abiding prospect, which is to be found only in the *eternal world*—and on which it may be necessary here to drop a reflection or two.

I think you must often have remarked, that the urgency and bustle of present things, not only raise a cloud of dust before our future prospects, but early beget a false principle, that the present life is the only one. You must also have observed, that ten thousand false maxims, which daily fly through the world, take their rise from this prime falsehood. Whereas, in fact, the present life, instead of being the whole, is comparatively nothing—a stage, a porch, a dream,

a weary day's journey. What is this drop to the ocean before us? What this moment to eternity? As a theatre, indeed, in which God exhibits the wonders of his providence and grace, or as a stage, on which we are to act our parts, without any opportunity of repetition; the present state is infinitely grand and important; but surely no greater imposition can be put upon the pilgrim, than to persuade him that he is at home, or to make him forget and drown his eternal interests in such a vision of the night as life.

Do you not, my dear friend, sensibly perceive this? While you sit here, does not the cloud break, and the mist subside? Have you not already so realized a "better, that is, an heavenly country," as to admire him who pitched only a tent here, but steadfastly looked for a "city that hath foundations?" Are you not ready "to take hold of the skirt of this Jew," saying, "we will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you?"

Seeing this, you only see truths ever exhibited in the Scriptures, and living principles in all who are "taught of God;" for he alone can enable us to use his own discoveries: and how gracious is he, when he removes any object which might prevent our thus seeing himself, his kingdom, and his righteousness; or whose removal may prove the occasion of our seeking them!

Just before the flood, there were doubtless among them "men of renown," admired projectors; but there appears to have been but one truly wise man among them; one who saw, and seriously regarded his prospects. And he, "being warned of God of

things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark, to the saving of his house." Now, such a man is the Christian. He feels "the world passing away with the lusts thereof, but that he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."—'I feel,' says he, 'that however finely they dress the pageant of this world, it passeth by: to a creature like me, going, hastening, such an ark is worth more than ten thousand dying worlds. Let the gay laugh; let "the despisers wonder and perish:" with such prospects before me, I must be serious. He that cannot lie, has revealed the terrors as well as the glories of a future state; he speaks of "a worm that dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched," as well as of "a fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore." I must not, I dare not, shut my eyes against these awful realities. I will not sacrifice my soul to a jest, nor miss the single opportunity afforded me for its salvation. He that calls for my whole heart is worthy of it; while the things which have hitherto engrossed it, though they cannot satisfy, I find they can ruin it. "I will therefore arise and go to my Father," to my Saviour, who has promised to "cast out none that come unto him." Yea, doubtless, "I count all things but loss, that I may be found in him," the true Ark, the only Refuge, which God has provided for perishing sinners.'

Such a man, indeed, is the Christian: but the Christian, after all, is but a man. In a state like this, he needs to be continually reminded of his own principles. Even the wise virgins slumber, though the bridegroom is at hand. But a cry is often made in the family, before that which will at midnight

awaken the world: one like that in the house of Pharaoh for his first-born, or that so lately heard in yours. A cry which, while it rouses the sleeper, fills his eyes with tears, and his heart with pangs, often produces such views of God, of the present and of the eternal state, as all other monitors would have attempted in vain.

Here, then, my afflicted, but, I hope, instructed friend, let us study the heavenly science of gaining by losses, and rising by depressions. Leaving the wilderness, like Moses, let us ascend the mount of scriptural discovery, and survey a prospect of which his was but a shadow. Let us look from vicissitude and desolation, to what alone is "incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away;" and, in the house of affliction and death, let us contemplate a house "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." How refreshing to look from a family bereft of its companions and comforts, to "Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; to an innumerable company of angels; and to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven!"—the only family which cannot be divided—the only friendship which shall not disappoint our warmest expectations.

'Glorious as this prospect is,' perhaps you are ready to reply, 'I have been long in the habit of viewing it very indistinctly. My attention has been so fixed on one below, that I live looking into the grave rather than beyond it. My spirits are so broken, my heart so wounded, and my eyes so dim with watching and weeping, that I can hardly read what is before me, or recollect what I read. If se-

rious reflection composes me for a few moments, I soon relapse, and seem to lose sight of every support. I indeed severely feel what you say concerning the present life; but I view the glories of the future like a starving creature, who, looking through the gate of the wealthy, surveys a plenty which but increases his anguish.'

There is, however, this difference, at least, between your cases—the plenty which you see is yours, if you are really willing to accept it. You never received a gift which was so freely bestowed, or so suited to your necessity, as that "gift of God, which is eternal life, through Jesus Christ."

In order to view this more distinctly, let us consider the sufficiency of

Our PROVISIONS—For "Wisdom hath built her house, she hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled her wine, and furnished her table. She also crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither; and to him that wanteth understanding she saith, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled —forsake the foolish and live."

Man, indeed, is daily reminded, by the thorns at his feet, by the sweat of his brow, and by the dust to which he is returning, that his paradise is lost: but paradise regained is considered rather as an idea —a subject for poetry. That book, however, which I hope you have chosen as your best companion in the house of mourning, like the vision of Jacob, not only shows the heavens opened, but discovers a gracious medium of communication and intercourse; as it were "a ladder let down from heaven to earth."

A medium so suitable to the state of man, that the weakest and vilest, who is humble enough to take hold of it as God's ordinance, advance a step at a time, and call for strength to proceed, may climb by it from earth to heaven.

Are you, my dear friend, among the number of those who stand before God, not only as stripped of their comforts, but humbled under sin, as the cause of all the desolations with which our fallen state abounds? Open your book at the 61st chapter of Isaiah. You will there perceive the most precious privilege of paradise restored—the Creator descending to the condition and wants of the creature, and once more holding communion with him. The broken-hearted, the captive, and the mourner, are here shown One mighty to save and to relieve: and that such should not mistake their friend, when our Lord stood up in the synagogue to read, he selected this passage, and, having read it, he closed the book with saying, "This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears." 'I am,' as if he had said, 'this Deliverer and Desire of nations; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted: blessed are ye that hunger now; for ye shall be filled: blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh.'

I scarcely need observe, that in an address like this, (a bow drawn at a venture,) formal statements of the different topics would be improper; and, therefore, I shall not attempt to describe, in their order, the various provisions comprehended in that scheme of redemption, usually termed the Gospel. It may be necessary, however, to remark, that the whole is

a proposal to the broken heart, answering all its objections, and meeting all its wants; and that such a proposal will be cordially received, only in proportion as this disposition prevails.

As it is the sick who best knows how to value a physician, the debtor a surety, and the criminal a pardon, so it is the awakened conscience alone which will embrace a constitution calculated to humble the pride, and mortify the corruptions, as well as relieve the wants of man. If "without shedding of blood there can be no remission," he who is earnest to obtain it, will rejoice to find it, though on the accursed tree; and, however the preaching of this cross shall be esteemed "foolishness among them that perish," such a one will not only rejoice in the provision, but magnify the means. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Our Lord represents the blessings of his kingdom under the parable of a magnificent feast, which a "King made for the marriage of his Son:" but when all things were ready, and invitations repeatedly sent, he points out the ruin of the world, in its indisposition to accept his gracious proposal. "They made light of it, and went their ways!" However different their pursuits, they all agreed to reject the invitation: they begin with one consent to make excuse: some urged reasons, and some abused the messengers. But what is this more than the history of human nature in every age?

Let us, however, my dear friend, never forget that the gate lately mentioned, though strait, is open;

and that only unbelief and indisposition stand without. Christ has declared that all things are ready: may his gracious influence, accompanying this humbling providence, form in you a spiritual taste for them! Certain I am, that whenever this is attained, his name will be "as ointment poured forth;" it will give a savour even to obsolete poetry:—

> Christ is a path—if any be misled;
> He is a robe—if any naked be;
> If any chance to hunger—he is bread;
> If any be a bondman—he is free;
> If any be but weak—how strong is he!
> To dead men life he is—to sick men health;
> To blind men sight—and to the needy wealth;
> A pleasure without loss—a treasure without stealth.

To prepare the heart for the reception of this treasure, as a God of order, he is pleased to use a system of means; one of which I hope he is now employing for your soul's health. I love to indulge hope, for affliction is a seed-time; and let me freely inquire, since God has called you aside, has spoken so emphatically, and you have had leisure for serious meditation, Do not the provisions of the gospel appear new, sufficient, and exactly suited to your case? Do you not mark that gold, which the thief cannot steal? that foundation, which no tempest can shake? that life, over which death hath no power? and that peace, which the world can neither give nor take away? Does not the religion of Jesus, that is so forgotten and degraded among men, stand forward now as the one thing needful? Does not his friendship appear now to be "that better part, which shall not be taken away," and which alone can help in

extremities? In the wreck of human aff
it is, that God often makes his truth
causes his gospel, like a plank thrown out to ...
perishing mariner, to be properly known and prized.

"These are the great occasions which force the mind to take refuge in religion. When we have no help in ourselves, what can remain, but that we look up to a higher and a greater Power? and to what hope may we not raise our eyes and hearts, when we consider that the greatest Power is the best?

"Surely there is no (truly wise) man who, thus afflicted, does not seek succour in the gospel, which has brought 'life and immortality to light.' The precepts of Epicurus, who teaches us to endure what the laws of the universe make necessary, may silence, but not content us. The dictates of Zeno, who commands us to look with indifference on external things, may dispose us to conceal our sorrow, but cannot assuage it. Real alleviation of the loss of friends, and rational tranquillity in the prospect of our own dissolution, can be received only from the promises of Him in whose hands are life and death; and from the assurances of another and better state, in which all tears shall be wiped from the eyes, and the whole soul shall be filled with joy. Philosophy may infuse stubbornness, but Religion only can give patience."*

In health and ease, ingenious speculations may amuse and satisfy us; but I think you now feel, with me, that when "he takes away the desire of our eyes with a stroke," our sorrows are too deep to be alle-

* Johnson.

viated by the mere orator or philosopher; we even turn in disgust from him who would thus trifle with our case; we need a support the world cannot afford. 'I faint,' says the wounded soul; 'I want an Almighty arm to lean on now; yea, a very tender and compassionate one too—one like that of the Son of Man. I need a "merciful and faithful High Priest, who, having been tempted, knows how to succour the tempted;" that Man of sorrows, that Brother born for adversity, who, being "acquainted with grief," can enter into my case, and commune with me in all the peculiarities of my distress. I now need one, who can quiet me on his own breast, and speak to me with his own voice, "Weep not; the child is not dead, but sleepeth." "Weep not, thou afflicted, tossed with tempest—when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee." It is true, this is the land of death; but "I am the resurrection and the life:" this is indeed a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; but I will lead you to "fountains of living waters; I will wipe away all tears from your eyes."'

You are ready, perhaps, to say, 'O that I knew where I might find him! But religion has been with me rather a case of necessity, than the high privilege of communing with such a Comforter. I feel the misery of living at such a distance from my heavenly Friend, especially at this time, but want liberty to approach nearer; could I indeed repose on the bosom just mentioned—"but, alas! my understanding is clouded, my faith weak, sense strong, and Satan busy in filling my thoughts with false notions, difficulties, and doubts, respecting a future state, and the efficacy

of prayer."* Though I see very gracious proposals made to returning sinners, I tremble to venture: death itself reminds me of transgression: my thoughts fly every where but to God.'

We readily acknowledge, that, among other views of death, it should be regarded as the wages of sin. It is also natural for convinced sinners to tremble before a Judge who charges even angels with folly. However pride may boast, or ignorance presume, he who measures by the standard of a law which is so spiritual as to regard a corrupt desire, will conclude with the apostle, that "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." A view of the divine character and of his own, led not only a publican to smite upon his breast, as the seat of apostacy and pollution, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner," but so perfect and upright a man as Job, to "abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes." I may add, that, as we become proficients in their school, we shall be more ready to confess than to complain; we shall learn to justify God in any instance of his righteous displeasure; and humbly own that he has laid upon us far less than our iniquities deserve.

But while the Christian, as a penitent, looks upon him whom he has pierced, and mourns—as a believer, he looks at him who was wounded for transgression, and hopes. He finds it as desperate to doubt the remedy as to deny the disorder. Having formerly rushed headlong with the presumptuous, he now fears perishing with the "fearful and unbelieving." He sees an atonement upon God's own providing; he

* Lady Russel's Letters.

pleads, upon God's own authority, the merit of that blood which "cleanseth from all sin;" and, by thus receiving "the record which God gives of his Son, he sets his seal to it that God is true."

Is this, my dear friend, in any degree your case? Fearful, wandering, and wounded, as your heart is, does it yet discover a resting-place? Instead of wishing to evade the charge of "manifold sins and wickedness, committed by thought, word, and deed, against the Divine Majesty," is "the remembrance of them grievous, and the burden of them intolerable?" Do you sincerely desire to be freed from this burden, and to enter into the glorious liberty of the children of God?—that heavenly communion and rest which has been mentioned. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world! Behold him exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins!" Come to him as a sinner, and touch, with humble confidence, but the "hem of his garment, and you shall be made whole." Wait upon him, and you shall obtain both strength and liberty; "for if the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Respecting your sense and weakness, let me add, that the provision made for fallen nature, corresponding to its various wants, is at once a character and an evidence of our religion. It is a glorious peculiarity of it, that its promises correspond with its precepts. To use the language which best conveys its meaning, "The kingdom of God is not in word only, but also in power." He who enlightens the blind eyes, undertakes to "strengthen the weak hands, and to confirm the feeble knees." The Spirit of wisdom and understanding is sent, to be also a Spirit of might, of grace,

and of supplication. It is peculiar to our Teacher, that he enables as well as instructs his disciples; he first presents a prospect of the inheritance, then a title to it through his death, and, together with these, affords strength to raise and pursue it. Turn to the 36th chapter of Ezekiel, and you will find your case amply provided for; but recollect that it is added, "I will yet for this be inquired of, to do it for them," —"Is any afflicted? let him pray."

But I must not pass by the temptation you mentioned respecting the efficacy of prayer. You will perhaps too readily object, 'Here it is that I sink. I prayed earnestly for the life of the deceased. I thought, at one time, I saw signs of a recovery; but the event makes me fear that I was not heard, and that I have no friend now left on earth or heaven.'

A little consideration will, I hope, show you your mistake, and prove that a petition may be graciously accepted, when its particular object is not granted. Did not our Lord declare, that his Father heard him always? Are we not told, that when, "in the days of his flesh, he had offered up prayers, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, he was heard in that he feared?" But consider, I pray you, how he was heard; certainly not by having the cup taken away, (a cup at which human nature, however perfect, must recoil,) but in being accepted when he prayed; in being supported while he drank it; and in victoriously accomplishing his grand design, through drinking it to the very dregs.

To come nearer to our own condition; we find St. Paul going to Christ for deliverance from some severe trial, which he calls a "thorn in the flesh." He tells

us that he also was heard, and in the same way as his Master; not by being released from suffering, but by receiving something more honourable and advantageous; namely, that grace, which not only supports a believer through his trials, but puts a healing virtue into them.

Far removed from the holy resignation of our Master, we too much resemble, in our prayers, the impatience of our children. I remember, when a sick one of mine has had some medicine to take, he has called loudly to me to come and assist him against those who were endeavouring to force it down. He probably wondered at my refusing to relieve him; but the little sufferer did not consider, though often told, that he was not to be helped in that way: he did not recollect, that while I tenderly felt his cry, the very compassion I felt for him, and the desire I had to relieve him, kept me from taking away the bitter draught.

The truth is, and it is a truth frequently told to us, that our heavenly Father always sends his children the things they ask, or better things. He answers their petition in kind, or in kindness. But while we think only of our ease, he consults our profit: we are urgent about the body, he about the soul; we call for present comfort, he considers our everlasting rest: and, therefore, when he sends not the very things we ask, he hears us by sending greater "than we can ask or think."

"Is any therefore afflicted? let him pray," not only in the public sanctuary, or in the retired closet, but let him consider that there is "a new and living way, consecrated through the veil" of a Redeemer's human nature, from every scene of retirement or

action to a mercy-seat; where he satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness: especially such as sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Our very misery and infirmity should, in defect of other preachers, point out the seat of our relief; and direct such frail and depraved creatures to the common Friend of the weary and heavy laden. Pouring into his bosom all our complaints, we at once obey his command, honour his character, and obtain his assistance: "for we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched by the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Is it not a time of need with you? Endeavour, at his command, to approach with a holy confidence for the "supply of all your need, according to his riches in glory;" and, at this time particularly, for the illumination and comfort of his Holy Spirit. He whom you supplicate, not only invites, but reasons with you: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

The religion of education and custom obtains, more or less, every where; but serious, vital, spiritual religion, is "a case of necessity" with us all. We summon our forces, we ransack our stores, "we spend our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not;" we look every way, and call to every thing, till each in turn loudly replies, "It is not in me." Well indeed

will it be, if, after all our fruitless efforts, we are brought to feel, that the provisions of the gospel are the only bread for a hungry soul, the only balm for a wounded heart. However foreign, my dear friend, these truths were from your consideration, when we first sat down together, if it shall please Him, who "commanded the light to shine out of darkness," to shine into your heart, and effectually discover the "exceeding riches of his grace" in these provisions, then, though you sit weeping over your loss, we are assured, from unquestionable authority, that angels are rejoicing for your unspeakable gain. We are certain, also, that not only every real friend will cry, "This day is salvation come to the house where we lately wept," but that, drying your tears, you yourself will be compelled to express your grateful sense of the correction you now deplore, and sing, with a companion and fellow-proficient in the school of affliction—

> Father, I bless thy gentle hand.
> How kind was thy chastising rod,
> That forced my conscience to a stand,
> And brought my wandering soul to God!
> Foolish and vain, I went astray,
> Ere I had felt thy scourges, Lord:
> I left my guide,—I lost my way;
> But now I love and keep thy word.

And here suffer me to drop a word or two respecting these

Our COMPANIONS in the house of mourning. Society is peculiarly pleasant when we are benighted on a journey: and especially that of a citizen of the place to which we are going. It is encouraging to

travel with those who are convinced, that if " they are chastened of the Lord," it is " that they should not be condemned with the world." " Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Here they are educated for it. Here they sit at the foot of the cross, and receive lessons of faith and patience, of humility and temperance.

" Blessed also are the pure in heart; for they here see God," who never so unveils himself as in seasons of distress. In sight of his character and word, they bow before his providence, yea, trust him in the stroke; for hope is made to arise here, as a light in darkness. Here the spiritual husbandman is taught to go " forth weeping, and bearing the precious seed of faith and love, penitence and prayer; assured that he shall come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him." Here also the heavenly scholar acquires " the tongue of the learned, that he should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." And here the true soldier of Jesus Christ is found " fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold of eternal life," in the very valley and shadow of death. He is here instructed to " cast down imaginations," those reasonings which peculiarly infest and darken the house of mourning; and taking the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, he wrestles not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers: a mighty though secret conflict, which God shall one day declare to the world; and which, when explained, will leave its most celebrated heroes " silent in darkness."

" Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock," for in this house they all have left the prints of their

feet. Here stood Jacob weeping over his beloved Rachel; and here Aaron deplored his sons. Here we trace the steps of David going up to his chamber, and crying with a loud voice, "Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son! my son!" and those of Ezekiel, who, forbidden to cry, silently resigned "the desire of his eyes" to the stroke. But enumeration is vain: hither came all the sons of God, the only-begotten not excepted; for Jesus himself stood and wept at the grave of a friend.

With such company, is it not far "better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting?" I knew one of these: a man who had seen affliction by a rod, like yours; a man who walked and wept in solitude, but with no expectation of being overheard. There is something sacred in grief, and we cannot listen to its effusions with too much candour: great candour, indeed, is here required; but, if afforded, it may procure you at least a companion, as you pass through this vale of tears.

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* * * "'Set thee up way-marks.' —I desire here to set them up, and to record the severest of my visitations in the house of my pilgrimage. Lord, prepare me for the next!

"I perceive I could not have properly sympathized with a friend in a similar case before this stroke. I could not have understood it.

"I have at times so felt the importance of eternal things, that I thought the loss of any present comfort would be tolerable: but I had no idea how much depended on being ready when the Son of Man came in such a providence.

" I feel I now stand in the right position to see the world and the word. They both appear under aspects entirely new.

" When I find ' my joys packed up and gone,' my heart slain, the delight of my eyes taken away—when I recollect who is gone before her, who is following, and what remains for the world to offer,—my heart cries, ' I loathe it, I would not live alway;'—I thank God that I am also to go.

" I perceive I did not know how much my life was bound up in the life of a creature. When she went, nothing seemed left. One is not; and the rest seem a few thin and scattered remains.

" And yet how much better for my lamb to be suddenly housed—to slip unexpectedly into the fold to which I was conducting her, than remain exposed here! perhaps become a victim!

" I cried, ' O Lord, spare my child!'—He did: but not as I meant. He snatched it from danger, and took it to his own home.

" I have often prayed, ' Lord, soften my heart! humble my pride! destroy my levity!'—I knew enough of his way to fear the means; and he has, in mercy towards me, regarded my soul more than my feelings.

" I prayed earnestly for her life. Duty compelled me to say, ' Thy will be done,'—but I meant nothing.

" O my God, how long hast thou come ' seeking fruit on this tree!' how much hast thou done to cultivate it! Shall it remain fruitless? Shall it be cut down after all?

" My passions forged impressions that she would live; but I now plainly perceive I am called to regard God, and not impressions.

" I have been long like one in a fever, attended at times with a strong delirium: I begged hard that I might not be bled, but he meant a cure, and pierced my heart.

" O how slender, how brittle, the thread on which hang all my earthly joys!

" I wish ever to be asking, ' Am I ready, should he send again and take ———, or ———, or myself?" ' Setting my house in order' will not make death approach sooner; but that it will render his coming much easier, I feel by sad experience.

" When I pass by the blaze of dissipation and intemperance, I feel a moment's relief. I say to my heart, ' Be still'—at least she is not left to follow these *ignes fatui*. How much better is even the grave for my T——, than ' the end of those things!'

" It is vain for me to wish, as I have done, to leave the world, and go to my Father, that I might inquire into the whole of the case; the reasons, the steps, the issue, &c. In a short time I shall; but he says enough now, if I have ears to hear.

" In the meantime help me, O my God and Father, to recollect, that I received this drop of earthly comfort from a spring which still remains! Help me to feel that nothing essential is altered! ' for with thee is the fountain of life.' Part of myself is already gone to thee, help what remains to follow."

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If this humble attempt to improve your affliction has been attended with any success, you will readily admit a few concluding hints with respect to

Our DUTY in such circumstances. And one

of the first and principal duties of the state is, as hath been expressed, to ACKNOWLEDGE God in it. It was charged upon some, that they "returned not to him that smote them, nor sought the Lord" in their distress. On the contrary, the clear apprehension Job had of a divine hand in his afflictions, is as instructive as his patience under them. While grief rent his mantle, faith fell down and worshipped —"The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Let us learn from him never to lose sight of the Author, by an undue regard to the mere circumstances of our loss. We may think and speak of the symptoms and stages of the late removal; of the physicians, of the remedies, &c. in their supposed right or wrong application; but not so as to forget, that an unerring Providence presided over the whole, yea, actually conducted every part on reasons as righteous as they are inscrutable.

Whatever may appear to us peculiar in the sick chamber, the whole was but God's intended method of removing one who had lived his full (that is, his appointed) time. "Seeing his days are determined, the numbers of his months are with thee; thou hast appointed him his bounds, which he cannot pass." Instead of fixing our attention upon means and creatures, of which we know so very little, let us turn to him who wrought by these instruments, and merely effected his own determinations by them. "Cease from man; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" Let not the creature hide the Creator, nor present things remain the fatal screen of the future; but in every occurrence mark the great Cause, "of whom,

and through whom, and to whom, are all things—who numbereth the very hairs of our head, and without whom even a sparrow falls not to the ground."

While others, therefore, are wandering without an object, and bereaved without a comforter, yea, are going to their worst enemy for relief, let us endeavour to say, with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go, but to thee?" Consider the great Physician as now proposing a most serious question to your conscience: "Wilt thou be made whole?" May the language of your heart be that of the apostle's: "If by any means." Then, though seemingly swallowed up of this grief, like Jonah, you shall find a resource in it, and finally be preserved by it. This dart, like that which once pierced an imposthume in battle, shall bring health with its wound, and you shall be enabled, with many that are gone before you, to say, "The Lord hath chastened me sore; but he hath not given me over unto death."

Duty also directs you to MODERATE YOUR GRIEF. Our heavenly Father, who "knows our frame, and remembers we are but dust," allows us to mourn when he afflicts us: he often, in his providence, calls us to it, and charges us to "weep with them that weep." But he admonishes us also of a danger on each hand—"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." If we seriously profess Christianity, our very profession implies, not only a subjection to our Lord's will, but that we have special resources in our affliction: several of which have been already named. That, among others of our privileges, there is "a peace from God, which passeth all understanding, to

keep our hearts and minds" through life and death: and that we have many reasons for "not sorrowing, as others who have no hope." Besides which, Christians have a post of honour to maintain—a high calling to demonstrate and commend. We shall, like the pilot in a storm, be brought to our principles; and, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," should prove that we have them not now to learn.

On the contrary, there is such a thing as nursing and cherishing our grief; employing a "busy, meddling memory to muster up past endearments," and personate a vast variety of tender and heart-rending circumstances. There is a tearing open the wound afresh by images and remembrances, and thereby multiplying those pangs which constitute the very bitterness of death itself. Our melancholy exceedingly affects this voluntary torture: it seeks expedients, and will listen to the most unjust and aggravated accusations which can approach a tender conscience respecting the deceased. But conscience should rather be concerned to repress such a disposition. It is a temptation. It desperately strives to retain what God has determined to remove: in some cases, it seeks to penetrate an abyss he forbids even conjecture to explore: and, while it unfits the mourner for the pressing duties of his station, it leads to that "sorrow of the world which worketh death" to his body, soul, and Christian character. How different and superior the sentiments of David! —"His servants said unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? Thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. And he

said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live: but now, he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Present circumstances also admonish you to KNOW YOUR OPPORTUNITY; and to improve this season as peculiarly favourable for spiritual advancement. There is a tide in the concerns of religion: the Scripture calls it the "day of visitation," and sends us to the stork and to the swallow for instruction respecting it. Your heart is now soft, its fascination withdrawn, and the call loud and affecting; endeavour, therefore, to take the benefit of a remedy you feel so expensive.

If, in a sense, "smitten friends are angels sent on errands full of love," instead of weeping over their tombs, let us listen to the voice which properly arises from them; especially if it be our privilege to bury one, who, like Abel, "being dead, yet speaketh," and who would be ready to say to his mourners, "Weep not for me, but for yourselves, and for your children." "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," and received my crown. I cannot now come to weep with you, but you may ascend and rejoice with me, where there is "no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; for the former things are passed away." If you truly love me, prepare to follow me. If you earnestly wish to see me again, seek not the living among the dead, but arise and become a "follower of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the

promises." Take that heavenly lamp, which "shineth as a light in a dark place;" walk humbly by it, "till the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your heart." Haste, my beloved, towards the things which "eye hath not seen;" and ere the eternal day break, and the present shadows flee away, "run with patience the race set before you, looking unto Jesus." How will my cup overflow, to meet you among those who daily "come hither out of great tribulation; and, having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, serve him day and night in his temple!"

Embrace every method God hath recommended for maintaining communion with him, and obtaining relief from him. The various ordinances of his house, the encouragements of his word, the society of his children, and especially prayer. Often speak to Him who "seeth in secret, and is nigh unto all that call upon him," though, with the woman of Canaan, you can only say, "Lord help me." Not only a high commendation, but a miracle followed her request. She urged it under the greatest discouragements, but you have both a command and a promise: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

And while you search the Scriptures, and attend the church, you will at once be instructed and encouraged, by marking in both, those footsteps which we lately considered. They are, indeed, not so explicit in the latter; but attention to the scriptural account of the Christian character, will greatly assist you in distinguishing real Christians from those who, equally forward and corrupt, have at all times assumed their

name, and mixed in their society, to their grief and scandal. Leaving these unhappy exceptions to their proper Judge, follow the unerring rule he has put into your hand, and those who walk by it; particularly such as are your companions in affliction. You will see them passing before you, with not only the same wounds in their hearts, but almost the same words in their lips. Study their course; mark their progress; observe how they held his arm, pleaded at his throne, reposed in his bosom, and magnified his truth, who walks with them in a furnace, which, like that of the three children, burns nothing but their bonds.

But "who is sufficient for these things?" A fourth direction will serve for a reply. To improve the opportunity you discern, and to keep pace with those you approve, SEEK DIVINE ASSISTANCE; or, as St. Paul hath expressed it, "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." If, on the one hand, religion has vast proposals to make; on the other, to be truly religious is a mighty aim, and can be accomplished only "through Him that loved us." Opposing Omnipotence to difficulty was their secret, who so gloriously overcame a world that was not worthy of them. Read their history in the 11th chapter of the Hebrews, and see what an implicit reliance, called faith, "a seeing Him who is invisible," will perform. That invaluable record seems to say, 'Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.'

We are, indeed, called to aim and to act, and have the greatest promises annexed to the endeavour: but are as frequently reminded, that "we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of our-

selves, but that our sufficiency is of God." Christ encourages no one to advance on the ground of his own strength, any more than on that of his own desert: he is as jealous of the power of his arm, as of the merit of his blood. He admitted infirmity and misery to be presented as a complaint, but never as an objection.

I have observed it not uncommon for this to be a season of peculiar temptation: a spiritual enemy stands ready to defeat every spiritual opportunity; but our help is near, and our example, in such conflicts, excellent. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice: and he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness." May you be enabled to add with the apostle, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest on me."

Again, that you may seek cheerfully this assistance,

REGARD YOUR ENCOURAGEMENTS.

To recover our alienated minds, and gain our confidence, God meets us in a way suited to our necessities, and to our fears. Resist, as the vilest temptation, any doubt of that "Good-will to man," which was sung at the Redeemer's birth. What hath God not done in order to commend his love? By every expression of tender concern, he, in the person of a "Man of sorrows," invites the guilty, the weary, the trembling, and the tempted, to come unto him; assuring them that he will neither "break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax."

If God is love, "Christ is God stooping to the senses, and speaking to the heart of man;" ever

saying, "Look to my cross, take my yoke, and lean upon my arm, and ye shall find rest." He sought the house of mourning, to comfort the sisters of Lazarus; he met a widow following her only child, and "when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not." May he meet you at this time, my dear friend, with consolations which none but himself can afford; and then, at the very grave, shall that saying be brought to pass, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Let such fear as despise our heavenly Friend, our Prospects, Provisions, Companions, and sense of Duty: God with us, and all things in God, is light in darkness, life in death. The words which revived him who styles himself "your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ," remain to cheer a solitude darker (if possible) than his: "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

To conclude: The late event solemnly repeats its Author's charge, "BE YE ALSO READY."

Your friend is gone: your following is certain; it may be sudden—it may be next. But should it take place this night, and find you provided with nothing better for the change, than the miserable subterfuges of the profane, or the scarcely less miserable supports of the formal, what an alarm, if you are not left to the most affecting delusion or stupidity, will it occasion! What an awful transition, to pass from the Saviour to the Judge! without love to him; without even an acquaintance with him; unwilling, unreconciled, un-

renewed !—and to him who has so often invited you, warned you, and, at times, affected your conscience with the truths we have been considering !—What a subject for eternal reflection ! " You would not come to him, that you might have life !"

God forbid, however, that this should be your case ! I only suppose it, lest it should : and it is too common to render the supposition improper. From such a danger we cannot be too secure ; and, therefore, having lately seen how soon " the night cometh, when no man can work," let us seek to-day, in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, that peace and safety which you must be conscious can never be found out of it, and which it may be too late to seek to-morrow.

Some things belonging to our important change are wisely hid from us. Nothing, however, is more plain than that it is near, and therefore demands our most serious attention ; that it is finally decisive, and therefore warns us to watch against those errors which eternity cannot rectify ; and that the hour is uncertain, and therefore calls us to stand prepared. With our loins girded, and our lights burning, may we thus wait for our Lord !

Impressed with such views, I have often wished to take the afflicted by the hand, and lead them to a Resource which their passions have obscured. I have wished them to see, that the Christian hope is then most alive and full of immortality, when every other hope perishes. These wishes, and the request of a friend, who was solicitous to obtain something of this kind, more compendious than he had yet seen,

have drawn from me some imperfect hints. Imperfect, however, as they are, like a few words, presented by the road-side, to the eye of a weary traveller, they may afford you some present direction and relief. And should He, who is pleased to employ the feeblest means in his greatest work, conduct you by them, though but a single step on your way, towards a *morning without clouds—a house without mourning*,—the service of your affectionate friend will obtain a high reward.

A WELCOME TO THE PLAGUE,

A FAREWELL TO LIFE,

AND

THE ANGELICAL LIFE.

BY THE

REV. SAMUEL SHAW.

TO THE READER.

Christian Readers,

It is now more than seven months since it pleased the holy and wise God to visit my house with the plague, when some dear and Christian friends from London were with me, whereby he gently touched, and gave warning to myself and whole family, consisting then of eight souls, but called away hence only three members of it, namely, two tender babes, and one servant; besides my beloved sister, and a child of my precious friend, that man of God, Mr. G. C. since also translated, who were of those citizens that visited me. You will easily believe, that I can have no pleasure to rake into the ashes of the dead, nor to revive the taste of that wormwood and gall which was then given me to drink: and yet I see no reason but that I ought to take pleasure in the pure and holy will of God, which always proceeds by the eternal rules of almighty Love and Goodness, though the same be executed upon my dearest creature-comforts, and grate ever so much upon my sweetest earthly interest: yea, I see all reason in the world why I should give to God the glory of his

attributes and works before all the world, and endeavour that some instruction may accompany that astonishment which, from me and my house, hath gone out and spread itself far and near. I will not undertake to make any physical observations upon this unaccountable disease, nor to vindicate myself either from that great guilt that is charged upon me, as if I were a sinner above all that dwell in this country, or from those many false and senseless aspersions that have been cast upon my behaviour during this visitation; but I do freely commit myself "to him that judgeth righteously," and pray with the Psalmist, "Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel!" Neither do I purposely undertake, in this Preface, to reconcile the providences of the most wise God to his promises, or to solve the seeming difference between the words of his mouth and the language of his hands, between which I have only suspected some kind of opposition, but have experienced an excellent harmony:—"In very faithfulness hast thou afflicted me." Whence arise all these uncharitable censures with which the afflicted soul is apt to charge both himself and his God too? Spring they not certainly from these two grand causes, namely, a misapprehension of the nature of God, and of the nature of good and evil? Let the studious and pious reader search and judge. If ever, therefore, you would be established in your minds in a day of affliction,—1. Labour to be rightly informed concerning the nature of God. Away with those low and gross apprehensions of God, whereby your car-

nal fancies ascribe to God such a kind of indulgence towards his children as you bear towards yours, which indeed no way agrees to his nature. His good-will towards his children is a solid, wise, and holy disposition, infinitely unlike to our human affections.—2. Labour to be rightly informed concerning the nature of good and evil. Judge not the good or evil of things by their agreeableness or disagreeableness to your fleshly taste or carnal interest, but by the relation they have to the supreme Good. The greatest prosperity in the world is no farther good, than as it tends to make us partakers of God; and the greatest affliction may thus be really good also. But that by the by. My design is to justify and glorify Infinite Wisdom, Righteousness, Goodness, and Holiness, before all men. O blessed God! who makes a seeming dungeon to be indeed a place of refreshment: who brings his poor people into a wilderness, on purpose there to speak comfortably to them! Be of good cheer, O my soul; he hath taken away nothing but what he gave; and in lieu of it hath given thee that which shall never be taken away—the first-fruits of life, instead of those whom the first-born of death hath devoured. But why do I say devoured? Doth not that truly live at this day, which was truly lovely in those darlings? Didst thou, O my fond heart, love beauty, sweetness, ingenuity, incarnate? And canst thou not love it still in the Fountain, and enjoy in it a more immediate and compendious way? Thy body, indeed, cannot taste sweetness in the abstract, nor see beauty except it be exhibited in matter; but canst not thou, O my soul, taste the uncreated goodness and sweetness except it be embodied, and have

some material thing to commend it to thy palate? Be ashamed that thou, being a spirit as to thy constitution, art no more spiritual in thy affections and operations. Dost thou with sadness reflect upon those sweet smiles, and that broken rhetoric, with which those babes were wont to entertain thee? 1. Consider duly what real contentment thou hast lost in losing those. For what were those things to thy real happiness? Thou hast lost nothing, but what it was no solid pleasure, nor true felicity, to enjoy—nothing but what the most sensual and brutal souls do enjoy as much as thou. 2. Be ashamed rather that thou didst enjoy them in such a gross and unspiritual manner. Art thou troubled because any earthly interest is violated? Rather be ashamed that thou hadst and cherishedst any such interest.

But pardon me, courteous readers, this digressive soliloquy; and now suffer me patiently, whilst I speak something by way of admiration, something by way of observation, and something by way of exhortation.

I. Let me call upon men and angels to help me in celebrating the infinite and almighty grace and goodness of the eternal and blessed God—

Who enabled me to abide the day of his coming, to stand when he appeared, and made me willing to suffer him to sit as a refiner of silver in my house—

Who carried me above all murmurings against, I had almost said all remembrance of, those instruments that conveyed the infection to me—

Who reconciled my heart to this disease, so that it seemed no more grievous, noisome, or scandalous than any other—

Who subdued me to, I had almost said brought

me in love with, this passage of the divine will. I can remember (alas! that I can say little more, but that I do remember) how my soul was overpowered, yea, and almost ravished with the goodness, holiness, and perfection of the will of God; and verily judged it my happiness and perfection, as well as my duty, to comply cheerfully with it, and be moulded into it—

Who gave me a most powerful and quick sense of the plague of a carnal heart, self-will, and inordinate love of the creature; convincing me, that those were infinitely worse than the plague in the flesh; so that I did more pity, than I could be pitied by, my ordinary visitors—

Who wonderfully preserved me from the assaults of the devil; never let him loose so much as to try his strength upon my integrity, or drive me to despondency, or to any uncharitable conclusions concerning my state—

Who enabled me to converse with his love and mercy in the midst of his chastenings, to see his shining and smiling face through this dark cloud; yea, kept up clear and steady persuasions in my soul, that I was beloved of him, though afflicted by him—

Who knew my soul in adversity, visited me when I was sick and in prison, refreshed, strengthened, comforted my inner man, in a marvellous manner and measure, and made me appear to myself never less shut up than when shut up. Oh, would to God I might be never worse than when I was shut up of the plague! The not removing of that affliction-frame I shall account a greater blessing, and a more proper mercy, than the removing of that afflicted state—

Who cleared up my interest in his Son, strength-

ened my evidences of his love, satisfied and assured my soul of its happy state, more than at any time—more than at all times formerly. I had clearer and surer evidences of divine grace in that patient, self-denying, self-submitting frame of spirit, than in all the duties that I ever performed: the valley of tears brought me more sight of my God, more insight into myself, than ever the valley of visions, all duties and ordinances, had done. When the Sun of Righteousness arose upon my soul, and chased away all the mists and fogs of self-will and creature-loves, then also did all dark and dismal fears, all gloomy doubtings, most sensibly flee before him—

Who supplied my family from compassionate friends, with all things needful for food and medicine. The Lord return it seven-fold into their bosoms—

Who maintained my health in the midst of sickness, in the midst of so great a death. I do not remember that either sorrow of mind, or sickness of body, ever prevailed so much upon me, during three months' seclusion, as to hinder me from my ordinary study, repast, devotions, or my necessary attendance upon my several infected rooms, and administering to the necessities of my sick. These ensuing Discourses were then composed; which doth at least argue, that, through grace, this mind was not altogether discomposed, nor body either—

Who preserved me, and gave me not up to death. For I judge, that I was personally visited with the plague, though not with the sickness—

Who hath given me a sincere and settled resolution, and vehement desire, to live entirely on and to himself: which I account to be the only life of a

soul, and only worthy to be called a living. Grant me this prayer, O most blessed and gracious God, for the sake of my only and dear Redeemer!

Thou, O Lord God, who art witness to all my thoughts, and words, and works, knowest that in truth and soberness, I publish these things to the world, not to advance the reputation of my own silly name, or to be admired of my fellow-creatures; but for the glory of thy holy name, to beget a good liking of so gracious a Creator in all thy poor creatures, who are prejudiced against thee and thy holy service, and to strengthen the hearts of thy servants to a most firm and lasting adherence to thee, even in the greatest extremities; that thou mayest be admired in thy saints, and glorified for giving such power, and grace, and comfort unto men. And "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works in and to the children of men!"

II. Suffer me to make a short observation of some few memorable passages, out of many: possibly they may be for the future, though they should not be for your present advantage. The Lord direct you to make a right application of them, according to the emergencies of life.

1. I do thankfully record the gracious design of the holy and wise God, in that he hath secretly prepared my heart, though at the time I knew not particularly for what. I remember that, for some few weeks before, I had found a more than ordinary largeness and readiness of soul; particularly, that I had been studying the excellent mystery, and imbibing the strengthening marrow, of that famous text, "God is love:" from whence I had importunately

pressed upon myself the reasonableness of complying sweetly, cheerfully, universally, with the will of God, little dreaming then of the plague, which was almost a hundred miles off from me. O blessed and merciful God, who of old didst make Abraham, and yet makest his and thy children, to follow thee, though they know not well whither!

2. In the next place, I count it most worthy of my observation, (not unworthy of your consideration,) that it pleased God to seize upon my family in the beginning of harvest; a harvest which I had too earnestly expected, too carefully provided for, and promised myself too liberally from: which folly and vanity of mind, this visitation, thus timed, did as clearly convince me of, (methought,) as if I had seen a hand-writing upon the wall. I am ashamed, yet I will not hesitate to confess before all the world, (God grant it may be for the seasonable and effectual warning of any,) that my vain mind was over-pleasantly, not to say eagerly, drawn out towards secular and worldly, however necessary employments and concerns: and thus I was rebuked.

Upon examination I find, that verily I have been guilty concerning my children. I do not remember that ever any man reproved me for immoderate loving of them, or could for any indulgence that could be by human eyes discerned; but O! I see and feel it as a sword at my heart, that I loved them not so purely, spiritually, and properly in God, as I ought to have done. Philosophy will easily prove it to be a more tolerable vanity to dote upon a child than upon a kingdom; but Christian divinity doth abun-

dantly demonstrate all creature-fondness unreasonable and intolerable.

3. The next thing that I will record, shall be the difficult task that I found to maintain a right humble, and a right cheerful frame, at the same time. O how oft and how long did I labour under this difficulty! That sense of sin which was called in to promote tenderness of heart, being overmuch indulged, was ready at length to destroy that largeness and cheerfulness of soul which was so much my duty and interest to maintain; and, on the other hand, the sense of divine wisdom, grace, and love in Christ Jesus, being called in to keep up the soul from sinking, was ready to bear it up so high, that it almost forgot that it was in the waters. Beware, Christians, and watch diligently, that godly sorrow do not settle into an ungodly despondency and inconsolable heaviness, the soul not being able to bear up under its own burden; and that a holy cheerfulness and serenity do not evaporate into an unholy frothiness and forgetfulness of your infirmities, the soul not being able to manage its own metal and motions.

I know you would willingly understand something of the frame of my heart at that day, with respect to my departure out of this world: you will best read my heart in the ensuing discourse upon 2 Cor. v. 6. which I think was fetched from thence. I shall, therefore, say no more as to this matter; only acquaint you with one eminent experience relating thereto. My mind, or fancy, or appetite, (I know not well what to call it,) was sometimes inditing in

me some desires to live yet longer. I entered the list with this temptation, and when I had fairly and calmly debated the ground and reason of such inclination, after many shifts and pretences, it came to this—I would fain persuade myself I was not yet holy enough. This I did immediately consent to, knowing it to be a certain truth; but that, therefore, I should desire to prolong my days upon earth, this was a fallacious inference. Methought I pleased myself a while, whilst I could say, I desired only to live to be better: but, after a time, I apprehended a fallacy in this pretence; for the way to be perfected in holiness, is not living, but indeed dying. Christians, if indeed your souls be sincerely and powerfully affected towards perfect holiness, then sing not so much with David, "Spare me, that I may recover," as with good old Simeon, who having seen God in the flesh, desired to go out of the flesh, that he might see him more fully and beatifically: "Now, lettest thou thy servant depart." I cannot enlarge upon this observation. I suppose I have hinted enough to show those pretences of many men, namely, that they would fain live to be more fit to die, to be, for the most part, but a kind of mockery and self-deceit.

4. Lastly, I do solemnly and sincerely profess before God, and angels, and men, that I was never so much as inclined to think hardly of God, or his good and holy ways, because of this dispensation; but did then constantly and freely proclaim to all that came to visit me, that sin, particularly self-will and earthly loves, are the worst of plagues; and holiness, the

only happiness of man; yea, afflicted holiness infinitely to be preferred before prosperous wickedness.

III. Suffer me, as a conclusion of this Preface, and as a result from all that I have seen and suffered, to commend unto you a few excellent and necessary duties. I have much ado to forbear being large here; but I have already transgressed, therefore I will waive those common themes of remembering your Creator betimes, of hearkening to the voice of his word, before his rod speak, of living in continual preparation for death, of repenting, and renewing repentance, &c. and only commend two or three things, which seem to me of most excellent and necessary importance.

1. Love and enjoy all things in God. Admire divine goodness in every created excellency, and taste a divine sweetness in every created comfort. Oh, how is the noble soul of man debased, straitened, confined, by low and earthly loves; whilst many men love the creature in opposition to the Creator, most men in competition with him, and almost all men in a way of separation from him! O base and degenerate affections! Let God be all things in your eye, so that you shall not see, nor know, nor love, nor taste any thing but him in the world. Deliver yourselves (O immortal souls! to whom I write) from all those low, and straitening, and starving creature-loves; and long and labour to be filled with pure, and holy, and spiritual delights, such as the angels of God have, such as the Son of God had, when he made it his meat and drink to do the will of his Father. But this you will find more largely prosecuted and

pressed in the last of these following discourses. Therefore,

2. Live purely at the pleasure of God, and maintain a universal and hearty compliance with his holy and perfect will. Believe it, you will never enjoy a firm and steady peace, till you have committed all your will and ways to him, and wrapt up all your interests and ends in him; till your hearts be conformed to the honour of God, and your wills moulded into his will. It is a difference of will and ends, and a distinction of interests, that beget all these ragings and stormings in the hearts of men against God: mine and thine do not only divide the world amongst men, but divide men against God, earth against heaven. Take this for a certain and undoubted aphorism, that "the grand interest of a soul is to comply with, and be one with God." Communion of hearts and wills, and interests and ends, is that glorious fellowship which a creature hath with its Creator; it is indeed the interest and honour, the duty and dignity, yea, the heaven and happiness, of the reasonable creature. But something to this purpose you will find in the first discourse.

3. I beseech you, Christians, be not content to say, you have chosen God for your chiefest good, but pursue after him as such, without grudging, and without ceasing, longing to be as much one with him in a participation of divine perfections, as our created natures are capable of. Maintain a holy and secret striving of soul towards this blessed object continually, as a thing moves towards its centre, as a soul ought to endeavour to accomplish its own perfections.

Stand not gazing upon a heaven to come, but labour to draw down all that peace, joy, love, purity, which heaven is, into your own souls, by growing up into the life of God daily. Reckon that you are never in a right temper, except you be in David's temper, when he waited for God "more than they that watch for the morning," when his soul broke for the longing that it had unto him at all times. I say not that you should prepare for death: that seems too low, both word and thing: look and live beyond death and the grave, be lifting up your heads to discover the dawnings of the day of your redemption, be laying hold upon immortality and eternal life. Something to this purpose you will find in the second discourse; to which I refer you.

And now accept, I pray you, these poor labours, which, for the glory of my God, I make public; that since, with Hezekiah, I may not go up to the house of the Lord, to declare the goodness of the Lord, yet I may leave some monument of it in writing, as he did, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness. I will add no more, but entreat all serious and devout readers to magnify the holy name of God on my behalf, adding thereunto their earnest prayers to God for me, that the same fire that burned up the standing corn of my creature-comforts, may also happily consume the stubble of my creature-delights and loves; that my God would give me "a name better than of sons and of daughters," the blessed fruits of his Spirit, instead of the beloved fruits of the womb; that I may for ever live under the most powerful influences of this dispensation; and that the

glory of the Lord may never depart out of the temple of my soul, as it departed out of the temple made with hands.

Now, to the God of all grace and peace be all praise and glory! To him I commit you all, and rest

Your friend and servant

In Christ Jesus,

SAMUEL SHAW.

February 27, 1665.

A

WELCOME TO THE PLAGUE.

Amos iv. 12.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

In this sermon of the prophet, the Lord reckons up the many fearful plagues wherewith, from time to time, he had essayed to reclaim this perverse people, the ten tribes of Israel, beginning at the 6th verse; but still concludes the relation with a doleful exclamation: "Yet have ye not returned unto me!" It is not my business to inquire into the several plagues, either the clear meaning of them, or the particular time when they took place or ended, nor into the impenitence and stubbornness of the people; though many useful things might be observed from hence. But in the conclusion, because none of these judgments had prevailed upon them, God resolves to trouble himself with them no longer, but to destroy them utterly. All that he had done to them in the land had not prevailed; therefore now he will cast them, and carry them out of the land, by the overflowing scourge of an Assyrian captivity. This threatening he denounces in the second and third verses: "I will take you away with hooks, and your

posterity with fish-hooks." And after he had reckoned up the many calamities whereby he had sought to bring them to repentance, but they repented not, and so had demonstrated the equitableness of this final judgment, he re-assumes the same threatening, and persists in his former resolution, ver. 12. "Therefore, thus will I do unto thee;" and then adds, "Because I will do this unto thee, therefore prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

Which words may either be understood ironically, by way of derision of all their vain confidences and refuges; and then the doctrine is, "That there is no standing before, nor striving against, nor flying before God, when he comes to execute vengeance;" which is an excellent truth, and of great use: or else the words may be understood seriously, by way of exhortation. The doubt seems to arise from the ambiguous meaning of the word *meet*. The word לקרא, signifies both to meet in a hostile manner, to assault, invade, or grapple with, as a man meets his enemy: so it is used concerning David addressing himself to fight with Goliath, "He ran to meet the Philistine:" and also to meet in a friendly, amicable manner, by way of communication, salutation, or converse: so it is used concerning Isaac going to meet Rebekah, and concerning God's meeting of Balaam, to speak with him, and impart his mind to him. If we take the word in the first sense, then it is spoken by way of irony or derision; and so the meaning of the words is contained in the proposition that I have laid down. If we take the words in the latter sense, then it is spoken seriously, by way of exhortation; and so the meaning of them may be wrapt up into this

Doctrine, "*That it is the duty of God's people to study a right behaviour towards him, and to converse with him aright in the way of his judgments, in the time of their afflictions.*" And in this sense I shall take them, and prosecute them. Besides that general, unalterable godly frame and behaviour, which God's people owe to him as a standing duty, and indispensable homage, there are some more especial behaviours and tempers which they owe to him in special cases, and are duties, as the season requireth: Particularly, there are some special behaviours required at our hands in the time of our affliction. And these both, 1. Towards ourselves, as self-examination, self-judging, renewing of repentance, &c. 2. Towards men, meekness, compassion, instructing, warning, comforting, &c. 3. Towards God, as we shall see anon.—An afflicted condition doth call for some more especial tempers and behaviours towards ourselves and others; but these I am not to speak unto from this text. It is the soul's meeting God, behaviour towards him, conversing with him, that my text leads me to treat of; and I shall not vary from it. In handling of which position I shall take this method:—

I. Premise some things needful to be known concerning the soul's conversing with God. For I shall retain the word *conversing* throughout my discourse, as being a single, yet a large and significant word.

II. Show what it is for a soul to converse with God, and how it comes to converse with him.

III. Prove the doctrine, that it is our duty to converse with God in the way of his judgments.

IV. Show particularly how we are to converse with God in the time of afflictions.

V. Apply it.

I. I shall premise some things needful to be known, that tend to clear up my way to the following discourse.

1. I premise, "That it is the great duty of man to converse with God." I have read, that it was a common precept that the Jewish doctors were wont to give to the people, that they should single out some one commandment, and exercise themselves very diligently in the observation of it, that therein they might make God their friend, and make him a kind of amends for the breach of many others. I doubt it is a rule that too many professors live by, who, not having the genuine and generous spirit of true religion, do parcel out their obedience into some little shreds of homage and devotion, and, instead of consecrating their whole lives to God, do content themselves with some circumstantial and light obedience, and think themselves people of great attainments, if they do but severely tie up themselves to hearing twice a-week, and prayer twice a-day, and a few other acts of more solemn worship. Certainly this is a penurious and needy spirit, much unlike the generous, ample, and free-born spirit of true religion. The duty, the whole duty, the constant duty of man, is to converse with God, commended in Enoch by the name of "walking with God;" where you may observe of him, that he did not only set out fairly with God, take a turn or two with him, but he walked with him three hundred years together. The same

God calls for from Abraham, under the same name, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." But it is not only the command of God that makes this a duty; if there had been no express commandment concerning it, yet were it the duty of every man, necessarily flowing from his relation as a reasonable creature. As man is a creature, so he must needs live upon God; and as a reasonable creature, so he ought to live with him and unto him. Therefore hath God given unto man a noble, rational soul, not only that he might talk and work, manage the creatures, and converse with the world, but that he might converse with the God of the world, that infinite, blessed, and glorious Being. This is the very end of man's creation, as man, as a reasonable creature: this was the end of his being created in the image of God; and when he was fallen from this image, this was the end of his redemption by Christ Jesus, that heaven and earth might be reconciled, and those that were far off might be brought nigh. Sin is a sinking of the soul down to self and the creature, and redemption from sin is nothing else but a recovery of the soul into a state of favour and fellowship with God; so that whatever is expressed by faith and repentance, is contained in this one word, "converse with God." It is the great, the necessary, and, as I may say, the natural duty of the reasonable soul.

2. "It is the highest privilege of man." The prerogative of man above the beast is his reason; and the glory of reason is, that it is capable of knowing, loving, enjoying, and conversing with the supreme and infinite Good. The privilege of reason is not, as too many think, that it is capable of understanding

arts and sciences; that it is capable of climbing up into the nature and course of the heavens, and diving into the secret depths of the earth and sea, and the creatures therein contained; but in conversing with the infinite and glorious God. How miserably do vulgar souls abuse this noble faculty, who exercise it only in discoursing, numbering, and ordering the poor concerns of the world and the body! Yea, certainly those wise men, those scribes, those disputers of this world, as the apostle calls them, who cry up this faculty, and glory so much in it, and yet do not exercise it about that high and eternal Being, do not converse with God in pure affections, and God-like dispositions and conversations, but expend those vast treasures of reason upon secrets in nature, secrets in art, secrets in state, or any other created being—do enthral their own souls, which they say are so free-born, and captivate and confine that noble principle, which they themselves do so much magnify; for sin is certainly the great and only shame and reproach of an immortal soul. And indeed these men, though they put their souls to drudgery somewhat more noble, yet are really not more happy than the vulgar sort, who spend the strength of their souls about eating and drinking, ploughing and sowing, or keeping of cattle. What difference, I pray you, in point of true happiness, is there between boys' playing with pins and points, and old men's hugging of bags and lands? The noblest sciences, the greatest commands, the most enriching traffics, are as very toys in comparison of true happiness, as the poor dunghill possessions of vulgar men; and the wise, the rich, the learned, the honourable of the world, that take

up with an employment in this world, and with a happiness in themselves, or in any creature, do as much disgrace their own souls, and as truly live below their own faculties, as he doth that knows no higher good than food and raiment, no higher employment than to toil all his days in a ditch. For indeed, as to all things but conversing with God, man seems to be but equal, perhaps inferior, to the beasts that perish. Doth man eat, drink, sleep, work? so do they. Doth man find any sensual pleasure which the beasts do not enjoy as well as he? If any glory in their knowledge of natural and political things, I could instance in the strong memory, great sagacity, quick fancy, wonderful perceptions, of many beasts, and their strange knowledge of many secrets, which they never learned by books, nor gathered gradually by observation. And as for man's communication of his notions by words and phrases, I doubt not to affirm, that there is something like to be found in beasts and birds; yea, that very beauty and flower of sound, even music, which some men magnify so much, is more fairly and sweetly uttered by the silly bird that sits solitarily upon a bough, than by the choristers of the Pope's cathedral. What solid prerogative worth naming remains to man above his fellow-creatures, but his conversing with God, which we call *religion*, and is indeed reason rectified, sanctified, exalted, and raised up into its pure and primitive perfection? Insomuch, that I have sometimes thought, that I never heard a more reproachful word spoken concerning a degenerate man, neither do I think that any thing can be spoken of him more shameful and dishonourable, than what the apostle

saith of the heathen—"without God in the world." By conversing with God in the world, man is truly raised above the beasts, and the godly man above all other men: nay, hereby is the godly soul advanced to the dignity and glory of the holy angels, or at least to a parity of happiness; for it is this that is their perfection and glory, as we find it described in Matth. xviii. 10. "They always behold the face of God." And therefore our blessed Saviour doth affirm, that the saints in the resurrection, who shall be raised above all creature-communion, to live upon God singly and entirely, shall be "equal to the angels of God." In a word, this is the most real heaven, setting aside all circumstances of place, the perfect and proper happiness of a soul, "to see God"—to be "like unto him"—to converse with the Father by the Son, as our Saviour hath told us, who best knew it: "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." By this it is that God dwells in the soul, and the soul in God, as we shall see hereafter, and the kingdom of heaven doth really enter into every believer.

3. "The natural man is utterly unwilling and unable to converse with God." An earthly mountain may as soon rise up to heaven by its own power and good will, as an earthly mind; and such minds are all natural and unregenerate. Sin, as I hinted before, is a falling from God, a sinking of the soul into self, whether sensual self, or spiritual self, and a shrivelling of it up into the creature: and the sinful soul is always, like a shadow, moving upon the surface of the earth, and higher it cannot get. Would you

know what is the principal object of a natural man's admiration, inclination, and ambition?—the Psalmist will tell you, it is some created good: "Who will show us any good?" Will you know what is the disposition of the natural man towards the supreme and uncreated Good?—the apostle will tell you, it is ignorance and enmity: "The carnal mind is enmity against God." This high duty of conversing with God in a right manner is beside the temper of the wicked man: never any such man did perform it. It is a contradiction. A wicked man conversing with God is, as if one should say, an ungodly man that is godly. But that is not all. This duty is not only out of the hands of a wicked man, but out of his reach too: "Neither can he know him," saith the apostle to the Corinthians; and again to the Romans, "Neither can he be subject to him." "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" saith the prophet. Can man walk with God, converse with God, except he be reconciled to him. And what agreement but by a Mediator? What mediator between God and man but Christ Jesus, who is a Mediator, who is God-man? In a word, some converse with one thing in the world, and some with another, as I noted before: but all converse principally and mainly with the creature, that are not regenerated by grace, reconciled by Christ.

4. "It is the duty of man, in all ages of life, at all times, and in all places and conditions, to converse with God." It is a necessary, natural, certain, constant duty, springing up out of the very nature and natural will of God, and out of the very nature, and relation, and capacity, of the reasonable soul, bind-

ing and admitting of no dispensation or diminution. There is no time wherein it is not a duty, or wherein it is less a duty than at another time; however we are apt to give to ourselves many relaxations from it. The first-fruits, nay, the very early buds of the tender soul, and of the springing faculties—these are due to God, and ought to be dedicated to him: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Manhood is not allowed so to attend to cares and exploits, nor old age to pains and griefs, as to neglect converse with God; but whether young men build or plant, fight or study, work or marry, or manage the affairs of the house or of the field, all should be undertaken and carried on in a way of converse and fellowship with God; or whether old men sit and muse and meditate, or lie under the pain and grievances of decrepit age, still it ought to be in the Lord. Neither doth this duty admit of interruption, any more than of cessation: there is no dispensation given us from this duty—as in no age, so in no hour of our life. As we cannot live a moment out of God, so neither ought we to live a moment without God in the world. We ought continually to endeavour to walk in subservience to, and converse with God; yea, and as far as may be, in a feeling converse with him too. Holy David witnesses of himself, that the fear of God was continually before his eyes, and that he did continually converse with God; for so those words may be understood, "I am continually with thee." The like is recorded of many other saints both in the Old and New Testaments, concerning whom one may well say, as the queen of Sheba concerning the servants of Solomon, and with much better reason,

"Happy are these thy servants, O Lord, which stand continually before thee." Neither is it the duty of some few men, who have the greatest knowledge, or the most leisure: for it springs out of the relation of a creature, and out of the very nature of the rational soul; so that no soul of man is exempted from it, however many ignorant and profane persons live rather in a professed independence upon God. Neither is it a duty only upon supposition of leisure and freedom from worldly business, as some other things are, but is equally incumbent upon prince and peasant, upon him that sits in his closet, and upon him that ploughs in the field; yea, they that go down unto the sea in ships, ought to go up to heaven in their hearts, and not only to converse with the clouds, which they often do, but above them too. A hand full of earth, and a heart full of heaven, may well stand together; for as this duty justles out no honest business, so neither should itself be justled out by any. And as this high and excellent duty agrees to all ages, and times, and persons, so it agrees to all conditions too. Poor men think that rich men may well do it, and rich men think that poor men had need to do it: Prosperity thinks it hath better things to mind than a God, and Adversity knows it hath worse things, but it must mind them: Plenty is too full to entertain him, and Poverty hath enough to do to bear up under its own burden: Learning knows how, but will not—Ignorance says it would, but knows not how. But notwithstanding all this shuffling, the obligation to this duty ceases not: none so high as to be above it, none so mean as to be below it: for rich and poor, high and low, learned and un-

learned, prince and peasant, though they are divided amongst themselves by punctilios and lesser differences, yet they are united in one universal Being, meet in one and the same centre, agree in the common capacity of reasonable creatures. As religion hath an interest and a concern in the whole of the conversation, according to that of the apostle, "Our conversation is in heaven," so also hath it a room in the conversation of every man in every capacity. No relation, condition, action, change, is exempted from the powerful influence thereof: so the apostle describes himself, by his "living in all good conscience before God" all along, and by his exercising himself in this thing, "to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men."

5. Now, the fifth step in order would be, that "It is more especially the duty of God's people to study to converse with him aright in the way of his judgments;" which is the doctrine itself, which I must not come to confirm, till I have showed,

II. In the second place, "what it is for the soul to converse with God, and how it comes to converse with him."

Not to name those too low and improper notions that men ordinarily have of this high and spiritual matter, conversing with God, to speak properly of it, is "a complex act of the soul, whereby it entertains God in itself, and renders itself back again to him;" receives impressions from him, and gives up itself again to him; is first filled with him, and then empties itself into him. You may conceive of it after the similitude of a plant, that is influenced by the benign

beams of the sun, and in those beams spreads itself, and in the virtue and power of them grows up towards heaven; or after the similitude of a river, that is continually filled with the ocean, and is continually emptying itself into the same. This seems to be our Saviour's elegant allusion, where he compares a divine and godly principle in the soul to "a well of water," springing out from God, and continually boiling and rising up towards him—"springing up into everlasting life." Or you may conceive of it after the similitude of a glass, which receives the image of him that looks into it, and reflects the self-same image that it receives: for indeed the brightness and beauty of holiness, wherewith a godly soul doth shine as a light in the world, is nothing but a reflection of that light and brightness wherewith the Father of light shines into it. And so the best of men have nothing of their own to glory in: for they behold God, but it is in his own light; they love him with a love which he hath shed abroad in their hearts: they are therefore like him, because he hath stamped his own image upon them; and so they must needs acknowledge, concerning all their acts of love, communion, and delight, as David did in another case, "Of thine own we offer unto thee." This is indeed the true and noble converse and communion with God, wherein the life of a godly man is infinitely advanced above the life of all other men, and indeed doth nearly resemble the life of angels. Their life is described in the Holy Scriptures, by a seeing of God, a beholding of him face to face; which we must not understand of a naked, idle speculation, but of a real assimilation, arising from the divine impressions

made upon them; a beholding of him so as to be changed into his image. And such is a godly man's life, spiritual life, his life of converse with God, consisting in a participation of God, and of his grace, and a holy reciprocation or reflection of affections to him: which are indeed two distinct acts, though originally springing from the same fountain: for the love wherewith the soul loves God, is itself an efflux from him: for by loving us, he inspires a love into us; and by influences from God, we become God-like. But this converse with God is not only by the impressions of goodness from God, and the reflections of love and delight towards him, but is also seen in the various acts of the soul, according to the various impressions which God makes upon the soul, and suitable to the various occasions of life. So we converse with God by acts of fear, reverence, joy, confidence, self-resignation, and the like.

Now, because we are in the body, and so cannot converse with God so purely, spiritually, and immediately, as the angels in heaven do, therefore it hath pleased God to appoint unto man ways and means of conversing with him, wherein he hath promised to communicate himself to the soul, and so to draw forth reciprocal acts of love, fear, reverence, confidence, resignation, dependence, and delight, out of the same soul towards himself. Now, these ways or means may be reduced to three heads—Duties, Ordinances, and Providences; though indeed the two first may be contracted into one.

1. I will speak a word or two of ORDINANCES, such as, the word and sacraments: for I shall name no more but these two. The preaching of the word

is a way in which God doth usually meet the soul, to communicate *life:* "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." *Light:* "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." *Warmth:* "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" *Growth:* "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." And the soul doth answer these impressions, as in water face answereth to face, by the acts of faith, love, joy, meekness, and holy resolution. So also the administration of the sacraments is a way wherein God meets the soul, and communicates his love, sweetness, fulness, goodness, strength, and vigour to the soul; and it reflects on him in the acts of holy complacency and delight, cheerfulness, thankfulness, and dependence.

2. Duties.—These are also ways of converse with God; such as confession, petition, thanksgiving, conference, singing, meditation, observation. In all which God impresses something of himself upon the soul, and draws answerable affections of the soul unto himself, as might appear in the particular explication of them; but that would be too much a digression. Only I will here note, by the way, the mistake of many low-spirited Christians, who know no other converse with God than the bare performance of these things; this they count the very top-stone of a Christian's perfections, the very flower of the spiritual life. But, alas! this is a gross mistake. There is, sure, something more sweet and satisfactory in the spiritual life than the dry duty: there is marrow in the bone, or

else a holy soul would not covet it with so much fervour. Converse with God in duties is a spiritual, savoury, filling enjoyment, distinct from the duties themselves. This must needs be, except we will allow to wicked and hypocritical men the same dainties that the most sanctified souls feed upon, and say, that the children's bread is common to the dogs as well as unto them. The soul doth not converse with God in duties barely when it prays or meditates; for even godly souls themselves do many times find little converse with God in these, when he suspends the influences of his graces, or their hearts are clogged or cloyed with earthly objects, or otherwise indisposed and shut up against him. It is not speaking to God that brings the soul really nigh unto him, nor bare thinking of God that advances the soul into the excellent state of feeling converse with him. Even prayer itself may prove many times an empty sound; and meditation, that most excellent and genuine offspring of the soul, may prove a poor, dry, and sapless speculation. It is not enough to set up the sails, but there must be also wind to fill them. But then doth the soul converse with God in duties, when the dark places thereof become filled with his divine light, and the empty places thereof filled with his divine love, and the low and languishing affections thereof are ravished and revived with the powerful insinuations of his almighty grace; when God draws, and the soul runs. He puts in his finger by the hole of the door, and the very bowels of the soul are moved for him, as it is described, Song v. 4. Then doth the soul converse with God in meditation and prayer, when the Spirit of God moves upon the face of the waters, when

he kisses it with the kisses of his mouth; and the shaking soul finds itself marvellously settled, the doubting soul established, the frozen heart thawed, the benumbed affections warmed, the scanty and contracted capacity of it enlarged and wonderfully widened, and its slow and sluggish motions quickened into a lively and cheerful compliance with and pursuit of the supreme and self-sufficient Good; when the soul finds its legs to run after that glorious object which is presented to it, lifts up its hands to lay hold upon the strength, the fulness, the faithfulness, the Christ of God; and, bearing up itself upon the wings of faith and love, flies out to seek its rest and happiness; and no longer envies the birds of the altar, for itself enters into the holy of holies, and through the arms of its Mediator throws itself into the very heart of God. In a word, and that shall be the word of God, then doth the soul converse with God in duties, when, with "open face beholding the glory of God," it doth not only admire it, but itself "is changed into the same image, from glory to glory;" that is, from grace to grace.

3. Providences.—These are another way wherein the soul converses with God. Now, by Providences we mean, in general, "the whole work of God in governing the world, and all things therein." And so indeed a religious enlarged soul, a mind freed from particular pinching cares, low and selfish ends, converses with God in beholding and observing God's settled course of governing the world. The whole heavens, earth, and sea, and the admirable order kept up in them, do teach the knowledge of God, and draw up the contemplative soul into an observa-

tion and admiration of him in them, and the pious soul longs to find some impressions made upon itself by all these, and to be affected with God therein. It is not content with a bare speculation, but its meditation of God in these is sweet to it, as David's were. Particularly, God's providence towards mankind, as it doth most lively express his infinite justice and wisdom, so we ought to converse with him therein, and in all the changes of any kind that befall man in the world, that befall all the kingdoms of the world, the four great monarchies of it, and all other subordinate dominions; more especially in all the mutations that befall the church of God in the world, and all men of all sects and sorts therein, but most especially ourselves. Labour to converse with that infinite mind, wisdom, and understanding, that ordains and orders all the changes that befall yourselves. Now, our conversing with God in the several changes that befall us in the world, is in general by endeavouring to serve the providence of God in every change. The providence of God serves itself even upon wicked men, and upon all creatures that do least understand it; but a godly man only knows how to serve the providence of God in the things that befall him: he hath no private selfish interest of his own, but counts it his interest cheerfully and faithfully to serve the will of God, to be what God would have him be, to be without that which God would have him want, and to do what God would have him do. Every wicked soul in the world sets up some trade for himself, and drives on some particular self-interest distinct from God: but a godly soul counts it his greatest honour and happiness to be nothing in

himself, or for himself, but is wholly at the will of his Creator; and, looking upon all his interest as being bound up in God, is solicitous for nothing else but to serve the will of God in his generation. So the life of holy David is described: "David in his generation having served the will of God," that is, 'the providence of God,' say the Dutch annotators, translating the words in this order. A good man eyeing nothing but the great and blessed God in the world, and knowing that he was not made for himself, but for a higher good, is only ambitious to be subservient to that infinite and sovereign Being; herein imitating his blessed Saviour, who lived not to "do his own will, but the will of him that sent him;" and, again, to "seek the glory of him that sent him." In a word, he looks upon himself, not as in himself, but in God, and labours to become wholly God's, and to live in the world only an instrument in the hands of Him that worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will; that is, in general, for the conversing with God in all kinds of changes in general.

Now, these changes are reduced to two heads—Prosperity and Adversity. In the first of these, it is our duty to converse with God, and not with the creature-comforts which we do enjoy from him, as one might show at large. But I am to speak of the latter, and to show how we ought to converse with God in that. But first I must demonstrate, that it is our duty to do it: which was,

III. The third thing I promised; namely, "To show that it is the duty of God's people to study to converse with him aright in the way of his judgments in a time of affliction."

And here, I hope, I need not be at pains to prove by Scripture, that besides the general business of a Christian's life, some particular and more especial behaviours are required of him in an afflicted state. All will grant it sure: besides, by the time I shall have declared what they are, I shall not need to prove that they are. Therefore, for the present, I shall content myself to give in three or four reasons of it, and so pass on.—It is especially the duty of God's people to study to converse with him aright in the time of afflictions:

1. Because, "Then especially it is hard to do it." We are then very apt to be taken off from it; therefore we should then especially labour to pursue it, and perform it. We are then in imminent danger to be taken off from it, and that by these means:—

(1.) "Our senses do set us on work to converse with outward means," which, whilst we attend upon too eagerly, we neglect and forget God. This might appear by an induction of particular afflictions; but that would be too long. I will only instance in one or two for explication. The sickness and pain of the body call out the mind to seek after and converse with physicians: bodily wants call us to seek after bodily supplies; and so all kind of distresses call out the soul to seek creature-relief. Call upon the sick and languishing patient, to call upon, and hang upon, divine help, to converse with God; alas! he hath enough to do to attend upon his pains. Tell him of ease, of recovery, and he can hearken to you, for that is the news that he longs to hear. Call upon the poor pined beggar to seek relief from God, to converse with him; alas! he finds such a faintness in

his limbs, such a gnawing of hunger, such a restless appetite within himself, that he can groan out nothing but—O that one would give me bread to eat! In a word, the soul is more naturally addicted to attend to its body, to which it is joined, than the God that joined it to that body. Hence you may observe two things by the way:—1. The reason why so few persons repent in time of sickness; the sense of sickness drowns the sense of sin. 2. The reason why so few poor people, who are evermore conflicting with the necessities of the body, do not at all mind the concern of their souls; the exigencies and straits of the body cry louder in their hearts than all the word and works of God. So that as health is the best time for repentance, so it seemeth that the best way to teach the poor is to relieve them.

(2.) "The corruptions of the heart are then most apt to make war against heaven." This is the opinion of him who knows the temper of man too well: "Put forth thine hand against him, and he will curse thee to thy face." And I am persuaded that the devil acts much by this observation; which makes him endeavour all he can to make many good men poor, thinking thereby to make them less good, though the wise and merciful God wonderfully prevents him. For indeed the soul is so naturally tender of the body, that it is loath God himself should touch it: if he do, it is ready to fret and storm, and fly in his face. "Converse with God!" saith the wicked king—why, "this evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?" There are many corruptions of the soul that are most ready to clamour against God in a time of affliction—as fear, anger,

unbelief, yea, and sinful self-love and creature-love: an affection that can never be taught to converse with God, yet will go crying after him, when he takes away any darling from it; as Phaltiel went crying after his wife, or rather crying against him; as Micah cried against the men of Dan, saying, "Ye have taken away my gods, and are gone away, and what have I more?"

(3.) "Temptations do then come strongest from without." Then it is the devil's time to play his game. What! put up with this reproach? what! will you sit down with this loss? up and revenge thyself. He that knows so well the temper of man's heart, so ready to curse God when he touches him, will not fail to touch the heart, and tempt it to curse him indeed—"Curse God, and die."

2. The second reason why we ought especially to study to converse with God in the time of affliction, is, because "That is a time wherein we are most apt to think ourselves excused from this duty;" as if it were allowed us in our extremity to forget God, and mind ourselves only; and that not only in respect of these bodily straits and distresses which I named under the last head, but in respect of our own passions. When the afflicting hand of God is upon us, pressing and grieving us, and taking our beloved comforts from us, we are apt to indulge our own private and selfish passions—care, fear, sorrow, complainings; yea, to think we are in some sense allowed to indulge them. How willingly do we suffer ourselves to be drawn into a converse with ourselves, to be contracted, as it were, into ourselves, and suffer ourselves to be carried down the stream of our own

passions, which at other times we should think it were our duty to resist! Even as the heart draws home to it, in a time of danger, the blood that was dispersed abroad in the body, as it were to defend itself, so the heart gathers home its power and affections, which were formerly bestowed here and there, to employ them all about itself in a time of sore affliction. And we are apt to think ourselves excusable too in so doing: so that if God himself should ask a distressed soul, as he did Jonah, "Dost thou well to be careful, fearful, sorrowful, querulous, because of those afflictions, losses, distresses, that are upon thee?" it would go nigh to give him the same answer—"I do well to be sorrowful, yea, and to refuse to be comforted." There seems to be allowed us some natural affections in case of extreme affliction, which, how far they are lawful, I will not now dispute: but sure I am, that if such be allowed us, they must not be wild extravagances, wandering without the bounds of religion and conscience, as if God had laid the reins upon the neck of the soul, and given it leave to indulge itself in what passions it would, for a certain time; as the daughter of Jephthah was allowed to go whither she would, wailing upon the mountains for two months. We are never allowed any passions or affections that do not comply with the will of God, and consist with our submission thereto. But whatever they are, I find that, under the pretence of those, some men are apt to be carried into strange, inordinate wishes, and commit many passionate outrages; and, indeed, the best of men are too prone to suspend and interrupt that lively and feeling converse with God, which they ought to maintain, even when they smart most.

3. " Because then is a time when there is more special use for and need of such converse with God." And that, 1st, to give rest to the soul. In prosperity men forget God, and yet make a shift to find some kind of rest in their pleasures, friends, employments. Some take comfort in their cups and companions; and, indeed, all are apt to fancy a contentment in creature-enjoyments. But in a time of great affliction all these are gone, or at least have no favour in them; and where shall the weary soul find rest then? When there is no show of rest but in God alone; when all other props fail, then either catch hold of God or fall. There is now nothing left to give any settlement or contentment to the soul but God alone; and in him there is ease to the sick, rest to the weary, settlement to the restless, contentment to the troubled Christian. Therefore converse with God in the day of greatest affliction, which is the same counsel in effect with that of our Saviour, " Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." 2d, There is need of it to give relief to the body also.

And so conversing with God in a right manner is the best policy, the surest way to recovery and relief. See what a speedy cure there is in it: " They looked unto him, and were lightened; and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." In vain is conversing with friends, physicians, counsellors—in vain is all creature-converse without this: no rest to the soul, no ease to the body, in a time of affliction, without converse with God: so that a man in affliction, estranged from God, straggling off from

God, is altogether miserable. In a word, separate a soul from God, in prosperity his enjoyments are low, and in adversity the want of them is very bitter: so that there is good reason why a Christian should study to converse with God in the way of his judgments.—But the great art is to know how. This, therefore, I now come to,

IV. In the fourth place, "To show particularly how we are to converse with God in affliction." Now there are two ways of explaining this:—

First, By showing with what attributes of God we are to converse.

Second, By what acts of the soul.—But I shall bring both these into one.

1. We ought to converse with the absolute and unlimited Sovereignty of God, whereby he, as a free and supreme agent, doth what he will, and none can say unto him, "What dost thou?" This Job often eyes and owns, particularly in chap. ix. 12. "He taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?" This we must also eye often, and own heartily; this we may well argue from God's creating us. He that made us thus without any constraint, can he not, may he not, make us otherwise, and alter us without restraint? So Job argues: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." We may also argue it from the subordinate sovereignty and inferior supremacy of men: even a monarch among men doth whatsoever he pleases, and who may say unto him, "What dost thou?" Yea, a very centurion hath a kind of sovereignty in his sphere,

over as many as are under him: he saith unto one man, "Go, and he goeth; and to another, Do this, and he doeth it." And shall we not then acknowledge a sovereign power, an independent, absolute authority, in the great and blessed God, over the whole creation, the workmanship of his own hands? So the good centurion argues and infers, in the passage last quoted. Nay, as the apostle saith in one place, "We have fathers of our flesh," who use us at their pleasure, and we do not gainsay their authority: we do not say to our father, "What begettest thou?" nor to our mother, "What hast thou brought forth?" Nay, if these similitudes will not teach you, I will say to you, as God to the prophet, "Arise, go down to the potter's house;" there I will cause you to learn this lesson: he maketh or marreth his vessels of clay, as oft as he pleaseth; and are not ye in the hand of the Lord, as the clay is in the hand of the potter? I speak the more to this, inasmuch as I find, that however men give God good words, and confess his dominion over them and theirs, yet when it comes to it, that he touches them in any of their darling comforts, they are ready to clamour against him in their hearts, as if he did them some wrong, if not to curse him to his face. Certainly there is some atheistical opinion of propriety, that in some degree or other is apt to steal into the most devout minds. And sure I am, we do not only barely offend, but we do ourselves much hurt; we wound our own peace, we shake the settledness of our own hearts, we put ourselves into briers; in a word, we both lessen our creature-comforts, and multiply our griefs, and aggravate our sorrows, by calling things our own.

If we had not taken them to be our own, it would not have troubled us to part with them.

Be sure, therefore, to eye and own the absolute and unlimited sovereignty of God. But that is not all: it is not enough to believe it, we must converse with it otherwise than by thinking of it, or assenting to it. Then do we converse with the sovereignty of God,

(1.) "When the powerful sense of it doth silence quarrelling, yea murmurings, yea even disputings in the soul." We may indeed modestly contend with men concerning their dealings with us; the potsherd may strive with the potsherds of the earth, but it must not say to the potter, Why hast thou made me thus? A pacate and quiet frame of heart is a real conversing with the sovereignty of God: so did Aaron when he held his peace, Lev. x. 3. and Job, when he attributed nothing unseemly to God.

(2.) "When the sense of it doth suppress self-will." This is an unruly lust in the soul, a giant-like spirit warring against heaven, and breeding hate continually. This is that which maintains a *meum* and *tuum*, even with God himself, that sets up interests, (as the Jews set up princes,) but not by God, yea, indeed, in opposition to him. This is the seditious party in the soul that is always crying out, "We will not have this man to rule over us;" and when that darling interest, which this proud rival hath set up, is touched of God, and smitten and blasted from heaven, it is ready to fret and storm, yea, and to think it hath reason to be angry. If this son of the bond-woman were cast out, Abraham's family would be all of a piece, all in order, and at rest. If this undisciplined and perverse spirit were quite banished, O what a calm day would it be in

the soul! what fair and sweet correspondence would there be between God and his creature! for certainly this is the Jonah that raises the storm, and makes the great deeps of the soul that it cannot rest, but do perpetually roll and toss, yea, and cast out mire and dirt continually. But, alas! I doubt this spirit is not quite laid, no, not in the most spiritual man; the best of men are ready to nourish up some darling, some private interest or other of their own, distinct from God and the grand interest of their souls, which God himself must not touch: some gourd or other, that the cold wind must not blow upon. He is a blessed man indeed, who doth so understand that he lives and moves in God alone, and is so overpowered with the sense of the infinite goodness and holiness of God, and the absolute perfection of his divine will, as that he reckons it his greatest perfection to be nothing in himself, nor have nothing of his own distinct from God, but only studies to be great in God, to be filled with God, to live to him and for him, to enjoy all things as in and under him, who counts it his only interest to quit all self-interest, and particular ends, and to be freely at the disposal of the highest mind, conformable to the highest good, cheerfully compliant with the uncreated will. Potiphar had so committed all to Joseph, in the sense of his great faithfulness, that "he knew not ought he had, save the bread that he did eat." But this similitude is too low; a godly soul should commit all its interests, its life, and livelihood, and all to God, in the sense of his sovereignty, and not know ought that he hath, no, not his own life, but despise it in comparison of uncreated life, as Job speaks: "Though I were perfect, yet would I not

know my soul; I would despise my life." Methinks the sovereignty of God speaks such language to the soul, and in it, as Eli to Samuel—" My son, hide nothing from me, keep nothing back of all that thou hast;" and the pious soul should not, with foolish Rachel, conceal any selfish interest, so as not to be able to part with it, when its sovereign Lord and Father comes to search the tent; but when God comes to ferret out all self-interests, and shall ask, " Is there any such yet with thee?" should be able to answer boldly, " No, there is none." Blessed is the man that is in such a case: blessed is the man whose only interest it is to serve the will of the Lord. Well, improve the infinite sovereignty of God to this end, and work it upon and into your own hearts, that all self-will may stoop to it; and let the main interest of your souls be so planted and established in your souls, that no other interest may be able to grow by it; charm your own self-will with such severe reproofs as this is—" Either deny thyself, O my soul, or deny thyself to be a creature; either be wholly at God's command, or call him not thy sovereign."

(3.) " When the sense of it doth beget reverence in the soul towards God." We ought not only to be subject to the rod of God, but even to reverence him when he correcteth with it; and so not only to accept of the rod, but to kiss it too. And surely if the fathers of our flesh correct us, and we give them reverence, much more ought we to reverence the sovereign Father both of flesh and spirit. This is a devout act of the soul, whereby it looks up and adores the infinite and sovereign Majesty, and thinks equitable and honourable thoughts of him, even when he

is in the way of his judgments. And these are the proper acts of a soul conversing with God's sovereignty in the time of afflictions. When we are silent before him, subject unto him, and reverencing of him, then we do really and truly converse with him as our almighty and absolute Sovereign. But God's authority and prerogative, though it may silence, it will scarce satisfy: such a corrupt and rebellious pass are our natures grown to. Therefore,

2. Converse with the Perfect and Infinite Righteousness of God in the time of afflictions; that divine perfection, whereby he renders to every man what is just and due, and no more. This we are to eye and own, and sincerely to acknowledge, even in the time of our greatest extremity, after the example of Daniel —"The Lord our God is righteous in all his works;" and of the godly Levites—"Thou art just in all that is brought upon us, thou hast done right." Argue with Abraham, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Can Righteousness itself err in judgment? Shall the timber say unto the rule, why hast thou measured me thus? or to the line, thou art crooked? "Are not my ways equal?" saith the Lord. Are not the Lord's ways equal? Let your souls say so too. Be ye firmly persuaded of the infinite and incorruptible righteousness and equity of God. But that is not all: we do not then converse with the righteousness of God, when we do believe it, or acknowledge it: a very Pharaoh may be brought to make such a confession—"The Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked." But then do we converse with the righteousness of God in general, when the sense of it doth give a rational

satisfaction to the soul. And indeed, whereas the sovereignty of God is enough to silence, yet his righteousness had need to be called in to administer satisfaction: the former is sufficient to stop the mouth, but there is need of the latter to settle the heart. And indeed, methinks, it is a heart-settling consideration: for how can the interest of the creature be better secured than in the hands of a righteous God? where can we venture all we have better than on such a certain and steady foundation? how can we better trust ourselves than on such firm and even ground? We will trust ourselves far with an upright and righteous man; and if we hear of the miscarriage of any interest of ours at any time, it doth mightily calm and satisfy our hearts, if we are assured that it was in the hands of a just and upright person: much more rational and steady satisfaction may the infinite righteousness of God administer, even in the time of the greatest affliction, if it be duly wrought into the heart. But more particularly,

(1.) "The powerful sense of the righteousness of God should make us sensible and serious." It becomes us seriously to ponder, duly to weigh, and in good earnest to lay to heart, all that is done to us by a righteous God. We use slightly to pass by, and slightly to esteem, the words or actions of vain man: but it is not for nothing that the righteous God afflicts any man, in any measure, at any time. The voice of God, though it be not always articulate, yet it is always significant. Will a lion roar for nothing? Surely, every action of the righteous God hath a meaning in it: a hair falls not from our head, nor a sparrow to the ground, without him; much less do

greater changes befall us without him. And in all things he is infinitely righteous. O how doth this call us to sensibility and seriousness! how ought all the powers of the soul to be awakened to attention, when the righteous God utters his dreadful voice, and the whole frame of the heart and life to be composed under his heavy hand! Now, if ever one would "say of laughter, It is mad;" one would reckon trifling to be a kind of profaneness, and judge that foolish jestings do almost border upon blasphemy, formerly not convenient, now not lawful: for indeed a vain, frothy, light, trifling spirit, in the day of affliction, is in a sense a blaspheming of the righteousness of God. As a consequent of this,

(2.) "It should put us upon self-examination." Nature itself had taught the heathenish mariners, in the case of Jonah, to inquire where the fault was in a storm; much more may the knowledge of God's infinite righteousness teach us. So may the holy word too, that word in Lam. iii. 40. "Let us search and try our ways," &c. and many others. Now do the faculties of the godly soul, being awakened, begin to cast lots upon themselves, to find out the guilty party: and certainly God hath a great hand in ordering these lots: he doth ordinarily show unto man his sin, even by the verdict of his own heart. Conscience, I mean, is God's vicegerent in the soul; and though it is true this judge is ofttimes corrupted and bribed, or at least overruled in prosperity, yet God instructs it to speak good sense, and to speak out, and speak the truth in the time of affliction. I believe they hit the nail upon the head, who cried out one to another, "Verily we are guilty concern-

ing our brother." Another cries, "Verily I am guilty concerning my master, concerning my people, guilty concerning my wife, concerning my children, concerning my estate, my time, my talents;" and it may be all true. I believe the heathen was in the right, who looked upon his hands and feet, and cried out, "As I have done, so God hath requited me:" and the Babylonish monarch harped upon a right string, after he was come to his right wits again—"Those that walk in pride, he is able to abase." God hath not given to our faculties any infallibility indeed, but he enables them to make good guesses, and, I am verily persuaded, doth many times lay the hand upon the right sore, and order this secret lottery from heaven; so that that faculty, or that frame, or that action, which stands convicted in the court of conscience, is seldom held guiltless in the court of heaven.

(3.) "It should work us to humiliation and reformation; a heart broken, and a conversation healed of its breaches." By humiliation I mean a heart broken purely, properly, and spiritually for sin. I do not mean by it, a heart broken for losses and afflictions, and bowing down itself heavily under the burden of its distresses; no, nor a broken heart for sin, as viewing it only in the calamitous effects and bitter fruits of it, which I doubt not is the humiliation of most. Many may say concerning their humiliation, (to use the prophet's words in a different sense,) "These are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends," by the loss of my friends, the loss of my health, the loss of my goods; these tears that you see, these groans that you hear, are nothing but

the scars which the sore hath left behind it, and the wails which the rod hath made. I doubt our very sorrow for sin, in a time of affliction, admits of a mixture of carnal self and passion, and so of sin too. But I mean a pure, spiritual, proper sorrow and hatred of sin, which I know may be broached by sharp afflictions, and have vent given it by piercing the vessel; but that is not the proper cause and ground of it. Moses, in his joy, had an eye to the "recompense of reward;" and so a Christian, in his sorrow, may have respect to the recompense of his sin, I mean his afflictions: but it is not primarily and principally caused by these; for though these dreadful showers from heaven should cease, yet the stream of his eyes, or at least the fountain of his heart, would not cease issuing forth bitter waters: though the righteousness of God serves to give vent to godly sorrow, yet it is the goodness and holiness of God that gives it. Do we sorrow for sin because it spoiled us of our comforts, stripped us of our ornaments? then, sure, we think there is something in the world worse than sin, for which we should bewail it, and hate it; and, consequently, that there is something better than God, for which we would love him. Alas! how apt are we to run into practical blasphemy before we are aware! In a word, to decide this controversy, our afflictions, losses, distresses in the world, may possibly be as a bucket to draw up this water of godly sorrow, but they must not be the cistern to receive and hold it. Serious and spiritual humiliation is a real conversing with the righteousness of God. To meet God, is indeed to fall down before him; and to converse with him, is to lie down under

him: the truth of which temper is best evidenced by that excellent commentator, the life of a Christian; this doth best declare the nature, and interpret the meaning of heart-humiliation. He that breaks off his sins, doth best make it appear that his heart is broken for them. If you would know whether there has been rain in the night, look upon the ground, and that will discover. O my friends! if the dust be laid, if all earthly joys, contentments, pleasures, concerns be laid, you may conclude your sorrow was a shower sent into your souls from heaven.

If you see a boy both sobbing and minding his book, you may conclude he hath some right sense of his master's severity. Conversion to God is the most proper and real conversing with him in the way of his judgments: so he himself interprets in that complaint—"The people turneth not to him that smiteth them." That which happened to Moses, when he had been in the mount with God, Exod. xxxiv. 29. should also be the condition of every good Israelite, when he hath been with God in the valley, the vale of tears, an afflicted state: his face should shine, his conversation should witness that he had been with God; the smell of this fire should pass upon his garments, his whole outward man; the spirit of mourning should be demonstrated by the spirit of burning. If God from heaven set fire to the standing corn of our worldly comforts, we must answer him from within, and set fire to the stubble of our worldly lusts and corruptions. Let me change our Saviour's words therefore a little, and exhort you earnestly: Thou Christian, when thou fastest, when thou humblest thy soul for sin, "wash thy face"

also, cleanse thy outward conversation from all sinful pollution, that thou mayest appear to be humbled indeed: and this shall be accounted as a true and real conversing with the righteousness of God in the time of affliction.

3. Converse with the Faithfulness of God. This attribute of God hath respect unto his promises, and therefore it may be you will think strange that I should speak of this in a discourse on afflictions, as not having place there at all. Every one will readily acknowledge, that God's Sovereignty and Righteousness do clearly appear in his judgments, but how his Faithfulness can be exercised therein they see not. What! faithful in punishing, in plaguing, in visiting, in afflicting, distressing his creature—how can that be? Many will be ready to think rather, that God is not faithful at such a time, when he denies what he had promised to give, takes away what he had promised to continue: when he plagues David every morning, when he had promised him that the plague should not come nigh his dwelling; when he brings Abijah to the grave, to whom he had promised that his days should be long upon the land; and Job to the dunghill, to whom all the promises were made both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. Is this faithfulness? doth God fulfil his promises by frustrating them? Notwithstanding all this, it seems that the faithfulness of God hath place in the afflictions of his people; for so saith David expressly, "I know that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me;" if indeed faithfulness be taken properly in that place. Neither indeed need it seem so strange as some men make it; for God hath promised his

covenant-people to visit their iniquity with a rod—"the rod of a man," a fatherly chastisement, as it is explained, where this seems to be made a branch of the covenant, and is understood by many as a promise. But if that be not a plain promise, I am sure there is one in Psalm lxxxiv. 11. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." And if no good thing, then no correction neither: for that is often good and profitable for the people of God in this world, for many excellent ends, which, considering the nature of man, cannot well be accomplished without it, as might appear in many particulars; but it is not needful to run out into them. God will take more care of his own people than of the rest of the world, and will rather correct them, than not reduce them. It is their main happiness that he takes care for, and he will in kindness take out of the way whatever hinders it, and give whatever may promote it. God's thoughts are not as our thoughts: he judges otherwise of health, riches, liberty, friends, than we do. We are apt to measure God by ourselves and our own affections, which is the ground of our mistake in this business: we mind the things that please our flesh, our senses, our appetite, our fancy; but God minds the things that concern our souls and their true happiness. The saints are much dearer to God, and much more beloved of him, than they are to themselves; and therefore he will not give them what is sweet, but what is meet: he will give them what makes for their real and eternal happiness, whether they would have it or not. He loves them with a strong and powerful love, and will not deny them any thing that is truly

good for them, though they cry out under it; nor allow them any thing that is really hurtful, though they cry after it. So will a wise father upon earth do by his children, to the best of his skill and power: much more will God then, whose bowels are infinitely larger and stronger than those of a father. Now, then, labour to converse with the faithfulness of God in the time of afflictions, which is by studying the covenant and the promises of it, and your present condition, and comparing them together, and observing how consonant and agreeable they are, each interpreting the other; as also by persuading your hearts of the consistency of afflictions with divine love and favour, and by studying to reconcile the hand and heart of God together. But especially converse with it practically, by a holy establishment and settlement of heart under all afflictions; for, whereas afflictions in themselves are apt to beget a fearfulness, despondency, or at least fluctuation in the soul, the lively sense of God's faithfulness in inflicting them will settle and sustain it: it is a firm and consistent thing upon which the shaking soul may settle safely, and centre itself boldly.

4. Converse with the Holiness and unspotted Purity of God. He is angry and sins not; he corrects for sin without sin: "Fury is not in me, saith the Lord." There is no passionate malicious temper in the pure and holy God, no revengeful appetite to feed upon the blood of his creature: he is of purer eyes than to behold the least iniquity, and of a purer nature than any way to miscarry in any of his dealings or dispensations. Converse then with this infinite holiness of God; keep up pure, equitable,

honourable thoughts of him in your hearts: take heed of fancying to yourselves a God guilty of passion or partiality, or carried away with such weak and mixed affections as we ourselves are. But, more practically, converse with God's holiness in the time of afflictions, by laying even little sins greatly to heart. Little sins, compared with infinite holiness and purity, ought to be matter of great and serious sorrow to a sensible soul. Again, take heed of the least miscarriages under affliction, of departing from God in the least. This, I know, is the great duty and care of every tender-hearted Christian at all times; but, I conceive, we ought more especially to press it upon our hearts in the time of affliction, because we are then most apt to indulge some kind of human passions, which we call natural affections, as if we had a license to care, and fear, and grieve, and complain, not only in an extraordinary, but even in an irregular manner. Oh! let the sense of God's infinite purity and perfect holiness check and awe those very natural affections, be they what they will, if they offer to exceed their bounds, and overflow their banks. But this I touched upon before, under another head, amongst the reasons of the doctrine. Therefore,

5. Converse with the Almighty Power of God. That God is infinite and almighty in power, I need not undertake to demonstrate: no man hath read a leaf in Scripture, nor indeed turned over any one leaf in the book of the creatures, who hath not learned this. I need not turn you to any particular mighty work of God; they that instance in his letting loose the virtues of the creatures, in the case of the uni-

versal deluge, or binding up of their influences, as in the case of the three captive Jews, and of Daniel and Jonah, when he kept the fire from burning, and forbade the lions to eat the one, and the fish to digest the other, whom he had swallowed—make a poor guess at almighty power, but a faint essay to describe it. The creation of the least creature out of nothing, is a higher argument of divine power than the command of the greatest that is already created. Eye God duly in the notion of a Creator, yea, the Creator of your own souls and bodies, and you have enough to fill you with everlasting admiration, as David was filled: "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." But it is not enough to eye, or acknowledge, or admire; we must yet do more, if we will rightly converse with the almighty power of God, by the acts of reverence and dependence.

(1.) "Reverence that almighty and glorious God in your hearts," who can bring any thing out of any thing, yea, out of nothing; yea, any thing to nothing, in a moment. Reverence that power of God, that can pour contempt upon princes; that can bring Job, the greatest of all the men of the East, to lie in the ashes, and make his bed in the dunghill; that can send home Naomi empty, who went out full and flourishing. Hath he done so by you? debased you when you were high, tumbled you down from the clouds, and rolled you in the dust; emptied you when you were full, withered you when you were fresh and flourishing? Let not these lose the glory of his almighty power; reverence that glorious hand of God.

(2.) "Rest upon the same almighty God," who

can also bring up the same Job from the dunghill, and set him with princes, and give Naomi a famous offspring, even one of the ancestors of the Messiah according to the flesh. The same power that caused your sun to go down at mid-day, when you least suspected, can also cause it to rise at midnight, when you least hope. Dwell not upon creature probabilities or improbabilities; but lift up thyself, believing soul, and be assured, that God can do what he will, and he will do what is good for them that love him, according to the dictates of unsearchable wisdom and goodness. Thou that art rolled in the dust, yet arise, and roll thyself upon those almighty arms that brought thee thither, and are able to advance thee; as I have seen a child thrown off by his father, and thrown down to the ground in a seeming displeasure, yet clinging to the same hand, and will not let it go, till at length he rise up again by it: a fit emblem of a child of God, whom his heavenly Father seems as if he had cast off. The wounding hand of God is apt to amaze indeed, and to beget consternation and astonishment; but remember, the same hand that wounds can also heal; he that breaks us, can also make up all our breaches: let this beget confidence and dependence. God never wounds deeper than that he can easily bind up the wound again: never throws his people so low as that they should be out of his reach. Take heed, therefore, of unseemly despondencies; cast not away your confidence, which shall have a recompense, if ye maintain it: a recompense, I say; for that God who can recover the setting sun, and exalt it in its beauty and brightness, and doth so every morning; who can clothe the for-

lorn and naked trees with leaves and fruits; who can recover the verdure of the withering grass, and doth so every year—he can also cause light to arise to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.

He who could give unto Amaziah much more than that which he parted with at his command; who could turn again the captivity of Job, and give him double for what he had taken from him—he can surely make his people "glad, according to the days wherein he hath afflicted them, and the years wherein they have seen evil;" he can recompense and restore to his penitent people the fruits which the locusts and the caterpillars have consumed, according to his promise; he can recompense to his people the comforts of health and liberty which sickness hath consumed, the comforts of friends and relations which the grave hath devoured. He who made the springs dry, can as easily make the "parched ground to become a pool," and "the thirsty land springs of water," as you find both elegantly joined together, Psalm cvii. 33, 35. "He turneth water-springs into dry grounds." Say not, therefore, with the captive Jews, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost;" for God can cause even "those dry bones to live." Say not with that low-spirited courtier, 2 Kings vii. 19. "If the Lord should make windows in heaven," then might such plenty be in Samaria; for he did accomplish it, and yet not rain it from heaven either: but say rather with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;" and with the three worthies, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us out of thine hand, O king:"—so he is able to deliver us out of thine hand, O enemy, O prison, O sickness, yea,

out of thine hand, O grave! If we despond and be dejected both in mind and body at the same time, then is our condition indeed sad and shameful; nay, we do more reproach God by such a temper in our affliction than he reproacheth us in afflicting us. Make it appear, Christians, that though God hath cast you down, yet you do believe that he hath not cast you off; and that you, although you be sorely shaken by him, yet are not shaken off from him. Thus you shall glorify the almighty power of God in the day of your visitation.

6. Converse with the infinite and unsearchable Wisdom of God; especially with the wisdom of God in reference to his judgments, and our afflictions. He is infinitely wise in reference to our afflictions: for, (1.) He knows what, and what manner, and what measure of correction we stand in need of. (2.) When and how best to deliver us. (3.) How to make the best use of all for our good.

(1.) "He knows what, and what manner, and what measure of correction we stand in need of." He is that wise Physician, who knows what humour is most predominant in the souls of his servants, and what is the most proper medicine to purge it out; where the most corrupt blood is settled, and at what vein to let it out. He is infinitely knowing of the various tempers and distempers of his servants, and can apply himself suitably to them all. And as to the measure and degree, he is also infinitely wise and exact: he weighs out the afflictions of his people to a grain for quantity, and measures them to a day and hour for duration. He did not miss of his time, no, not one day in four hundred and thirty years. So

many years of bondage were determined upon the people, and after these years were expired, the very next day the hosts of the Lord went up out of Egypt. And as for measure, he observes a certain proportion, as you may see in Isa. xxviii. 27, 28. As the husbandman uses different ways of purging and cleansing different sorts of grain; beating the fitches with a staff, and cummin with a rod, because they are a weaker sort of grain, and will not endure hard usage; but bruising the bread-corn, because threshing will not suffice; and he is loath to break it all to pieces with turning his cart-wheels upon it. An elegant similitude, whereby God insinuateth his different ways of correcting his people, and observing a suitableness to their strength and temper, when less would not do, and more would overdo: he must correct so far as to bruise, but will be sure not to break and spoil. He that saith to the proud waves of the swelling sea, "Hitherto shall ye come, and no farther," hath the same command over these metaphorical waves, those floods of affliction, which he lets loose upon his people; and they cannot go an inch further than he hath appointed: he saith, Hitherto shall this sickness, this mortality, this persecution go, and no further; and even these storms, and this sea, obey him. Now, we converse with this instance of divine wisdom, not only when we observe it and acknowledge it, but,

First, When it begets in us a friendly and "charitable temper towards second causes:" when we are at peace with the whole creation, even with enemies themselves, and in perfect charity with those very plagues and sicknesses that do arrest us; rather ad-

miring and delighting in their subserviency to God, than at all maligning their severe influences upon us. A good man is so much in love with the pure, and holy, and perfect will of God, that he desires also to fall in love with, at least he is at peace with, every thing that executes it, that serves the will of his heavenly Father: he sees no reason in the world to fall out with and fret against any man, or any thing that is a means to afflict him; but views them all as instruments in the hand of God, readily serving his will, and doing his pleasure, and under this notion is charitably affected towards them all. Observe a little, and admire, how David was reconciled to the rod, because it was in the hand of his Father, and seems to kiss it for the relation that it had to the divine will: "Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." This gracious soul is so wonderfully in love with the will of God, that he could almost find in his heart to be reconciled to sin itself, if it do accomplish it; and to be friends with the wrath of man, if it work the righteousness of God. And if David can be so charitably affected towards a cursing Shimei, viewing him as an instrument in the hand of God, methinks we may be almost in love with any thing under that notion, and much rather say concerning a poor harmless sickness, Let it alone, so let it put us to pain, for God hath sent it. To this sense may a devout soul draw the words of our Saviour concerning the woman in Matth. xxvi. 10. "Why trouble ye the woman? she hath wrought a good work upon me:" Why do ye interrupt and disturb this disease? why do you fret against this persecutor? why do you repine at this prison? it

executes the will of my God upon me. What though these men pour out their venom in such abundance? what though this disease spend its influences upon my body so plentifully? there is no waste in all this; there is need of just so much: God doth not lavish out his arrows in vain, nor shoot at rovers, as Jonathan did, who cozened his lad, making him believe he shot at a mark, when he shot at none. A soul overpowered with a sense of God's infinite wisdom in appointing, measuring, timing all afflictions, will easily be reconciled to a poor harmless creature, which is set on and taken off at his pleasure.

Secondly, "When it begets in us a holy acquiescence and resting in God," which is opposed to a larger and disorderly hastening towards deliverance. Then do we indeed own and honour the skill of our chirurgeon, when we do quietly suffer the corrosive plasters to lie on, and do not offer to pluck them off, notwithstanding the smart they put us to. And surely he who believes the infinite wisdom of God, who knows what, and what manner and measure of correction we stand in need of, will not make haste to be delivered from under his hand, but composeth himself quietly, as young Samuel laid himself down, and when he was called, answered cheerfully, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

A soul, sensible of God's infinite wisdom in this particular, argues thus—Who am I, poor worm, shallow creature, that I should contend with infinite wisdom about the time or manner of my being in the world? why did not I also undertake to appoint him the time and place of my being born? shall I say it is too much, when infinite wisdom thinks it is not

enough? Cease, wrangling soul, and be at rest, for the Lord deals wisely with thee.—Such a soul, so conversing with the all-wise God, dare freely refer all to him, venture all with him: if he smite him on the one cheek, he dare turn to him the other; if he take away his coat, he dare offer him his cloak also: if he take away his liberty, he dare trust him with his life too; if he smite him in some of his comforts, he dare turn to him the rest also: for he knows that infinite wisdom cannot err in judgment, nor miscarry in his dispensations.

(2.) "God knoweth when and how best to deliver us." This necessarily follows upon the former. To him all times, and all things, past, present, and to come, are equally present: in one single act of understanding he doth wonderfully comprehend both causes and events, sicknesses and cures, afflictions and deliverances. Let the atheistical world cry, These are they that are forsaken, whom no man careth for; there is no hope for them in their God, as their manner is to blaspheme; still the promise stands unrepealed in both Testaments—"I will never leave you, nor forsake you:" though the case be ever so extreme and desperate, still the apostle's words hold good, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." If all passages be blocked up, he will rather make a gap in the sea, than his people shall not escape. And this way and time of God's deliverance is the most excellent, suitable, and certain, as might abundantly appear in many particulars; but that would be a digression. In the general, be assured that God's way is the best way of deliverance, and his time is also the best time. He that

sits as a refiner of silver, knows how and when to take out the metal, that it be purified, and not hurt. Here I might enter into a large discourse, and show you how the judgment of man is ordinarily deceived, and his expectations disappointed, which he had built upon creature-probabilities, when, in the meantime, the purpose of God takes place in a far better and more conformable deliverance of his servants. But it may suffice to have hinted it only.

Our duty is to converse with this instance of divine wisdom, by the exercises of patience and hope. If God seems to tarry long, yet wait patiently for his appearance: for he will appear in the most acceptable time, and "in the end ye shall consider it," and acknowledge it. Take heed of limiting the Holy One of Israel, as that murmuring generation did, Psalm lxxviii. 41. Take heed of fixing of your deliverance to such or such a train and series of causes, which you have laid in your own heads, and of engaging God to act by your method; if God be a wise agent, it is fit he should be a free agent too. Bear up, Christian soul; faint not, when thou art rebuked of him: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord," and he will, in due time, find out a way either of lessening it, or removing it. "You have heard of the patience of Job, and you have seen the end of the Lord." Be you patient, and you shall see it too; a better end than ever you could have accomplished by your own art and industry. In the meantime, cherish in your hearts a lively hope of a happy issue; for your lives and comforts are all hid in him, in whom also are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. As the consideration of infinite wisdom,

in knowing how and when best to deliver us, may settle our hearts, that they do not rise up as a foam upon the waters through impatience; so it may bear up our hearts, that they do not sink within us, as a stone in the waters, through desperation.

(3.) "God knoweth how to make the best use of all for our good." I say, of all; both of the affliction, the manner and measure of it, of his delay, and of the season in which he chooses to redeem us. He can make Paul's imprisonment turn to his advantage; Job's captivity to redound to his far greater state; Joseph's banishment to make him great, and Manasseh's to make him good. This is a large theme, and therefore I dare not go into it particularly; take all in one word from the apostle: "All things do work together for good to them that love God." Whatever the premises be, the only-wise God knows how to draw a happy conclusion from them. Get a firm belief of this radicated in your hearts, and converse with the wisdom of God in this instance of it, by the great grace of self-resignation. The sovereignty of God may well work us into a resignation of our interests, and comforts, and concerns to him; but this infinite wisdom of God ought, in reason, to work us into a resignation, even of our very wills unto him. Oh! this debasing of self-will, this self-resignation, is a noble and ingenuous act of a pious soul, (for so I dare call him in whom it is found,) whereby it honours God greatly in all that comes upon it! A godly soul, considering itself ignorant of many things, burdened with many corruptions, and clogged with an animal body, senses, appetite, fancy, which are always calling for things inconvenient, if not unlaw-

ful, doth conclude it would not be good for it to be at its own finding, or caring, or carving; and duly eyeing that infinite Mind and Understanding, who, in a wonderful, unaccountable manner, orders all things, and all events, to the best and certain issue, is so mastered by, and indeed enamoured with, the sense of it, that he renounces his own wisdom, and throws out his own clamorous will, and complies readily with the all-wise God. This is truly to converse with the wisdom of God, when we do out of choice refer ourselves to it, and roll ourselves upon it. Every bare acknowledgment of divine wisdom is not a proper conversing with it; but when the same is wrought into the soul, and the lively sense of it doth so overpower the heart, that the will is prepared to close readily with such methods as God shall please to use to accomplish his own ends, then do we properly and feelingly converse with God, under the notion of the all-wise God. But this of self-resignation I spoke something to under the first head, and much of that which is spoken there, may be indifferently applied hither. Therefore,

7. Converse with the unbounded Goodness, Love, and Mercy of God. God is infinitely and unchangeably loving and merciful to his people: he is Good, saith the Psalmist; and he is Love, saith the apostle. Those dreadful and terrifying apprehensions which men have of the blessed and good God, as if he were some austere and surly majesty, given to passion and revenge, are apt to destroy that cheerful and ingenuous converse with him, which the creature should maintain with its Creator at all times. But then we are most prone to entertain those apprehensions, and

to harbour such unseemly notions of him, when he appears in the way of his judgments, when we take a view of him in the ruins of our comforts, the blood of our friends, the spoil of our goods, and in the distresses of our lives. We are apt to frame notions of God, according to what we find in our own disposition; to fancy a God like unto ourselves; and therefore we cannot eye an afflicting God, but we presently conclude an angry God: as though the eternal and pure Being were subject to passions and changes as we are. These apprehensions being once drunk into the soul, it becomes unhinged presently, and almost afraid to behold the face of Love itself, but flies and hides itself, as Adam in the garden; or if the soul do converse with God at all, it is as a city that is besieged converses with the enemy without, sending out to seek peace, and to obtain a cessation of arms. And so a soul may bestow much upon God, surrender up the castle, give him all that he hath almost, not for any love that he bears to him, but as Joash gave Hazael a present of gold and precious things, to hire him to depart from him. Oh! then they will up and do any thing; yea, circumcise their lives, as Zipporah circumcised her son, to escape the hands of an angry God. Every one will converse with God as an enemy in time of extremity, hang out a flag for peace, send presents, pay homage, send ambassadors to entreat his face: but few know how to converse with the goodness and mercy of God, with him as their dear and only friend, in a time of affliction, freely and cheerfully. Now, there seems to be a double account to be given

of men's not conversing with the goodness and mercy of God in the time of afflictions:

(1.) "Many cannot believe the mercy and kindness of God, when he is in the way of his judgments." "If it be so, why am I thus?" cries the poor soul, struggling under its burden, and travailing in pangs to be delivered of its griefs. Thus unbelievingly argues Gideon, who was otherwise famous for faith. In the time of his bitter bondage under the Midianites, when an angel from heaven was sent to assure him of the good-will of God towards him, he could not entertain the news, nor believe the report, because of the anguish of his soul, but cries out, "O, my lord! if the Lord be with us, why is all this evil befallen us?" No, the Lord hath forsaken us, for he hath delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. The sad soul is ready to cry concerning Christ's gracious presence, as the two sisters concerning his personal presence: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!" Lord, if thou hadst been here, if thou hadst loved me, if thou hadst any delight in me, my brother had not died—my husband, my wife, my children had not died; I had not been thus plagued, afflicted, wounded, tormented, as I am. Hence we have those many complaints of the afflicted soul up and down the Psalms: "Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious? is his mercy clean gone? hath he shut up his tender mercies in anger?" and many such like. The smart of our senses is apt to pervert the judgment of our minds, and the sense of bodily evils is ready to destroy all sense of the infinite and unchangeable goodness and love of God. Now, this great evil seems to arise from these two

causes: namely, our measuring God and his divine dispositions, by ourselves and human passions and affections, as I hinted before; and our measuring the love of God too much by the proportion that he gives us of worldly prosperity. Wo to him, in a day of distress, who was wont to judge of divine love by the things that are before him, as Solomon calls the things of this world. This, I say, is the temper, the infirmity of many in the time of afflictions, though indeed there be no reason for it: for why should we conclude harshly concerning Job upon the dunghill, any more than we would conclude charitably concerning Ahab on the throne? Besides, the Scripture teaches expressly, that the love of God doth stand with correction: "I will visit his iniquity, but my loving-kindness will I not take from him." Nay, it seems as if it could not well stand without it: "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

(2.) Others do indeed believe the goodness and mercy of God to them in a time of affliction; "but either they cannot, or dare not, or will not converse with it, nor take comfort in it." They remember God with the Psalmist: ("I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed:") that is, saith Mollerus, the goodness, bounty, mercy of God, and yet, at the same time, are troubled; their hearts are unquiet, fluctuating, tumultuous within them; the soul is so impressed with the sense of sin, which it hath contracted from the consideration of its sufferings, that it dare not presume to meddle with mercy. But though this mercy of God be its own, yet it is ready to think

that it is a duty to forsake its own mercies, as though it heard God chiding it in the words of Jehu to Joram's scout: "What hast thou to do with peace?" what hast thou to do with mercy? "turn ye behind me." An afflicted soul hath much ado to believe it to be a duty to converse with the goodness and love of God in a time of affliction. It easily agrees to converse with the justice, holiness, and power of God indeed, but thinks it very improper and unseasonable, if not unsafe, to converse with his mercy. It is ready to cry, with Solomon, presently, "In the day of prosperity rejoice, but in the day of adversity consider;" or, with the apostle, "If any be afflicted, let him pray; if he be merry, let him sing psalms." Conversing with the goodness of God seems not to be a duty at this season. I confess this is a high and hard duty. Every smatterer in religion will cry out in his affliction, "Thou art just and righteous, O Lord:" but, "Thou art good and merciful—blessed be the name of the Lord," is the voice of a Job only. But it is a duty, though a hard one, and affording much pleasure and contentment to them that are exercised therein. That the kindness and benignity of God doth not fail, that his love is not broken off from his people, no, nor suspended either, when he afflicts them most, is most certain: for though he works changes in and upon us, yet himself is eternally and unchangeably the same; and though some of his dealings towards his people seem to be rough and severe, yet if we judge rightly of them, they are all mercy and truth towards them that keep his covenant: And that the people of God ought to converse with this divine

love and mercy, even in their greatest afflictions, is as clear. To this purpose I might allege the forequoted example of holy Job, and might enforce this doctrine from the apostle's words, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice:" and "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations:" and from many good reasons too, if it were needful. I know indeed that it is a hard thing to keep up a right frame towards, and converse rightly with, the righteousness and goodness of God at the same time: the one frame is ready to justle out the other. Sorrow is apt to contract the heart, and destroy the large and cheerful temper of it; and joy dilates and enlarges it, and is ready to make it forget its grief. But though it be hard, yet it is possible: these two may well consist in the same soul, according to that passage, "Rejoice with trembling."

But how must we converse with the love and mercy of God in the time of afflictions? I have partly prevented myself in this already, but I shall speak a little more distinctly of it. We do not then converse with the goodness and mercy of God, when we barely think of it, or acknowledge it; but,

First, "When we believe and apply it, and take to ourselves the comforts of it;" when we look through the clouds that are round about us, and quite cover us, and by the eye of faith behold the Fountain and Father of light; when we can look beyond the frowns that are in his face, and the rod that is in his hand, and see the good-will that dwells in the heart of God towards us: more especially,

Secondly, When we do not only see and believe it, but "also draw virtue and influences down from it into

our souls, to establish, settle, and satisfy them." Not so much when we see it, as when we taste it; when we feel the Sun of Righteousness warm us, though it does not dazzle us, and though we cannot perceive it to shine upon us, yet we find it to shine in us. We do then converse with the love and mercy of God in an afflicted state, when the same doth bear us up, not only from utter sinking, but even from inordinate sorrowing; when we draw a virtue from it into our souls to sustain them, yea, and to cherish them too. Thus Job comforts himself in his living Redeemer; and the Psalmist in the mercy of God, even when he was ready to slip—" In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." In a word, we converse with divine goodness when we are really warmed with it, and with almighty love when we rejoice in it, and can with holy venturousness, and humble confidence, throw ourselves into the very bosom of it; when we receive impressions of it from the Spirit of God, and are thereby moulded into a temper suitable to it, and becoming it: for then indeed do we most happily converse with the love and goodness of God, when we for our part do live upon it; when we, being assured of an interest in a loving and good God, do render up ourselves also unto him, in the most beautiful and becoming affections of love, joy, confidence, and holy delight. This is an excellent frame; and sure I am it is much for our interest thus to converse with God in the time of our afflictions. It is a high way of glorifying God, and bringing much credit to religion: and, indeed, he who keeps up this frame can be afflicted but in part; he escapes the greater half of the evil:

for though it be ever so stormy a time without him—a storm upon his house, upon his goods, upon his relations, yea, upon his own body—yet it is a calm day within; in the soul there is peace and tranquillity.

8. Lastly, and indeed everlastingly too, we are to converse with the infinite self-sufficient Fulness of God in a day of the greatest extremity: that is, as if I should say, not with any one single attribute, but with the very Godhead of God, the immense Perfection of God, and the Allness of the Deity. O! how seasonably doth this blessed object present itself to the soul in a time of afflictions, losses, mortalities, persecutions, when we are most emptied of creature-enjoyments, and the emptiness of them doth most appear! for upon these two doth our conversing with God much depend. I need not tell you how apt we are to live beside God, when we have our fill of creature-delights: whilst we can entertain our hearts with a created sweetness, we foolishly forget and neglect the supreme Good. And so fond and unreasonable is this affection, that no warnings, no precepts, will serve the turn: God is forced to break that off from us, from which we would not be broken. Sure I am, the blessed and bountiful God envies not his servants any of their creature-comforts or delights; but he loves them, as I said before, with a strong and powerful love, and will not suffer them to live so much to their losses as they do, when they spend noble affections upon transitory things, in the everlasting enjoyment of which they could never be happy. Now, afflictions are a negative, if we speak properly, even as sin is: and, whenever we are afflicted in any kind, we are emptied of

some created good; as poverty is nothing but the absence of riches; sickness, the want of ease, of order, of health in the constitution; restraint is the loss of liberty. So then it appears, that, in a time of affliction, God is emptying us of creature-enjoyment: for indeed affliction itself is little or nothing else but such an emptying or deprivation; and that then the emptiness of the creature doth most appear, I suppose all will grant. The sick person looks upon his decayed strength, and withering members, and is feelingly convinced of the truth of the scripture—"All flesh is grass." Another casts about his eyes with Samson, and sees heaps upon heaps, and cries out like one that feels the weight of his own words, "Childhood and youth are vanity:" or, alas! how soon is the desire of one's eyes taken away with a stroke! another sees his goods carried away before his face, and his house on fire before his eyes, and then cries out, that he hath a real proof of the vanity of those things, which Solomon had long ago observed: "Riches make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle towards heaven." Whilst we see the creatures stand, we will not believe but they are stable; whilst we see them fair and flourishing, we cannot rightly lay to heart the withering nature of them: but when we see them cut down, we then conclude they were but flowers; when we see them flitting, we conclude they are shadows; when God pours them out upon the ground, we are then convinced that they were unstable as water: to show us what the best of our creature-enjoyments are, God is forced to take them quite away, that they may be no more.

Now then, in such a case, at such a time, converse with the infinite, self-sufficient Fulness of God. Oh! now it is seasonable, now it is your duty, nay, now it will be your greatest policy. If that channel, that creature-channel, be stopped, in which your affections were wont to run too freely, turn the stream of them into their proper channel, in which they may run freely, and neither ever meet with obstruction, nor ever overflow. Let your soul grow up into acquaintance and union with God by creature-breaches and disappointments. More particularly, converse with the self-sufficient fulness of God,

1. By the act of creature-denial. The eyeing of an infinite, absolute, uncreated Fulness in a right manner, takes off the soul from all created objects, earthly things; even as the beholding the sun in its glory dazzles the eye to all things below. God becomes so great in the eye of the soul, that it cannot see the poor motes of worldly comforts. Give a soul a feeling taste of the infinite sweetness and fulness of the fountain, and its thirst after the poor puddles of the world is presently abated, if not perfectly quenched; according to that of our Saviour, "Whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst;" that is, not after any other thing. Like unto which is that gospel promise—"They shall not thirst" who do enjoy these springs of water. When this fountain is opened in the eye of the soul, and the soul begins to taste of it, it longs to drink deeper of that indeed; but as for all other waters, waters of the cistern, the soul looks upon them as not being, or at least as being bitter waters of Marah in comparison. We do then truly

converse with the infinite self-sufficient fulness of God, when we look upon all created good with a noble disdain, are content to part with it; or, if we do still enjoy it, are resolved to enjoy it only in God, and so look upon it, and love it, only as a beam from the Father of lights, as a drop of the infinite Fountain of all perfections. Tell me, is it not a poor and low thing that many professors do, who acknowledge and magnify the uncreated goodness, the fulness of God, and yet at the same time do covet and court the creature with all eagerness, and their worldliness is apparently too hard for their religion? Methinks I hear God speaking to such seeming friends, as Delilah to Samson—"How canst thou say, I love thee, when thy heart is not with me?" To these men's hearts, methinks, our Saviour's doctrine should strike cold—"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also;" and those words of his beloved apostle—"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Let a man pretend and profess what he will, and in words magnify the fulness and sufficiency of God as much as he will, if in the meantime his soul be bound up in the creature, such a man's religion is vain; nay, indeed, his profession of God becomes a real reproaching of him, and a blasphemy against reason itself. Let your low esteem of all created good in comparison of the supreme Good, your readiness to quit your title to every creature-comfort, and, in the meantime, your care to live beside it, witness the true and honourable esteem, the true and feeling sense, that you have in your hearts of the infinite and self-sufficient fulness of God: for however men may make a shift to cheat

themselves, God is not truly great in the soul, till all other things become as nothing; neither doth the soul rightly converse with his infinite fulness, so long as any thing stands in opposition to it, or competition with it.

2. Converse with the self-sufficient Fulness of God by the grace of faith; I mean by that act of it whereby we do interest ourselves, and, as it were, wrap up our own souls in this fulness, and make it our own. And herein there is no danger of an humble soul's being too bold or venturous; for the proclamation is full, and the invitation free—"Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." What Seneca says of the soul, in regard of the divine original of it, may sure be better said of a godly soul, in respect of the divine nature and qualities of it—"It doth not converse with things divine as with another's, but as its own." And, indeed, we cannot truly and comfortably converse with the infinite perfection and fulness of God, if we have no title to it: but then we converse with God, when we converse with our own God, not another's; when the soul is able to say, All the fulness of power, wisdom, goodness, is all mine in my head Christ Jesus; for in him all this fulness dwells, and he dwelleth in me; in him are hid all these treasures, and "my life also is hid with Christ in God." You see, then, that a soul cannot converse with the infinite fulness and self-sufficiency of God but by Christ; for it is in and by him that we receive of divine fulness. The fulness of a fountain is nothing to me, except it be mine. "There is bread enough in my father's house," says the poor prodigal, "but for all that I perish with

hunger:" so is there living waters evermore in this uncreated Life, this infinite Spring of all perfection; yet many souls are choked with thirst, because the Fountain is not theirs; it is "a fountain sealed," as Solomon speaks in another case. "The well is deep," and they "have nothing to draw with," as the woman said to Christ concerning another well. Therefore, be sure you get an interest in the fulness and sufficiency of God, or, as Solomon speaks in another case, "Drink waters out of thine own well."

3. Converse with the self-sufficient Fulness of God, by delighting yourselves in it. Drink of this fountain, yea, drink abundantly, ye beloved of God; yea, lie down by it; yea, bathe yourselves wholly in it; "enter into the joy of your Lord," lie down in his bosom, spread yourselves in his love and fulness. The beloved disciple leaning upon the breast of his Lord at supper, was but a dark shadow, a poor scanty resemblance of a beloved soul, which, by the lovely acts of joy, confidence, and delight, lays itself down in the bosom of Jesus, and doth not feed with him, but feed upon him, and his all-sufficiency. Then do we converse indeed feelingly and comfortably with the infinite fulness, when the soul is swallowed up in it, doth rest in it, is filled with it, and centred upon it. O the noble and free-born spirit of true religion, that, disdaining the pursuit of low and created things, is carried out with delight to feed, and dwell, and live upon uncreated fulness! Then is a soul raised to its just altitude, to the very height of its being, when it can spend all its powers upon the supreme and self-sufficient Good, spreading and

stretching itself upon God with full contentment, and wrapping up itself entirely in him. This is the soul's way of living above losses; and he that so lives, though he may often be a loser, yet shall never be at a loss. He who feeds upon created goodness or sweetness, may soon eat himself out of all: the stock will be spent, and, which is worse, the soul will be dried up, that hath nothing else to nourish it. But he who lives upon uncreated fulness is never at a loss, though he lose ever so much of the creature: for who will value the spilling of a dish of water, who hath a well of living water at his door, from whence he had that, and can have more as good, though not the same? Nay, to speak properly, this is the only way to lose nothing; for how can he be properly said to lose any thing who possesses all things? And so doth he, I am sure, who is filled with the fulness of God. Be sure, therefore, that in the want, in the loss of all things, you live upon the fountain-fulness, delight yourself in the Lord, after the example of the prophet Habakkuk, chap. iii. 17, 18.

I have gone through the doctrinal part of my discourse upon these words, which was the thing I mainly intended. Many inferences might be drawn from it; but I shall content myself to forbid, and so, as it were, to remove out of the way, some things that hinder this great duty, and so shut up all with one word of exhortation.

1. "Converse not with creature-comforts," the poor, low, and scanty enjoyments of this world; for so I may well call them. Though they be ever so high in the opinion of them who have them, and

ever so large as to the proportion that any one hath of them, they are low in comparison of that high and supreme good for which the soul was made, and scanty as to any real happiness or satisfaction that they can possibly give; for indeed those sinful and sensual souls that take up their rest and happiness most in them, are not properly satisfied, but surfeited; not filled, but for the present glutted with them. There are many unlawful and hurtful ways of the soul's conversing with created comforts: I will not go over them all, as not intending any large discourse upon these heads. Converse not with them, fondly delighting in them, and doting upon them: especially take heed of this when God is shaking his rod over any of them. Doth God arise and begin to plead with you in judgment, laying his hand upon any of these, and threatening to take them from you? O then touch them not! What an unseemly and indeed monstrous sight is it to see a creature pulling and tugging against his Creator, and maintaining his supposed right against Heaven itself! Is it for a heaven-born soul to stand gazing and doting upon, or passionately weeping over, created friends, carnal liberty, corporeal health, houses made with hands, things below God, yea, and below itself too? Pore not too much upon them, value them only in God, and refer them freely to him. If you can say, you have any thing of your own, make much of it, and spare not; but give unto God the things that are God's: and by the time you have done so, I think you need not dote upon what is left. We ought indeed, at all times, to enjoy all our creature-comforts with hearts loosed from them; but if for-

merly our hearts have been too much joined to them, it is now time to loosen them.

2. "Converse not with creature-causes in a time of affliction." This is a strange kind of atheistical temper, into which we are very prone to fall. I speak properly when I say fall: for it is indeed a falling down from God in our hearts, in whose infinite essence all creature-causes are wrapt up, and in whose hand the several successes and events of them all do lie. Let a beast, that judges by sense, kick at the poor thorn that pricks him; but let rational souls fix upon the highest and supreme Agent, who, in an infinite, powerful, and skilful manner, uses what creature he will, for what end he will, and sends it on an errand which itself knows not. Why do we run hunting poor partridge-instruments upon the mountains of contemplation? shall the noble faculties of an immortal soul spend themselves upon such an inquisition? or is it just to pursue an innocent creature out of breath, for being an instrument in the hand of God; to quarrel with the sword, because it suffered itself to be drawn; or beat the air, because it is infected? This were indeed to go out with the king of Israel, with much warlike preparation, to catch flies. I deny not but that wise men may look into second causes, and make many profitable observations from them, both for present and future, and all men may and ought to learn many wholesome lessons even from the instrument that afflicts them: but sure I am, a godly man will not dwell upon these; he will not fix here, but readily resolve all into a higher cause, and so falls to converse with that: much less will he blame or murmur

at a poor harmless arrow, that flew no farther than it was shot, and pierced no deeper than it was bidden. Yea, though the second cause were a sinful cause, a rational agent, and so consequently actuated by malicious and evil principles, yet a godly soul knows how to distinguish upon him and his action; he hates him as a sinner, but comports well enough with him as God's instrument; and though he condemns his action as it varies from God's command, yet he approves of it as being ordered by God's hand and counsel. David hated cursing as much as any man; yet did he so eye the hand of God in every thing, and comply with it too, that there was a time when he said concerning Shimei, "So let him curse." Concerning this I hinted something before under another head: therefore,

3. "Converse not with creature-cures, creature-relief." These may indeed be looked out after, and safely made use of when they are found; nay, I will add further, that they are to be sought diligently, and used carefully. Those who know the infinite sovereignty, power, and wisdom of God, will not tie him to means, much less to those or these particular means: but, on the other hand, they that understand God's usual and ordinary way of acting, governing, and upholding the world, will not tie him up from means: no, nor expect that he should appear for their relief immediately and miraculously: though if any one have a miraculous faith, truly grounded upon some special and particular promise, I will not contend with him; only I would desire to see his miraculous faith justified by some miraculous works, which I conceive do always attend it. But the con-

verse with creature-cures, which I forbid, is the immoderate seeking of them, or the inordinate using of them. To seek after means in themselves unlawful, can never become lawful: but I speak not of these. For although some are come to that height of atheism and abjuration of God, as to retain the devil himself for a counsel in a time of straits, as Saul did, and contract with the prince of death for the preservation of life in time of sickness, as Ahaziah did—and I doubt very many do fall into acquaintance with that evil spirit, and receive assistance from him before they be well aware, by meddling with unphysical, unscriptural, unwarrantable cures—yet the greatest danger is not in these: the greatest danger is of miscarrying about things in themselves lawful; and that is chiefly by those two ways which I named just now. Take heed, therefore, of immoderate seeking after created helps; be not anxious, perplexed, tormented in mind by a passionate desire of any of these. O what a raging and unquenchable thirst have many men after creature-cures! they will move heaven and earth, and almost hell too, (with her in the poet,) but they will find out relief. Give me a physician, or I die, says one: give me trading, good markets, a plentiful crop, or I am undone, says another. What, man! is thy life wrapt up in a pill, or incorporated into a potion? Is thy main happiness in the abundance of these things here below? or wilt thou say to the wind, Blow here in this quarter, and no where else; tie up the supreme and free Agent to a form and method of working? Let not such a profane disposition be found amongst us. Again, if you have found out hopeful creature-cures,

take heed of using them in an inordinate manner, laying stress upon them, looking earnestly on them, as though they by their own power and proper virtue could make the lame to walk, or the sick to recover. Eye not, much less depend upon, the virtue of any created means, as distinct from God; but acknowledge the power, and virtue, and goodness of every created being, to be the power, and virtue, and goodness of God in that creature; and so consequently use it in subordination and subserviency to the supreme Cause, who can at pleasure let loose or suspend the influences and virtues of every such means.

4. "Converse not with creature-losses in a time of affliction." The sinful soul that hath strayed from God, and centred upon the creature, is always intemperate and restless; if it be disappointed in its converse with creature-cures, and sees that for all these his comforts are cut off, health, liberty, friends, are perished; then he falls to converse with his losses, and spends the powers of his soul in discontents, and many dismal passions. "O then, alas! I am undone! What shall I do for the hundred talents? I am the only man that hath seen affliction; no sorrow like unto my sorrow. I shall go softly all my days, for the joy of my heart is perished, the delight of mine eyes is cut off." Thus Rachel weeps for her children, and will not be comforted; Rizpah attends the carcasses of her sons, and will not be parted from them. It is a strange thing that a soul should live upon its losses; and yet how many do so? Their very soul cleaves to the dust, where their creature-comforts are interred; whose souls are so

much bound up in the creature, that they will needs live and die together with them. If God smites the gourd, and make it to wither, Jonah droops, and will needs die too. If Joseph be missing a while, Jacob will not be comforted; no, he will go down into the grave unto his son mourning. Who would have thought to have heard such words from such wise men as a prophet and a patriarch? Oh the strange and unbounded power which this unseemly creature-love hath obtained over the best of men! which makes me call him a happy man, almost more than a man, a compeer of angels, who hath learned to converse with God alone. Well, converse not with creature-losses; let not your soul take up its lodging by the carcasses of your created comforts, with Rizpah; dwell not upon the lowest round of the ladder, but climb up by it to the meaning of God, and to some higher good, and more excellent attainment. They live to their loss who live upon their losses, who dwell upon the dark side of the dispensation; for every dark providence hath one bright side, wherein a godly soul may take comfort, if he be not wanting to himself.

5. "Converse not with flesh and blood." By flesh and blood, I suppose the apostle means no more than men—"I conferred not with flesh and blood." And indeed, if we confer with men only for counsel, and repair to men only for comfort, in a time of affliction, we shoot short of the mark. But by flesh and blood the Scripture elsewhere often means man in this his animal state, as he is in his corruptible, mortal body, as 1 Cor. xv. 50. and many other places. And in this sense I speak, when I say, converse not with

flesh and blood. Judge not according to your senses; let not your own sensual appetite determine what is good or evil, sweet or bitter: consult with rectified reason, and not with brutish appetite; confer with faith, and not with fancy. Rectified reason will judge that to be really good which our sensual appetite dictates; an enlightened mind will judge that to make for the interest of the soul, and its eternal happy state, which sense judges hurtful to the interest of the body and its animal state. It is not possible there should be any order, nor consequently any peace or rest in that soul, where the inferior faculties domineer over the superior, and sensitive powers lord it over the intellectual, and where raging appetite and extravagant fancy must clamber up into the throne to determine cases, and right reason must stoop and bow before it.

Be admonished to fly converse with all these, if you would converse rightly, purely, properly, comfortably with God, which is the highest office and attainment of created nature. Consider what I have said concerning this excellent and high employment, and awaken your souls, and all the powers of them, to meet the Lord God, and converse with him aright in the way of his judgments. Converse with God, with God in Christ, with God in his promises, with God in his attributes; and labour to do it, not speculatively, notionally, but really, practically, according as I have directed in the foregoing discourse. Religion is not an empty, airy, notional thing; it is not a matter of thinking nor of talking, but it hath a real existence in the soul, and doth as really distinguish, though not specifically, one man from another,

as reason distinguishes all men from beasts. Converse with God is set out in Scripture by living and walking, and the like. Let me inculcate this thing therefore again, and press it upon you, and I shall finish all. As the way of glorifying God in the world is not by a mere thinking of him, or entertaining some notion of his glory into our heads, but consists in a real participation of his image in a God-like disposition, and holy conversation, according to that of our Saviour, "Herein is my Father glorified, in that ye bear much fruit;" so the way of conversing with God in his several attributes is not thinking often with ourselves, and telling one another, that God is just, wise, and merciful, though this be good; but it is a drinking in the virtue and value of these divine perfections, a working of them into the soul, and, on the other hand, the soul's rendering of itself up to God in those acts of grace which suit with such attributes, as in water face answereth face. I do not call bare performance of duties a conversing with God; prayer and meditation, &c. are excellent means, in and by which our soul converses with God: but communion with God is properly somewhat more spiritual, real, powerful, and divine, according as I described it just now. As, for example, the soul receives the impressions of divine sovereignity into it, and gives up itself unto God in the grace of self-denial, and humble subjection—the soul receives the communication of divine Fulness and Perfection, and entertains the same with delight and complacency, and, as it were, grows full in it; even as the communications of the virtues of the sun are answered with life, and warmth, and growth,

in the plants of the earth. So a soul's conversing with the attributes of God is not an empty notion of them, or a dry discourse concerning them, but a reception of impressions from them, and a reciprocation to them: the effluxes of these from God are such as do beget reflections in man towards God. This is to know Christ, to grow up in him unto all things, according to that passage—" Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him."

A

FAREWELL TO LIFE.

2 Cor. v. 6.

Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.

The holy apostle having, in the first verse of this chapter, laid down the doctrine of eternal glory, which shall follow upon this transitory state of believers, shows, in the following verses, how he himself longed within himself, and groaned after that happy state; and then proceeds to give a double ground of this his confident expectation. The one is in verse 5. where the apostle is confident concerning the putting off of this mortal body, because God had wrought and formed him for this state of glory, and already given him an earnest of it, even his Holy Spirit; the other ground of the confidence and settledness of his mind as to his desires of a change, is taken from his present state in the body, which was but poor and uncomfortable in comparison of that glorious state held forth in the words of the text—"Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord."

For I do not take the words, "we are confident," concerning the apostle's resolvedness, with a quiet and sober mind to suffer any kind of persecution or affliction whatever; but "we are always confident"—that is, we do with confidence expect, or at least we are always well satisfied, contented, well resolved in our minds, concerning our departure out of this life: for the apostle was speaking, not of afflictions or persecutions in the former verses, but indeed of death, which he calls a dissolving of "the earthly house of this tabernacle," verse 1. and a being "clothed upon with our house which is from heaven," verses 2, 4. Yea, and thus the apostle explains himself, verse 8. where he tells you what he means by this his confidence: "We are confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body;" where the latter words are expository of the former: as if he should say, It is better to be with the Lord than in this mortal body; but we cannot be with the Lord whilst we are in this body; it keeps us from him: therefore we have the confidence to part with it. It is the reason of the apostle's confidence and willingness to part with the body, that I am to speak of; and the reason is, because this body keeps him from his Lord: "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." The words are a metaphor, and are to be translated thus—"We, indwelling in the body, do dwell out from the Lord;" which our translation renders well, taking little notice of this metaphor, "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord;" though, indeed, if they had left out that word, "*at home*," it would have been as well, and so have neglected the metaphor altogether, as we

may haply hint hereafter. The words are a reason of the apostle's willingness to be dissolved, and contain a kind of an accusation of the body, and so seem to lay a blame upon it, and upon this animal life, which must be remembered. Now, for the former phrase, of being "at home in the body," it is easily understood, and generally, I think, agreed upon, to be no more than whilst we carry about with us this corruptible flesh, whilst we live this natural, animal life, it only signifies man in his compounded animal state, and doth not at all allude to his sinful, unregenerate, or carnal state: but the latter phrase, "absent from the Lord," is capable of a double sense, both good and true, and I think both fit enough to the context and drift of the apostle. I shall speak to both, but insist most upon the latter.

I. "Whilst we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord;" that is, from the bodily presence of the Lord in heaven, absent from Christ Jesus and his glory; and so the words are the same in sense with "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God:" for, by flesh and blood, there must needs be meant man in this animal, corruptible state. And so the apostle accuses this kind of life in the body, and, as it were, blames it for standing between him and his glorified Lord; and so, consequently, between him and the glory of his Lord. And this sense doth well agree with what went before, and with what follows. The apostle hath a great mind to depart; for whilst he is in the body, he is absent from his perfect happiness: for this is the consummation of a Christian's happiness, to be with the Lord, to be admitted to a beholding of his infinite glory, as ap-

pears by our Saviour's earnest prayer for this: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Besides, if we shall see him as he is, we must also needs be made like unto him, else how can we be fit to live for ever in his presence? Now are we kept from this seeing and beholding of the Lord in glory by this animal life: it stands between us and the crown, between us and our Master's joy, between us and the perfect enjoyment of God. To be with the Lord, is a state of perfect freedom from sin. No unclean thing shall or can enter into heaven. A perfect freedom from all manner of afflictions: "There shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, and all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes." A state of freedom from all temptations to sin; for a tempting devil, and all tempting lusts, shall be cast out for ever: a state of perfect peace, without the least disturbance from within or from without: of perfect joy, that shall never have end or abatement: and of perfect holiness, when the whole soul shall be enlarged, and raised to know, and love, and enjoy, the blessed God, as much as created nature is capable. This is the happy state of seeing God, of being with the Lord; and it is our corruptible body, this animal life, that interposes between us and it; so that the apostle is confident, and rather willing to depart, and be with the Lord, than stay here, and be without him.

II. "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord," without any reference to the world to come; and so it may be fitly translated, 'distant from the Lord, estranged from God.' This

agrees well with the context and scope of the apostle also. And thus the words are also a good ground of the apostle's resolution and willingness to die: as if he should say, I am willing to be absent from this body; for whilst I am in it I find myself to be at a great distance from God. And indeed the word, ἐκδημεῖν, signifies properly, to be at a distance, or to be estranged: so I find it interpreted by a learned critic, without any mystery, (as he speaks,) of the distance that even believers themselves stand at from God in this life. And in this sense I shall choose to prosecute the words. In which sense the apostle blames this body and animal life, because it keeps us at a distance from God; is a clog, a snare, a fetter, a pinion to the soul: and so the words do agree in sense with those of our Saviour, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak:" where, by the flesh, must needs be understood the body, if we consider the context; namely, the occasion upon which the words were spoken, the sleepiness of the apostles; or if we consider the propriety of speech, according to the style of the New Testament. True, indeed, the corruption of nature is sometimes called "flesh;" but, according to that way of speaking, our Saviour would rather have said, that 'the spirit was willing, but the flesh was strong;' as he saith elsewhere, that the strong man armed kept the house.

Now to explain this doctrine a little, "That even the godly themselves, whilst they are in this body, are at a distance from the Lord." It must be granted, that the godly soul is nigh unto God, even whilst it sojourns in this mortal body, and tottering flesh. All souls are involved in the apostacy of

Adam, and are fallen down from God, have alike strayed from their God, and are sunk into self and the creature: God opened a way for their return by the blood of Jesus; for we owe it unto Christ's death, not only that God is reconciled to us, pardoning our sins, but that any of our natures become reconciled to God, by accepting of him as our God, and loving him as the chiefest good. Now there is a double being brought nigh to God by Christ. The first is more general, external, and, as I may say, rational: thus the partition-wall being broken down, the Gentiles that were converted from their idolatry to a profession of God and Christ, and admitted to a communion with the visible church, are, upon that account, said to be brethren to the rest of God's children: and as to the church, they are said to be within it, though, at the same time, they were fornicators, covetous, drunkards; and as to God, they are said to be made nigh. A professing of God is said to be a being nigh to him; and even an external performance is said to be a drawing nigh to him; and so Nadab and Abihu, even in the offering of strange fire, are said to have drawn nigh to God. And this, though it be a privilege, yet it is not that honourable privilege of the truly godly souls, who are by Christ Jesus raised up to God in their hearts, and reconciled to him in their natures, and united to him in their affections, and so are made nigh unto him in a more especial and spiritual manner. Thus all sinful and wicked souls, notwithstanding all their profession and performances, are far from God—estranged from the life of God. Enmity and dissimilitude are the most real distance from God, and truly godlike souls are

only nigh unto him; they dwell in him, and he dwelleth in them, as in his most proper temple. As to any kind of apposition, no man can draw nigh to God, nor by any local accession; for so all men are alike nigh to him, who is every where, and the worst as well as the best of men do live and move in him. But they are really nigh unto God who do enjoy him; and they only enjoy him, whose natures are conformable to him in a way of love, goodness, and godlike perfections. We do not enjoy God by any gross and external conjunction with him: but we enjoy him, and are nigh unto him, by an internal union; "when a divine Spirit informeth and acteth our souls, and derives a divine life into them and through them." And so a godly soul only is really and happily nigh unto God. Thus the apostle Paul, I believe, was as nigh unto God as any man in the world; who did not only live and move in God, as all men do, (though few understand it,) but God did even live, and, as it were, breathe in him. The very life that he lived, was "by faith in the Son of God;" for though he walked in the flesh, yet he did not walk after the flesh. And yet this gracious soul, even as all other believers, was at a distance from God; and that not so much by reason of his being a creature, for of that he doth not speak, (so the very angels of God are at an infinite distance from God,) but by reason of this mortal body, and animal life, which hindered him from being so nigh to God as his soul was capable to be: "Whilst we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord;" that is, at a great distance from God.

1. We are distant from God, "as to that knowledge which we shall have of him." Philosophical

divines speak of a threefold knowledge:—1st, An essential knowledge of God. This is that unspeakable light, whereby the Divine Nature comprehends its own essence; wherein God seeth himself. 2d, By science. This, man is capable of in this life. But this kind of knowing of God by way of science, is but a low and dry thing, common to good and bad, men and devils; and is indeed the perfection of the learned more than of the godly: "and this kind of knowledge of God the glorified soul will reckon but like a fable, or a parable, when it shall be once swallowed up in God, feasting upon Truth itself, and seeing God in the pure rays of his own divinity." 3d, By intuition. This, man cannot attain to in this life, in its perfection, because it arises from a blissful union with God himself, which in this animal state is imperfect. This, in the Platonic phrase, is a contact of God, and, in Scripture language, a beholding of God face to face, which we are not capable of in this animal, concrete state. So may the answer of God to Moses be understood, when he besought God to show him his glory; that is, to imprint a distinct idea of his Divine Essence upon his mind. "No man can see me, and live;" that is, No man in this corruptible state and animal life is capable of seeing me as I am, to apprehend my Divine Essence, to see my face. The vision of God is not in this life, but in the other; so that a man must die before he can thus know God. This is the exposition of Jewish doctors; and our learned countrymen do approve it also. This blessed knowledge of God we are at a distance from whilst we are in this body: so the apostle declares plainly—"Now we see darkly,

as through a glass;" but the time will come when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known. Now our body principally hinders the operation of our minds, when they do exercise themselves about the nature of God, whilst it presents its fancies and gross imaginations to the soul; so it becomes, as it were, a veil upon the face of the soul, draws a cloud, and casts a mist over its eyes, that it cannot discern distinctly, nor judge properly and spiritually. And with allusion to this, that passage of the apostle is proper and significant, "We see as through a glass," —"which glass is indeed continually sullied and darkened whilst we look into it, by the breathing of our animal fancies and imaginations upon it." Not only those fogs of pride and self-love, and other sinful corruptions, that do arise out of the soul itself, hinder our right perceptions of God; (as the earth sends out vapours out of itself, which arise and interpose between itself and the sun;) but even the animal fancy casts in its phantasms and imaginations as a mist before the eye of the soul, which through divine grace hath been somewhat enlightened, and cleared from its inbred sinful humours. Though corruption in the mind be as a rheum in its eye, so that it cannot well see, yet that doth not hinder, but that the fancy, by presenting its unspiritual imaginations, doth also cast a mist before it, that it cannot see well, nor judge rightly; and so it is either held in gross ignorance, or lapses into error. But in the regeneration, this sense either shall not be, or shall be pure and spiritual.

2. Whilst we are in the body, we are distant from God, "as to that service which we ought to perform

to him in the world." And herein it were endless to run through all those outward duties which we owe to God in the body, and to show how the body becomes a hinderance either to them or in them. Though the soul be made willing and forward by a divine principle implanted in it, yet the body remains a body, a weak and sluggish instrument; and so it will be whilst it is animal—it will go down into the dust a weak body. What man ever had a more willing and cheerful heart than Moses, the friend of God? yet his hands were heavy, and ready to hang down. Shall I instance in the excellent duty of preaching and hearing, wherein the spirits of the most spiritual preacher are soon exhausted, the tongue of the learned is ready to cleave to the roof of his mouth, the head is seized with dizziness, the heart with pantings, the organs of speech with weariness, and the knees with trembling; and the ears of the most devout hearers with heaviness, the eyes with sleepiness, and the whole body in a short time with weakness? Shall I instance in the noble duty of prayer, wherein the pious soul goes out to God, but can scarce get its body to accompany it? And there the fancy distracts, the senses divert, and indeed all the members are ready to play the truants, if not the traitors too; especially the brain, where the soul sits enthroned, is suddenly environed with a rude host of sluggish vapours arising from the stomach, and being no longer able to defend itself against them, falls down dead in the midst of them; insomuch that the poor soul is ready to wish sometimes with the sorrowful prophet, "O that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place, that I might leave my members, and

go from them, for they are all an assembly of treacherous servants!" or wish that it were like its Saviour, who could leave his raw disciples asleep, and go and pray apart, and come again unto them. Shall I instance in that high duty of sustaining martyrdom, bearing persecutions for God? Come on, my body, cries the holy soul—come on to the stake: come, my head, lay down thyself upon this block: come, my body, compose thyself in this dark dungeon: come, my feet, fit yourselves into these stocks: come, my hands, draw on these fetters, these iron bracelets: come, come drink the cup that my Father gives thee. But oh, how it follows to the stake! what shaking, shivering, trembling, and reluctancy may you see in the whole structure of it! the head hangs down, the eyes run over, the lips quiver, the shoulders pull back, the hands tremble, the knees knock together, and the whole fabric is ready to tumble down, for fear of falling. Either to this, (as some interpret,) or to that duty of prayer, (as others,) doth that of our Saviour refer—"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." It seems the spirit of the weakest Christian is strong, though the body (as we have seen) of the strongest saint is weak: though indeed it is not properly the weakness that is in the body that I am to speak to, but the influence that the body hath upon the soul to weaken that; for, whilst the soul sympathizes with the body, attends to it, spares it, pities it, itself becomes almost ill affected to the service of God. I am not so much blaming the body because it had need, by reason of its slothfulness, to be drawn on to duty; but because, by its influences, it draws on the soul also

from them: for so we find it by woful experience, that if the body do sleep, the soul cannot wake, it cannot hear without the ear, nor see without the eyes; so that the body's weariness at length ends in the soul's unwillingness, and the weakness of the one grows to be the sin of the other.

3. Whilst we are in the body, we are at a distance from God, "as to communion with him;" we are estranged from fellowship with him: and this is indeed to be absent from the Lord. Oh, how many weary and uncomfortable days do poor saints live, at a great distance from their God, their life, their happiness, whilst they are in their worldly pilgrimage, in their cage of flesh! Oh, how many days do they forget God, and are apt to think that God hath forgotten them too! how do they live sometimes, as it were, without God in the world, their souls being surfeited with carnal pleasures, benumbed with fears, frozen with self-love, choked with cares, stifled with griefs, and seem to have no more feeling of God, their life, than a body in the dust hath of the soul, its life! Oh, what a heavy yoke doth the poor soul draw under, when it ploughs to the flesh, and cannot lift up its head to heaven! Oh, how is our intercourse with God obstructed, our beholding of him obscured, our entertaining of him prevented, our enjoyment of him disturbed and violated, our love to him deadened, and his love to us damped —ours rendered infirm, and his rendered insensible, and all by this make-bait mortal flesh! Alas! what uncertainties and vicissitudes,—what changings and tossings, turnings and windings, are our poor pilgrim-souls here exercised with! what breakings and

piercings, reconciliations and fallings out, closing and parting, rising and falling, what ups and downs, what forwards and backwards, doth the poor distressed soul experience in this animal state! The flourishing soul withers, the lofty soul languishes, the vigorous soul faints, the nimble soul flags, the devout soul swoons, the lively soul sickens, and is ready to give up the ghost: and she that was a while ago resting and glorying in the arms of her Lord, anon lies embracing the dust, and hath almost forgotten that ever she was happy; her peace is violated, her rest is disturbed, her converse with heaven interrupted, her incomes from God are few and insensible, her outgoings to him are few and lazy, and the rivers of her divine pleasures are almost dried up,—and all this whilst she is in this body; and indeed a great part of it by reason of this body in which she is: the animal body keeps us distant from the Lord, that we cannot converse with him, mind him, enjoy him, live upon him and unto him. The body being fitted only for this animal state, is ever drawing down the soul, when it would raise up itself in contemplation of, and communion with, the blessed God. And so,

(1.) The Necessities of the body hinder the soul's communion with the Lord. Not that the necessities of the body are simply in themselves to be blamed, but the caring for these doth so exercise the soul in this state, that it cannot attend upon God without distraction. Oh, how much doth the necessary caring for meat and drink, food and medicine, yea, the ordering of temporal affairs, estrange from communion and converse with God! so that the soul, like poor Martha, is cumbered with many cares, and

busied with much serving in this house, and cannot attend so devoutly and entirely as it ought upon the Lord. If the body be pinched with pain, the soul cannot be at rest, but must needs look out for relief: if the body be pinched with hunger and thirst, the soul can take no rest till it have found out a supply for it: if the one be sick, the other is sad: if the one be hungry or thirsty, the other seems to languish; like Hippocrates' twins, that laughed and cried, lived and died, together.

It is a wonderful mystery, and a rare secret, how the soul comes to sympathize with the body, and to have not only a knowledge, but, as it were, a feeling of its necessities; how these come to be conveyed to the soul, and how it comes to be thus affected with them. But we find it so; and indeed, to speak truth, it seems necessary for the maintaining of this animal state, that it should be so, that the soul should be, as it were, hungry, weary, sick, and sleep too, together with the body. "For if our soul should not know what it is to be hungry, thirsty, cold, or sick, or weary, but by a bare ratiocination, or a dry syllogistical inference, without any more especial feeling of these necessities, it would soon suffer the body to languish and decay, and commit it wholly to all changes and casualties; neither would our own body be any more to us than the body of a plant or of a star, which we do many times view with as much clearness, and contemplate with as much contentment, as we do our own." But, in the meantime, the soul is diverted from its main employment, and turned aside from its communion with God; not so much by providing somewhat for our bodies to eat, and drink,

and put on, which is lawful and needful, as our Saviour implies—as by sinking itself into the body, being passionately and inordinately affected with its wants, and so being sinfully thoughtful, as our Saviour intimates in the same chapter.

(2.) The Passions of the body hinder the soul's communion with the Lord. So powerful is the interest and influence that this body hath in and over the soul, that it fills it with desires, pleasures, griefs, joys, fears, angers, and various passions. The body calls out the soul to attend upon its several passions, which I dare not say are sinful in themselves, as they first affect our souls, no more than it is our sin that we are men: our blessed Saviour seems not to have been free from them, as grief and fear, who yet was free from all sin. Nay, it seems necessary, as I said before, considering the nature of this animal life, that the soul should have the corporeal passions and impressions feelingly and powerfully conveyed to it, without which it could not express that due benevolence to the body which belongs to it: and, indeed, were it not so, we could not properly be said, in the apostle's phrase here, to be at home in the body,—the soul would rather dwell in any other house than its own. But the soul being called out to attend upon these passions, is easily ensnared by them; for it can hardly exercise itself about them, but it slips insensibly into a sinful inordinacy. As for example, "The animal spirits nimbly playing in the brain, and swiftly flying from thence through the nerves up and down the whole body, do raise the fancy with mirth and cheerfulness, which we must not presently mistake for the power of grace, nor condemn for the

working of corruption: so also, when the gall empties its bitter juice into the liver, and that mingles itself with the blood there, it begets fiery spirits, which presently fly up into the brain, and cause impressions of anger." Now, though I dare not say that the soul's first sensating and entertaining of these passions is sinful, yet it is sadly evident, that our souls, being once moved by these undisciplined animal spirits, are very apt to sit upon and cherish those passions of grief, fear, mirth, anger, and, as it were, to work them into itself, in an inordinate manner, and contrary to the dictates of reason; and so the will presently makes those sinful, which before were but merely human, or, as one calls them, the mere blossomings or shootings forth of animal life within us. We see then, in these particulars, that not only the depraved dispositions of the soul do keep us at a distance from God, but even this body, also, is a great hinderance to that knowledge of God to which we shall attain, that service of God which we might perform, and that sweet communion with him which we shall enjoy. It is a clog to the soul that would run, a mist to the soul that would see clearly, a manacle to the soul that would work, a snare to the soul that would be free, a fetter to chain it to earthly and material things, and, as it were, a pinion to the wings of contemplation. More particularly, it is a hinderance to it, as to these three things which I have named: as to the soul's knowledge of God, the body is an occasion of ignorance and error; as to its serving of God, an occasion of distraction and weariness, lightness, and triflingness; and as to its communion with God, an occasion of earthliness and sensuality.

Now, this distance which this body keeps the soul at from God, might more particularly appear in another way of explication, by observing the especial grievances that arise to the soul from those three great animal faculties, (if I may so speak,) the Senses, the Appetite, the Fancy.

1. The Senses, I mean the external senses of the body, seeing, hearing, &c. These convey passions to the soul, upon which it subsists and feeds with a sinful fondness and eagerness. Set open the eye, and it will set hard to convey some species of earthly objects to the soul, that shall exclude the ideas of God out of it. Set open the ear, and it will fill the soul with such a noise of earthly tumult, that the secret whispers of the Divine Spirit cannot be heard. The like I may say of the rest. Oh, how easily do these discompose the fixed soul, distract the devout soul, cast a mist before the contemplative soul, and draw down the raised soul from communion with heaven, to converse with earthly objects! The souls of most men are quite sunk into their senses, and do nothing but, as it were, become their lackeys all their lives; and so the servants are on horseback, and princes go on foot. Though the eye will never be satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, yet forsooth these importunate suitors must be gratified: the eye must see what it will see, and the ear must hear what it will hear; nothing must be withheld from them, that these childish senses do whine after. These men's souls are indeed incarnate, swallowed up in their eyes, ears, and mouths. But not only these, but even godly souls, are often charmed and ensnared by their

senses: even they converse not only in the body, but too much with it also, and it becomes as a Delilah to lull them asleep, and bind them too. Good Job found his senses so treacherous, that he was fain to make a covenant with them; and well if he could escape even with this. The words are a metaphor; for indeed the worst of it is, that these senses are not capable of any discipline: one cannot bring them into any covenant-terms; so that whilst we have senses, they will be treacherous; whilst our eyes are in our heads, they will be wandering after forbidden objects.

2. The Appetite, the sensitive appetite, which is a faculty of the sensitive soul, whereby this animal man is stirred up to desire and lust after the things which his senses have dictated to him. This bodily lust following upon the neck of the former, becomes a greater snare to the soul: this restless suitor comes whining ever and anon to the soul for every trifle that the eye hath seen, or the ear heard, or the mouth hath tasted, and by its continual coming, and importunate crying, wearies her into an observance of it; as the fond child comes crying to the mother for every toy that it hath seen upon the stalls, and she, though she cannot in judgment approve of the request, yet, either in fond indulgence, or for peace sake, will condescend to purchase it. This is the daughter of the horse-leech, that cries continually, Give, give. Why, what would it have? even any thing that it hath seen, or heard, or touched, or tasted—any thing that it sees a fellow-creature to be possessed of: and so indeed the appetite doth not only ensnare the soul unto drunkenness and gluttony,

but voluptuousness, lasciviousness, and all manner of sensuality. The evil of the sensual appetite appears in wantonness and lasciviousness, (whether real, verbal, or mental,) in immoderate and inordinate trading, engrossing, sporting, building, attiring, sleeping, visiting, as well as in eating and drinking. I will determine nothing concerning the first motions of the appetite, whereby it solicits the will to fulfil it; only this, that if it solicit to any thing simply and morally evil, it is sinful in that first act, and that at all times it ought carefully to be watched, lest it seduce to intemperance in things lawful. But concerning the gratifying of the appetite, seeing there must be in us a sensitive appetite whilst we are in this animal state, it is to be endeavoured, as far as may be, that we gratify the appetite, not as it is a sensitive appetite, but under this notion, as the thing that it desires makes for our real good, and tends to the enjoyment of the Supreme Good: to eat and drink, not because we are hungry or thirsty, because the appetite desires it, but with reference to the main end, with respect to the highest good, that the body may be enabled, strengthened, and quickened, to wait upon the soul cheerfully, in the actions of a holy life. But to this, man, in his animal state, cannot perfectly attain, which shows that the appetite doth keep us at a distance from God.

3. The Fancy: this also keeps man at a distance from God, and hinders us in the knowledge and service of God, and interrupts the soul's communion with God. This is a busy and petulant faculty, or inward sense, and the soul doth readily gratify the passions of it, so that it doth frequently hinder its

mental operations, and becomes a great snare. A working fancy, how much soever it is magnified by the wisdom of this world, is a mighty snare to the soul, except it work in a fellowship with right reason and a sanctified heart. I am persuaded there is no greater burden in the world to a serious soul, especially in hot and dry constitutions, where it is commonly most pregnant, and most impatient of discipline; and, I confess, I have often wondered at the soul's readiness to be so speedily affected with the phantasms and imaginations of it, and fondness to cherish them so dearly. This, indeed, if it be so far refined as to present sober and solid imaginations to the mind, and to act in subserviency to sanctified reason, is an excellent handmaid to the soul in many of her functions; but otherwise is a snare, as we have partly observed already, and may observe more, if we study the secrets of our own souls, and the mighty mysteries that are within us. And this doth not only disturb, distract, and hinder, in ordinary duties, but even when the soul is at the highest pitch of communion and contemplation, it endeavours to pull it down to attend to its vain phantasms, and indeed gives it many a grievous fall. I hesitate not to affirm, that this is the most pernicious enemy of the three that I named, to the soul's happiness, as might appear in many respects: I will only name one. It hath an advantage against us, which neither of the other two hath: it infests us, and annoys us, sleeping as well as waking. In sleep, the senses are locked up, and the appetite is, for the most part, silent from its begging; but then the fancy is as busy and tumultuous as ever, forming and gathering imaginations,

and those are commonly wild and senseless, if not worse. The mind, in way of kindness and benevolence to the body, suspends its own actions, whilst the body takes its rest in the night, and then the rude fancy takes its opportunity to wander at liberty, as being without its keeper, and acts to the disturbance of the body: but that is not the worst; for it becomes so tumultuous and impetuous sometimes, as that it awakens the mind to attend upon its imaginations; and this the soul doth condescend to in an inordinate manner, and sets the stamp of sinfulness upon them, to its own wounding. And now that I am speaking of sleep in this discourse, I cannot but observe how this very thing also keeps us at a distance from God in this animal state. How is our communion with God interrupted by this! for herein we cease not only from the actions of an animal life, but commonly from the actions of a spiritual life too. What a great breach, what a sad interruption, is there made in our converse with God by this means! Such a poor happiness it is that we have in this world, that it is cut off, and seems, as it were, not to be one-fourth part of our time; for indeed a happiness that is not felt, deserves not the name of happiness. Some learned and active men have been ashamed that they have slept away so much of their time, which was all too little for their studies and exploits. Ah, poor Christian! that, as it were, sleeps away so much of his God; being as much estranged from him in the night, as though he had never conversed with him in the day; and in the morning when he awakes, cannot always find himself with him either; which is enough to make a poor saint wish, either

that he might have no need of sleep, or that, though he sleep, his heart might wake perpetually.

We have seen in what sense this mortal body keeps believers absent from the Lord, and in what respects it keeps them at a distance from God, even in this life; from the knowledge of God, the service of God, and communion with him. Here then, by way of application,

1. We may see that it was for good reason the blessed apostle is confident and willing to depart; nay, he groans within himself, desiring that "mortality might be swallowed up of life," as he speaks, verse 4. I told you before, that these words did contain the reason or ground thereof; and by this time I hope you see that the reason is good, and the ground is sufficient. What! will the men of this world say, Will you persuade us out of our life? should any thing in the world make a man weary of his life? "It is better to exist in misery, than not to exist." The apostle was surely beside himself, or he would never have fallen out with his own life; or else he was in a passion, and knew not what he said; or else his life was bitter to him, by reason of the poor, afflicted, persecuted condition that he lived in, and so he was become desperate, and cared not what became of him. No, none of these: the apostle was in his right wits, and in a sober mind too. It was not a passion, or a fit of melancholy, but his judgment and choice upon good deliberation; and therefore you find him in the same mind elsewhere: "I desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better." Besides, he gives a reason for what he desires: but we know that passion is unruly and un-

reasonable. Neither was the apostle beside himself, for he gives a good, solid, and wise reason—"Whilst we are at home in the body," &c.—he will part with his life, rather than not be perfectly happy. For, whereas worldlings put such a high price upon life, and think that nothing should persuade men out of their lives; (it is true, indeed, if we speak properly, life is the perfection of the creature; the happiness of every thing is its life: "A living dog is better than a dead lion;") but I may say to these, even as our Saviour said to the woman concerning her husband, The life that we live here is not our life. The union of the sensitive soul with the body, is indeed truly and properly the life of a beast, and its greatest happiness, for it is capable of no higher perfection: but the union of the rational soul with God, is the noblest perfection of man, and his highest life; so that the life of a believing soul is not destroyed at death, but perfected. Neither was the apostle weary of his life, because of the adversities of it. The apostle was of a braver spirit, surely, than any stoic: he durst live, though he rather desired to die. All the conflicts he endured with the world, never wrung such a sigh from him, as the conflict he had with his own corruptions did: "O wretched man!" &c. All the persecutions in the world never made him groan so much as the burden of his flesh doth here, and his great distance from the Lord. A godly soul can converse with persecuting men and a tempting devil, can handle briers and thorns, can grapple with any kind of oppressions and adversities in the flesh, without despondency, so long as it finds itself in the bosom of God, and in

the arms of Omnipotence; but when it begins to consider where it is, how far it is from its God, its life, and the happy state that God hath prepared it for, then it cannot but groan within itself, and be ready, with Peter, to cast itself out of the ship, to get to its God, to land itself in eternity. Neither, indeed, to speak truly, is it only the sense of sin against God which sets the godly soul a-longing: for though it must be confessed that this is a heavy burden upon the soul, yet the apostle makes no complaint of this here, but only of his distance from God, that necessary distance from God that the body kept him at.

2. See here the excellent spirit of true religion. Godly souls do groan after a disembodied state, not only because of their sins in the body, but even because of the necessary distance at which the body keeps them from God. We may suppose a godly soul, at some time, to have no manner of affliction in the world to grieve him, no sin unpardoned, unrepented of, to trouble him: yet for all this, he is not at perfect rest: he is burdened, and groans within himself, because he is at such a distance from that absolute Good whom he longs to know more familiarly, and enjoy more fully, than he doth yet, or than is allowed to mortal men; and though nothing else troubled him, yet the consideration of this distance makes him cry out, "O! when shall I come and appear before God?" be wholly swallowed up in him, see him as he is, and converse with him face to face. Mere innocency, or freedom from sin, cannot satisfy that noble and large spirit that is in a truly God-like soul: but that spirit of true goodness, being nothing else but an efflux from God himself, carries the soul

out after a more intimate union with that Being from whence it came: God dwelling in the soul, doth, by a secret mighty power, draw the soul more and more to himself. In a word, a godly soul, that is really touched with the sense of divine sweetness and fulness, and impressed with divine goodness and holiness, as the wax is with the stamp of the seal, could not be content to dwell for ever in this kind of animal body, nor take up an eternal rest in this imperfect, mixed state, though it could converse with the world without a sinful sullying of itself, but must needs endeavour still a closer conjunction with God; and, leaving the chase of all other objects, pant and breathe not only after God alone, but after more and more of him; and not only when it is under the sense of sin, but most of all when it is under the most powerful influences of divine grace and love, cry out with Paul, "O! who will deliver me out of this body?"

3. Suffer me from hence to expostulate a little, to expostulate with Christian souls about their unseemly temper. Doth this animal life and mortal body keep us at such a distance from our God, our happiness? Why are we then so fond of this life and mixed state? why do we so pamper this body? why so anxiously studious to keep it up, so dreadfully afraid of the ruins of it? If we take the apostle's words in the first sense that I named, then I may ask with him in the first verse, "Know we not, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?" or, verse 8. Why are we not willing rather to be "absent from the body," and to be "present with the Lord?" If we

take them in the latter sense, as this animal body is a hinderance to the soul's knowledge of, and communion with God, then I ask concerning this, as the apostle doth concerning rich men, James ii. 6. Why do ye pamper, prize, honour, dote upon this body? Doth not this body oppress you, distract you, burden you, clog you, hinder you? doth not this body interpose between the Sun of Righteousness, between the Father of lights, and your souls, that should shine with a light and glory borrowed from him; even as the dark body of the earth interposes between the sun and moon, to eclipse its light? why are we not rather weary that we are in the body? Surely there are some objections, some impediments, to the soul's longing after its happy state; but I doubt also, that there is something that chains the soul to this animal life, some cords in this earthly tabernacle that tie up the soul in it: but I cannot well imagine what they should be. Say not, there is something of God to be enjoyed in this life, which makes it pleasant; for although this be true, yet I am sure God gives nothing of himself to a soul thereby to clog it or cloy it. Did Moses send for some clusters of the land of Canaan into the wilderness, think ye, that the people might see and taste the fruits, and sit still, and be satisfied, and say, O, it is enough, we see that there are pleasant things in that land, we will never come at it? or did he not rather do it that they might make the more haste to possess themselves of it? Will any man say, Away, I will have no more land, no more money, I have some already? Can a godly soul say, God hath given me an earnest, I desire no more? No, no; but the report that a

Christian hears of a rest remaining, a happy life remaining for it, and the chariots of divine graces that he sees God hath sent out into his soul to convey it thither, make him cry out, not with Jacob, "It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive;" but O! this is not enough, this report is not enough; it is not enough that I taste some of the good things of the land, it is not enough that I see these carriages sent for me, it is not enough that my soul hath a happy and honourable life prepared for it; I see it indeed before I die, but I will also die, that I may see it better, and enjoy it more. But I doubt there is some earthly tie, even upon the heavenly soul, that chains it to this present animal body; but sure I am, that whatsoever it is, it is but a weak one. Is there any worldly accommodation, any creature-toy, that should in reason step between a soul and its God? Is this life sweet, because there are creature-comforts to be enjoyed? And will it not be a better life, when creature-comforts shall not be needed? And are the pleasures of this body, the comforts of this life, the flattering smiles, the fawning embraces, of the creature, such a mighty contentment to a soul, to a soul acquainted with the highest Good? Hast thou, O my soul, any such full and satisfying entertainment in thy pilgrimage, as to make thee loath to go home? wilt thou hide thyself with Saul among the stuff, among the lumber of the world, when thou art sought for to be crowned? are the empty sounds of popular applause, the breaking bubbles of secular greatness, the shallow streams of sensual pleasures, the smiles and lisping eloquence of wives and children, the flying shadows of creature-refreshments,

the momentary flourishes of worldly beauty and bravery, are these meat for a soul? are these the proper object, or the main happiness of such a divine thing as an immortal soul? Why are we not rather weary of this body, that makes us so weary of heavenly employment? why do we not rather long to part with that life that parts us from our life? and instead of the young apostle, "It is good to be here," cry out, with the sweet singer, "O that one would give me the wings of a dove, that I may fly away and be at rest!"

And now, methinks, by this time I might be somewhat bold, and form my remaining discourse into an exhortation. But it may be you will not bear it all at once; therefore I will first begin with a dehortation, to dissuade from two evils concerning your body,—namely, fear and fondness.

1. Take heed of fear for the body. I speak not so much of those first impressions which our fancies and animal spirits do make upon our minds, though it were to be wished that the mind did not so much as once entertain these; but of those acts of the will whereby it doth receive, allow, cherish, these impressions, until the cockatrice' egg be hatched into a viper. I speak not against care and circumspection; no, nor against that kind of suspicion whereby wise and prudent persons are jealous of circumstances and events, and so do watch to prevent, remove, or manage bodily evils, which is called *fear;* though even in these there may be an extreme, a "fear where no fear is," which is there ascribed to the wicked, and elsewhere threatened as a judgment. "The sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them." "The Lord

shall give thee a trembling heart." "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself;" but there are also many fools who hide themselves, though they see no evil. But I am not speaking of these; there is a vast difference between care and fear. By fear, I mean that trembling, fluctuating, tormenting passion, that doth not suffer the heart to be at rest, but doth, as it were, unhinge it, and loose the joints of the soul, whether it breaks out into expressions or not: it clouds the understanding, unsettles the will, disorders the affections, confounds the memory, and is like an earthquake in the soul, taking it off from its own basis, destroying the consistency of it, and hurling all the faculties into confusion: this, whether it break out into any unseemly acts or not, which commonly it doth, is itself an unseemly temper for a wise man, much more for a godly. I might speak as a philosopher, and show how unbecoming a man, and how destructive to him, this passion is: so much, that whilst it doth predominate, it almost robs him of that which is his greatest glory, even reason itself. But, to say no worse of it, it is very opposite, if not contrary, to that noble grace of faith, whereby the steady soul rests and lodges in the arms of God, as in its centre. But, to speak to the thing in hand, what an unseemly passion is this? We would have the world to believe that we have laid up our happiness in God, and that we are troubled that we are so far from him; and yet we are afraid lest that should be taking out of the way that keeps us at a distance from him: we flatter ourselves that we are in haste for heaven, and yet we are dreadfully afraid lest our earthly objects should be taken out of the way.

How do these things agree together? Are we persuaded, that if this earthly house of our tabernacle were taken down, we have a building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens? if not, why do we yet call ourselves Christians? But I think I may take it for granted we are all so persuaded; and if so, why are we so afraid it should be taken down? I am loath to speak what I think; yet methinks the entire and ardent love which we either do bear, or ought to bear, to the blessed God, and union and communion with him, should cast out this fear. This is suitable to Scripture, 1 John iv. 18. I will not dispute how far sinful fear for the body may carry a godly soul: the further the worse, I am sure: but if any will needs be so indulgent to his own passions, and so much an enemy to his own peace, as to encourage himself to fear, which is a strange thing, from the example of Abraham denying his wife, or Peter denying his Lord, let him compare the issue, and then let me see whether he dare go and do likewise: but if that will not fright you from fear, ponder upon these two considerations:—

(1.) I pray you seriously dispute the matter with yourselves, how far fear of sickness and death may consist with that ardent thirst after union and perfect communion with the blessed God, with which we ought to be possessed.

(2.) Dispute seriously how far it can stand with the sincerity of a Christian. God hath not left us in the dark as to this matter. I will turn you to a passage or two, which, methinks, should strike cold to all slavish, trembling professors—"The wicked travaileth with pain all his days, a dreadful sound is

in his ears." They are the words of Eliphaz indeed, but they do agree with the words of God himself:—"The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites." When I read over these passages, I cannot but pray, and cry, O my soul, come not thou into the number of the wicked, and be not united into the assembly of hypocrites!

2. Take heed of fondness of the body; of a double act of it, priding, pampering.

(1.) Take heed you pride not yourselves in any excellencies of the body. Doth this mortal body keep us at a distance from our God? do we well, then, to love that which keeps us from that which is most lovely? why then do we stand fondly gazing upon that which keeps us from the blessed sight of God? If you ask me, Did ever any man hate his own flesh? I will ask you again, Did ever any wise man love his own flesh above Him that made it? did ever any godly soul love his body in opposition to his God? O, but it is a comely body! And what is a beautiful body but a fair prison? A silver twist, or a clog of gold, do as really hinder the flight of a bird, and forestall her liberty, as a stone tied at her heels. Nay, those very excellencies which you so much admire, are so much the greater hinderances. If we had learned that excellent lesson indeed, of enjoying all things only in God, then the several beauties and braveries of the body would be a help to our devotion, they would carry us up to an admiration and contemplation of that glorious and most excellent Being from whom they were communicated: so we might, in some sense, look into a glass, and behold the beauty of God. But, alas! these com-

monly prove the greater snares: many had been more beautiful within, had they been less beautiful without; more chaste, if less comely: many had been more peaceable, and more at peace too, if they had been less able to have quarrelled and fought. It was said of Galba, who was an ingenious man, but deformed, that his soul dwelt ill; but, sure I am, it might better have been so said of beautiful Absalom, or Jezebel, whose bodies became a snare to their souls. On the other hand, they that want a beauty in their bodies, will perhaps labour to find an excellency in their minds far beyond it; as the philosopher advised to look often into a glass, "that if you be deformed, you may correct it by the beauty of your morals."

(2.) Take heed of pampering the body, of treating it too gently and delicately. Deny it nothing that may fit it for the service of God and your own souls, and allow it no more than may do that. Thy pampering is, 1. Unseemly. What! make a darling of that which keeps us from our Lord; carry it gently, and delicately, and tenderly towards that, which whilst we carry about with us we cannot be happy! 2. Injurious. If you bring up this servant delicately from a child, you shall have him become your son at length, yea, your master. If you do by your bodies, as the fond king did by his son Adonijah—never displease it, never reprove it, never deny it—it will do with you in time as he did, raise seditions in your soul. Go on, and please, and pamper your bodies, and it will come to this at length, that you must deny them nothing; you must give whatsoever a whining appetite will crave, go whither your gadding senses will

carry you, and speak whatsoever wanton fancy will suggest. Doth not the body itself set us at a sufficient distance from God, but we must estrange ourselves more from him by pleasing it, spend the time that should be for God in decking, trimming, and adorning it? When you do this, you feed a bird that will pick out your eyes; you nourish a traitor when you gratify this Adonijah. In a word, is it not enough that we do all carry fire in our bosoms, but we must also blow it up into a flame? "Nay, my brethren, do not so foolishly."

And now, methinks, by this time, I may venture upon an exhortation, by degrees at least.

1. "Watch against the body." You have heard how the senses, appetite, and fancy, become a snare to the soul's living unto and conversing with God. Now then, if you seriously design communion with heaven, if you place your happiness in the knowledge and enjoyment of that supreme and eternal Good, it becomes you to watch against all things that may distract or divert you from it, or make you fall short of the glory of God. Men that live upon earthly designs, whose great ambition it is to be great in the world, do not only use the most effectual means, and take the most direct courses, to accomplish those designs, and attain those ends, but do continually suspect, and diligently watch against, all the moths that would corrupt, the rust that would consume, the thieves that would plunder their treasures; and, in a word, against all possible hinderances and disappointments: so will we suspect and watch, surely, against all enemies and traitors to our souls, if we live here upon eternal designs, if our ambition be to be great in God

alone. And the more imminent the danger is, the more will we watch. Have you not found by experience, which of these three have been most prejudicial to your communion with God? If not, you have not been so studious to know the state, nor pursue the happiness, of your own souls as you might: if so, then watch against that most of all which you have found to be most injurious. For it ordinarily comes to pass, either by the difference of constitutions, or difference of temptations, or different ways of living, or some other thing, that God's children are more ensnared by some one of these than another. Well, be sure to watch and pray, and strive more especially against the more especial enemies of your souls.

2. "Live above the body;" above bodily enjoyments, ornaments, and excellencies. Though these bodily enjoyments be ever so sweet, these bodily ornaments ever so glorious, yet is not your happiness in these. Certainly they live to their loss, who live upon the excellencies of their own souls, whether natural or supernatural; they deprive themselves of the infinite glory, fulness, and sufficiency that is in the blessed God, who take up their happiness in these: much more do they pinch and impoverish their own souls, who live upon bodily ornaments or excellencies, wherein many inferior creatures do excel them—the rose in beauty, the sun in brightness, the lion in strength, the stag in swiftness, &c. If a woman were as lovely as the morning, "fair as the moon, clear as the sun,"—if a man were full of personal grace and majesty, "terrible as an army with banners," yet were not their happiness

in these accomplishments. Nay, which is worse, these ornaments stand between us and our happiness. When you begin, therefore, at any time fondly to admire any of these bodily excellencies, then think with yourselves, Oh, but all these do not make my soul happy! Nay, this beautiful outside must rot, and be deformed; these fair and flourishing members must wither in the dust; this active, strong, and graceful body must be buried in disgrace and weakness, before I can attain to entire and perfect happiness. This consideration will advance us to live above the body.

3. "Be content to be disembodied for a time." Is it true, that we can no otherwise be happy, no otherwise be present with God, know him familiarly, enjoy him perfectly and entirely? cannot we get to him except we go through the dust? Be it so then: be content to be disembodied for a time. "Let him die, only let him reign," could the heathen say concerning her son: much rather may a Christian say concerning his Father, Let him slay me, so my soul may but reign with him, which is by his reigning in it; let him kill me, so he will but fill me, let him draw me through the dust of the earth, so he will but draw me out of this dust of the world, so he will but draw me nigh unto himself, and bring me into a full and inseparable conjunction with my Lord! Methinks I need not use many arguments to persuade a soul that is feelingly overpowered, mastered, ravished, with the infinite beauty, goodness, glory, and fulness of his God, to be willing to quit a dusty tabernacle for a time, wherein it is almost swallowed up, to depart, and to be entirely swallowed up in him.

Nay, suppose a Christian in the lowest form, who hath but chosen God for his highest good and only happiness, as every sincere Christian hath, methinks he should have learned this lesson, to comply with that infinite, perfect will, that governs both him and the whole world. I cannot conceive a godly soul without the subduing of self-will, nor suppose a sincere saint void at least of the habit of self-resignation. Therefore I will add no more concerning this, but rise a step higher.

4. "Long after a disembodied state," desire to depart, and to be with the Lord; groan within yourselves to have mortality swallowed up of life, in which temper you find the holy apostle. To be content to die is a good temper, a temper scarce to be found, I think, in any wicked man; not from a right principle, I am sure: but, methinks, it is no very great thing, in comparison of what we should labour to attain to. Think on a little—what a strange kind of cold, uncouth phrase it is, Such a man is content to be happy! Men are not said to be content to be rich, but covetous; not willing to be honoured, but ambitious; and why should ye only be content to be with God? I am persuaded there is no show nor semblance of satisfactory bliss and happiness for a soul, a noble, immortal nature, but only in the supreme, essential, perfect, absolute Good, the blessed and eternal God: and should not this noble, active being be carried out with vehement longings after its proper and full happiness, as well as this earthly, sluggish body is carried with restless appetite after health, safety, and liberty? Why should a soul alone be content to be happy, when all other things

in the world do so ardently court, and vehemently pursue, their respective ends and several perfections? Certainly, if the blessed and glorious God should display himself in all his beauty, and open all his infinite treasures of goodness, and sweetness, and fulness, within the view of a soul, it could not but be ravished with the object, earnestly press into his presence, and, with a holy impatience, throw itself into his arms: there would be no need of setting bounds to the amount, to keep it from breaking through unto the Lord. What is said of the queen of the south, when she had heard the wisdom and seen the glory of Solomon, would be more true of a Christian—there would be no more spirit left in him. Some have therefore observed the wisdom of God in engaging the soul in so near a union with the body, that it might care for it, and not quit it: yea, the heathen observed the wisdom of God in concealing the happy state of a separated soul, that so men might be content to live out their time. But, alas! we see but darkly, as through a glass, and our affections towards God are proportionable to our apprehensions of him: these are dark, and therefore those are dull. And oh! would to God they were but indeed proportionable! for then we should love him only, if not earnestly, and desire him entirely, if not sufficiently. Consider what I have hinted concerning the happiness of the soul in the enjoyment of God, and what I have more fully demonstrated concerning the body's hindering of it, and keeping it at a distance: and then argue, Is happiness the main end of every being? must not this soul then, being a noble and immortal nature, needs look out for some

high and noble happiness, suitable to its excellent self? can that be any where but in the enjoyment of the highest and uncreated Good? and can this never be attained whilst we are in this animal state? Oh! why then do we not look out after so much enjoyment of this blessed God as we are now capable of, and long after a departure hence, that we may enjoy him freely and fully, and be eternally happy in him? Oh! be not only content, but even covetous.

But what! shall the soul break the cage, that she may take her flight? God forbid! how can he pretend to be a lover of God, who is not formed into his will, subject to his ordination, content to abide in the station that he hath allotted him? But if we may not break it to escape, yet, methinks, it may be safe enough, with submission, to wish it were broken: if we may not, with Saul, dissolve ourselves, yet, with Paul, we may desire to be dissolved. The perfection that the most Christians attain to, is but to desire to live, and be content to die. Oh! consider what I have said in this matter, and invert the order of those words in your hearts, "Be content to live—desire to die."

But what! would you have us pray for death? Answer: I speak not of a formal praying either for one or other. What the apostle speaks of the greatest of sins, I am ready to say of this state of freedom from all sin,—"I do not say that ye should pray for it." You will tell me, that David and Hezekiah prayed for life, and I can tell you that Elijah prayed for death: he was indeed a man subject to passions, but I believe this was none of them.

But I will not inveigle myself in any controversy: methinks the sad consideration laid before your eyes, Whilst we are in the body, we are absent, distant from the Lord, should wring out an "O wretched man that I am!" &c. or an "I desire to be dissolved;" or if not words, yet at least a groan after immortality, with our apostle here—"We groan within ourselves, that mortality may be swallowed up of life."

But can a soul possibly long for the destruction of the body? Philosophy indeed tells us that it cannot. Be it so; yet I am sure divinity teaches, that a soul may long after the redemption of the body, the redemption of it from this kind of animal, corruptible, ensnaring condition that it is now in—"We groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our body." If we cannot wish to be unclothed, yet we may long to be clothed upon, verse 4th of this chapter; at least, methinks, the heathen should not outdo us, who could say, "I am unwilling to die, but I care not when I am dead." But will all cry, Oh! if we were sure of an interest in Christ, of pardon of sin, of truth, of grace, of eternal life, then we could freely leave all.

Ans. 1. That is, you would live to be more holy before you die: you are not yet holy enough, no, nor ever shall be till you die. If you long after holiness, long to be with God, for that is a state of perfect holiness. To desire to live, upon pretence of being more holy, is a mere fallacy, a contradiction. But it may be, this is not the meaning of the objection: therefore,

2. A not having of what we would have, is not

an excuse for not doing what we should do. It is our duty to rejoice in the Lord, which our not having of assurance doth not exempt us from: though, if we have assurance, we might indeed rejoice the more. But, to take off this plea at once,

3. Our earnest longings after a full and perfect enjoyment of God, and so our breathings after an immortal state, do not depend upon our assurance, but indeed assurance rather depends upon that. I doubt we are commonly mistaken in the nature of assurance, and, it may be, are in a wrong manner curious about the signs of Christ's appearing in our souls; for certainly a well-grounded assurance of the love of God, doth most discover and unfold itself in the growth of true godliness in the soul. Now, the love of God, and an earnest desire to be like unto him, and to be with him, is the better half of all religion; so that it rather seems that assurance springs up from this frame of soul, than that this arises out of assurance. If assurance be the thing that you desire, get your souls joined to God in a union of affections, will, and ends; and then labour and long to be closer to him, liker to him, perfectly holy and happy in him, and be assured that Christ is in you of a truth: for these mighty works which he hath wrought, these divine breathings, these holy pantings after him, do bear witness of him.

4. Whether ever you come to that feeling knowledge, that powerful sense, of your state, or not, which you call assurance, yet know that it is your duty to long after immortality. We are wont to call assurance the privilege of some few; but the Scripture makes this temper that I am speaking of, the

duty of all believers; which I do the rather name, because I find few professors of this temper, and indeed but few that are willing to believe that they ought to be. Our Saviour calls all believers to as much in effect as I do—"Look up, and lift up your heads, for the day of your redemption draweth nigh:" whereby is not meant a bare posture and speculation, but joy and longing are required by that phrase. Consider further, (which, methinks, should strike cold to the hearts of cold-hearted professors,) that this very temper is made one of the greatest characters of true and sincere saints: I do not know of any one oftener named—"We groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our body"—"The Lord shall give the crown to them that love his appearing." We should live godly in this present world, "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ"—"What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hastening to the coming of the day of God?"—"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Do all these plain and pathetical scriptures stand for ciphers in your eye? methinks they should not. But not to stand upon the proof of it to be a duty, it matters not whether there be an express command for it or not: this that I am speaking of is not so much the duty of godly persons, as the very nature, genius, and spirit indeed of godliness itself. Methinks a godly soul, that is truly touched with divine goodness, influenced by it, and impressed with it, as the needle is with the loadstone,

must needs strive powerfully within itself to be in conjunction with it: a holy soul, that, after all its wearisome defeats, and shameful disappointments in the creature, finds itself perfectly matched with this infinite, full, and perfect object, must certainly and necessarily be carried, without any other argument, with fervent longings after union to it, and communion with it. The spouse might say concerning Christ, as he concerning her, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib:" and every godly soul may, in some degree, say with that spouse, "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him: I rose up," &c. Tell me, friends, how can divine grace, that well of living water in the soul, choose but spring up into eternal life? I hesitate not to affirm, that that which is of God in the soul must needs carry the soul after God: as it belongs to heaven, so it will be longing towards heaven. That which is of a divine original, must needs have a divine tendency; that which is of divine extraction, will have in it a divine attraction, and pursue a divine perfection. That divine life and spirit that runs through godly souls, doth awaken and exalt, in some measure, all the powers of them into an active and cheerful sympathy with that absolute Good that renders them completely blessed. Holiness and purity of heart will be attracting God more and more to itself; and the more pure our souls are, and the more separate from earthly things, the more earnestly will they endeavour the nearest union that may be with God; and so, by consequence, methinks they must needs, in some sense, desire the removal of that ani-

mal life and dark body that stands in their way; for they know, that that which now letteth will let, (such is the unchangeable nature of it,) till it be laid in the dust, till it be taken out of the way. The thirsty king did but cry for water of the well of Bethlehem, and his champions broke through the host of the Philistines, and fetched it; and will ye not allow the thirsty soul, if not to break through to fetch it, yet at least to break out into an "Oh, that one would give me to drink" of the living water, of the fountain of grace, and peace, and love? Will you allow hunger to break down stone walls? and will ye neither allow the hungry soul to break down these mud walls, nor to wish within itself that they were broken down? In a word, then, give me leave earnestly to exhort you to an earnest pressing after perfect fruition of, and eternal converse with God; and, to change the apostle's words, Seeing we are compassed about with so great a divine light, and glory, and brightness, let us be willing and desirous to lay aside this weight of flesh, and this body, that so easily resists us with sins and snares, and run with eagerness to the object that is set before us. "Draw me, we will run after thee." Amen, amen.

THE

ANGELICAL LIFE.

MATTH. xxii. 30.

Are as the angels of God in heaven.

THE doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the great things of the Christian religion, as they were accounted strange things by all the world when they were first published and preached, so indeed by none less entertained, or rather more opposed, than by the wisest of men living in that age, namely, Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, who were the "disputers of this world," as the apostle's phrase is: a thing of wonderful observation, not only to us in our day, but even to our blessed Lord himself in the days of his flesh, who fetches the cause of it from heaven, and adores the infinite wisdom of God in it—"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Amongst other set disputations that the Sadducees held with our Saviour, the one in this chapter is very famous; where they dispute against the resurrection of the dead, by an absurd argument, grounded upon an instance of a woman that had been married to seven

husbands successively. Now, say they, if there be a resurrection, whose wife shall she be then? Our Saviour answers, by destroying the ground of their argument, and showing that they disputed upon a false supposition; for, saith he, "In the resurrection there shall be no marrying; but men shall be as the angels of God." In which words this doctrine is plainly laid down, (for I shall not meddle with the controversy,)

That *the glorified saints shall be as the angels of God in heaven.* The other evangelists lay down the same truth, see Mark xii. 25. Luke xx. 36. In the explication of which point I will show,

I. Negatively, wherein the saints shall not be like the angels.

II. Affirmatively, wherein they shall be like unto them, or, as St. Luke hath it, equal to them.

I. Negatively.

1. The glorified saints shall not be like the angels in essence. The angelical essence, and the rational soul, are and shall be different. Souls shall remain souls still, keep their own essence; the essence shall not be changed; souls shall not be changed into angelical essences.

2. They shall not be wholly spirits without bodies, as the angels. The spirits of just men now made perfect, are more like to the angels in this sense than they shall be after the resurrection; for now they are spirits without bodies: but the saints shall have bodies, not such as now, corruptible, not in any thing defective, not needing creature-supplies, but incorruptible; glorious bodies, in some sense spiritual bodies; which are described by three characters—incorrup-

tible, (somewhat more than immortal,) glorious, powerful. Neither doth their having bodies any whit abate their perfection or glory, nor render them inferior to the angels, for even the glorious Redeemer of the world hath a body, who is yet superior to the angels; and he shall change the vile bodies of the saints, and make them like unto his glorious body.

3. Neither have we any ground to believe that the saints shall be altogether equal to the angels in dignity and glory; but rather, that as man was at first made a little lower than the angels, so that he shall never come to be exalted altogether so high as they; for it seems that the natural capacity of an angel is greater than of a man, and so shall continue, for they are a distinct kind of creatures. As a beast cannot become so wise and intelligent as a man, for then he would cease to be a beast, so neither can a man become so large and capable as an angel, for then he would cease to be a man.

II. Affirmatively.

The glorified saints shall be like the angels of God in heaven—First, in their qualities; that is,

1. In being pure and holy. Whether they shall be equal to them in positive holiness or not, I know not; whether they shall understand, and know, and love God, in all degrees, as much as the angels—it seems rather that they shall not; because, as I said before, their capacity shall not be so large. But if in this they be not altogether equal to the angels, yet it implies no imperfection; for they shall be positively holy, as far as their nature is capable, and so shall be perfect in their kind—"The spirits of just

men made perfect:" they shall in this be like unto the angels, if not equal to them, yea, like unto God himself in it—"Be ye holy, as I am holy." But as to negative holiness, the saints shall be even equal to the angels of God in heaven; that is, they shall have no more sin, no more corruption than they have: they shall be as perfectly freed from all iniquities, imperfections, and infirmities, as the angels. What can be cleaner than that which hath no uncleanness at all in it? Why, so clean shall all the saints be—"No unclean thing shall enter into heaven." They shall be without all kind of spot or blemish, which is a perfect negative holiness: more cannot be said of the angels in this respect. As branches of this:

2. As the holy angels do reverence the divine Majesty—they cover their faces with their wings, crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts," so shall the glorified saints. You may see what sweet harmony they make, consenting together to give the glory of all to God. The saints stood and cried, "Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb;" the angels stood round about, saying, "Amen, amen."

3. In their readiness to do the will of God, and "execute his commands;" therefore the angels are described to have wings—"with twain they did fly." How God shall please to employ angels or saints in the world to come, is not for us to inquire: but they shall be alike ready to do his will, and serve his pleasure, whatever it shall be. Even whilst the saints are imperfect on earth, they can cry, "Here am I, send me:" how much more ready shall they be then, when all their fetters are knocked off?

4. They shall be as the angels in their cheerful and unwearied execution of the will of God. So the angels are, and so shall the saints be. The spirit shall then be more willing, and the flesh shall be no more weak, as it is now; for when it is raised again, it shall be in power. More things of this nature might be added, but I pass lightly over them; because, although they be true, yet they are not principally looked at in this text: therefore I come to the second thing, wherein the glorified saints shall be like unto the angels, and that is,

In their way of living. They shall be like the angels; that is, saith one truly, ἰσαγγέλως βιοῦντες, living like the angels. How is that? our Saviour tells us, "Neither marrying, nor being given in marriage:" it is added presently in Luke xx. 36. "For neither can they die any more." If there be no dying, there will be no need of propagation; if no need of propagation, then why should they marry? The angels are single, and know no other conjunction but with God in a spiritual manner: no more shall the saints. But what great matter is that, to be like the angels? what perfection is that? Many saints, yea, and sinners too upon earth, are so like the angels, nay, and the devils too. Therefore you must know, that our Saviour, under this phrase of "not marrying," doth comprehend all manner of creature-converse, all kind of living upon and delighting in the creature, by a synecdoche of the part, as is ordinary in Scripture: "I have not given upon usury," saith the prophet, "yet the people curse me;" that is, I have had no dealing in the world, no negotiation. By one kind he understands the whole.

Ezek. xxv. 4. where, by eating their fruits, and drinking their milk, is understood the possession of all that was theirs; and in many other places the Spirit of God uses this tropical way of speaking.

The angels of God neither marry, nor are given in marriage; that is, they live not upon any created good, delight not in any created comfort, but live entirely upon God, converse with him, are everlastingly beholding his glory, and delighting themselves in him. Thus shall the glorified saints live for ever; their bodies shall not need nor use created supplies, food, physic, raiment, &c. which things in this animal state they stand in need of, Matth. vi. 32. But that is not all: for their souls shall not any longer desire nor hanker after any created thing, but, as the angels, shall be possessed of God, filled with the fulness of God: all their powers and faculties are perfectly refined and spiritualized, abstracted from all created things, eternally rejoicing and delighting themselves in the contemplation and participation of the supreme and infinite Good: for during this earthly and imperfect state, not only the bodies of good men feed upon and are sustained by the creatures, in common with other men, but even their souls do taste too much of worldly contentments, and drink too deep of earthly pleasures and creature-comforts: even the most refined souls upon earth, though they do not properly feed upon any thing below God, yet do oft dip the end of their rod in this honey that lies upon the earth, (with Jonathan,) do use their earthly enjoyments, and delight in them, in a way too unspiritual, having abstracted them from God, and loving them with a distinct love. But in the resur-

rection it shall not be so; for the holy soul shall be perfectly conformed to the holy God, shall feed upon him singly, live upon him entirely, be wrapt up in him wholly, and be satisfied with him solely and everlastingly, and so shall they be equal to the angels. The creature, although it does not fill any truly sanctified soul upon earth, yet it hath some room there; but then it shall be perfectly cast out, and the soul shall be filled with all the fulness of God. The creature is now much in some godly souls, and something in all of them; but then it shall be nothing at all to them, or in them, but God shall be all in all, all things in all of them; as the way of the saints living, and their glorified state is described—"That God may be all in all." "They shall inherit all things." But how is that? Why, see the explication of it in the following words: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God." God will be their God; God shall be unto them instead of all things. In that state there shall be no need of sun or moon: by which excellent and useful creatures the whole creation seems to be understood; for they that shall live above the sun and moon, shall certainly live above all things that are below these: but how then? Why, it follows, "The glory of God shall enlighten them, and the Lamb shall be their light." "And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord giveth them light." All happiness is derived into them from God, and therefore there shall be no night, no want of any creature-comfort to them; neither shall they desire any thing more of the creature, whether small or great, whether

candle or sun. For explication of this their blessed life, let me allude to that of our Saviour, "The fowls of heaven neither sow nor reap, yet God feedeth them:" so the saints in heaven neither want nor desire any created good, for they feed upon God, the supreme and infinite Good: and again, "The lilies neither toil nor spin, and yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." These blessed souls have no respect at all to things terrene and created; yet they are so filled and adorned with the glory of the infinite Majesty, that Solomon in all his glory was nothing in comparison of them. In a word, the state of the glorified saints and angels is set out by our Saviour in the same manner, by one and the same description, and that is, the seeing of God: the life of angels is called a continual beholding of the face of God; and the state of the saints' glory and happiness is also a seeing of God—"They shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads." Now this phrase, the seeing of God, applied both to the saints and angels, doth place their happiness in God alone, excluding the creature; and it doth import the fulness, and clearness, and certainty of their bliss.

Thus I have showed you in what sense, though I am not able to show you in what degree, the glorified saints shall be like the angels of God in heaven: their way of living upon the blessed God alone, shall be the same with that of the holy angels.

Application.—From the discovery of the future state of the saints, I find myself filled with indignation.

1. Reproof against the carnal conceits that many Christians have of heaven. Christians do I call them? nay, herein they seem rather Mahometans, who place heaven in the full and lasting enjoyment of all creature-comforts; nay, indeed of sinful and abominable pleasures, as one may read in their Koran. It may be, few Christians are altogether so sensual; but, sure I am, the far greater sort of Christians, so called, are very gross and carnal, at least very low in their conceits of the state of future happiness. Heaven is a word as little understood as holiness, and that I am sure is the greatest mystery in the world. It would be tedious to run through the various apprehensions of men in this matter, and indeed impossible to know them. The common sort of people understand by heaven, either just nothing but a glorious name, or, at best, but a freeness from bodily torment: as nothing of hell affects them but that dreadful word *fire*, so nothing of heaven but the comfortable word *rest*, or *safety*. Others, it may be, think there is something positive in heaven, and they dream of an honourable, easy, pleasant life; free from such kind of toils, labours, pains, persecutions, reproaches, and penuries, which men are subject to in this life: this is a true notion, but much below the nature of that happy state. Others are yet more highly affected with the words of glory and glorious, and seem to be much ravished with them; but are like men in a maze or wonderment, who admire something that they understand not, and are altogether confounded in their own apprehensions of it; as if a man should be mightily taken with such a fine name as Arabia the Happy, and by a blind fervour of mind

should desire to go and visit it. Others rise yet higher in their apprehensions of heaven, and look upon it as a holy state; but that holiness is negative, a perfect freedom from sin, and all temptation to it: and indeed this is a precious consideration, and that wherein many a weary soul finds much rest: but yet this amounts not to the life of angels; it is a lower consideration of heaven than what our Saviour here presents us with. The state of the glorified saints shall not only be a state of freedom from temporal pains or eternal pains, or a freedom from spiritual pains and imperfections, but a state of perfect positive holiness, pure light, ardent love, spiritual liberty, holy delights; when all created good shall perfectly vanish, all created love shall be swallowed up, the soul shall become of a most God-like disposition, shining forth in the glory that he shall put upon it, glorying in nothing but the blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in his divine image and perfections, and wrapt up entirely into his infinite fulness to all eternity; which hath made me ofttimes to nauseate, and indeed to blame, the poor low descriptions of the kingdom of heaven which I have found in books and sermons, for too dry, yea, and gross: which do describe heaven principally as a place, and give it such circumstances of beauty, firmness, security, light, and splendour, pleasant society, good neighbourhood, as they think will most commend an earthly habitation. True, indeed, the Holy Ghost in Scripture is pleased to condescend so far to our weak capacities, as to describe that glorious state to us by such things as we do best understand, and are apt to be most taken with, and do most gratify our

senses in this world; as a kingdom, paradise, a glorious city, a crown, an inheritance; but yet it is not the will of God that his enlightened people should rest in such low notions of eternal life; for in other places, God speaks of the state of glory according to the nature and excellency of it, and not according to the weakness of our understanding, and describes it at another rate, calling it the life of angels; as, the beholding of God—a coming unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ—God's being all things in us,—it is called a knowing of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ. In a word, which is as high as can be spoken, higher indeed than can be perfectly understood, it is called a being like unto God: "We shall be like unto him." But this use is not so much for reproof, as it is for information.

2. Here is matter of reproof, yea, and of just indignation against the gross, low, sensual, earthly life of professors, who yet hope to be the children of the resurrection, and to be as angels of God in heaven. What! hope to be like them then, and yet altogether unlike them now? I speak not in a passion, but out of a just indignation that I have conceived against myself, and against the generality even of saints themselves. I am not going to speak of covetousness, commonly so called: there is a sin much like to it, which is not indeed a single sin, but an evil and unseemly temper, which is earthly-mindedness, or minding of earthly things; or if you will, because I would not be misunderstood, a living upon the creature, or a loving of the creature, with a distinct love. Oh! the insensible secrecy, and insuperable power, of this creature-love! I cannot sufficiently

exclaim against it. Why do we spend noble affections upon such low and empty nothings? Are we called with such a high calling, think you, that our conversation should be so low? Is the fulness of the fountain yours, and do ye yet delight to sit down by, and bathe yourselves in, the shallow streams? Is your life hid with Christ in God? why then do you converse as if your life were bound up in the creature? Have you laid up your treasure in the blessed God? what do your hearts then so far from it? Is your happiness in heaven? why then is not your conversation there too? Do ye count it your bliss to see God? what then mean those fond glances that ye cast upon created comforts, and that impure love which you bestow on things below? I mean not only the "bleatings of the sheep, and the lowings of the oxen;" I speak not of the grosser sort of earthly-mindedness, sensuality, or covetousness, but of that more refined and hidden creature-love, a loving of friends, relations, health, liberty, life, and that not in God, but with a love distinct from that love wherewith we love God. To love all these in God, and for his sake, and as flowing from him, and partaking of him, and with the same love wherewith we love God himself, is allowed us: but to love them with a particular love, as things distinct from God; to delight in them merely as creatures, and to follow them as if some good, or happiness, or pleasure, were to be found in them, distinct from what is in God.—this is a branch of spiritual adultery, I had almost said idolatry. To taste a sweetness in the creature, and to see a beauty and goodness in it, is our duty: but then it must be the sweetness of God in it, and

the goodness of God which we ought alone to taste and see in it. As we say, "The wife shines with the rays of her husband," so more truly, every creature shines but by a borrowed light, and commends unto us the goodness, and sweetness, and fulness of the blessed Creator. You have heard that the glorified souls shall live upon God alone, entirely, wholly, eternally; and should not the less glorious souls, I mean gracious souls, do so too, in some degree? yea, even we who are upon earth, and do yet use creatures, should behold all the scattered beams of goodness, sweetness, perfection, that are in these creatures, all united and gathered up in God, and so feeding upon them only in God, and upon God, in all of them. It is the character of wicked and godless men, that they set up and drive a trade for themselves; live in a way distinct from God, as though they had no dependence upon him: they love the world with a predominant love; they enjoy creature-comforts in a gross, unspiritual manner; they dwell upon the dark side of their mercies, they treasure up riches, not only in their chests, but in their hearts; they feed upon the creature, not only with their bodies, but their very souls do feed upon them; and thus, in a word, they "live without God in the world." All this is no wonder; for that which is of the earth, must needs be earthly; but is it not a monstrous thing, that a heavenly soul should feed upon earthly trash? I speak without any hyperbole: the famous king of Babylon, forsaking the society of men, and herding himself with the beasts of the earth, and eating grass with the oxen, was not so absurd a thing, nor half so monstrous or

unseemly, as the children of the Most High God forsaking the true bread of souls, and feeding upon the low fare of carnal men, even created sweetness, worldly goods: nay, a glorious star falling from its own sphere, and choking itself in the dust, would not be such an eminent piece of baseness; for what is said of the true God in one sense, is true of the truly godly in this sense—"He that cometh from heaven is above all;" that is, above all things that are below God himself.

3. Shall this life of angels be also the life of saints? This may then serve as a powerful consideration to mortify in us the love of this animal life, to make us weary of this low kind of living, and quicken us to long after so blessed a change. Well might the apostle say indeed, that to die was gain; for is not this gain, to exchange an animal for an angelical life? a life which is in some sense common to the very beasts with us, for that which in some sense may be called the life of God? For as the blessed and holy God lives upon his own infinite and self-sufficient fulness, without being beholden to any thing without himself, so shall the saints live upon him, and upon the self-same infinite fulness, and shall not need any creature-contributions. The apostle indeed saith, that "the last enemy to be destroyed is death," which is true of enemies without us; and it is true with respect to Christ, who shall make a general resurrection from the dead, for that is the proper meaning of it: but it is true also, that the last enemy to be overcome within us, is the love of life; therefore it is said, that a man will part with any thing to keep his life; and

we do generally excuse the matter, and cry, Oh! life is sweet, life is precious. It must be confessed, and it may be granted—I believe that there is an inclination of the soul to the body, arising from that dear and inconceivable union that God himself hath made of them, which is purely natural, (some say altogether necessary for the maintaining of man in this complex state,) and not in itself sinful. Possibly there may not be found a man upon earth so holy and mortified, in whom this is not found; certainly it is the last hinderance to be removed out of the way of our perfect happiness. This, although in itself natural, yea, necessary, and without blame, yet in the inordinateness of it, ordinarily, if not constantly, becomes sinful. I count him the most perfect man in the world, who loves not his own life with an inordinate sinful love, who loves it only in God, and not with a creature-love distinct from God. There are two ways whereby this natural and lawful love of life becomes sinful; immoderateness and inordinateness. Immoderateness is, when men love their lives at that rate, that they are filled with unreasonable and distracting fears, cares, and thoughts about them, when the whole business of life is almost nothing else but a studiousness to preserve the being of life. Inordinateness is, when men, though they do not love their lives at that excessive rate, yet do love life as a creature-good, not in God, nor in order to him, but love it for itself, as something out of God. Every carnal man in the world is guilty of the latter, and I doubt but few saints are altogether free from the guilt of it. Now, that this immoderate love of life ought to be sub-

dued in Christians, all men almost will grant: if any will not grant it, we can easily prove it from the command of God—" Take no thought for your life "—" Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Both which words, in the most favourable interpretation that can be given of them, do, in the judgment of all, forbid immoderation; nay, a mere philosopher would enforce this from mere moral considerations, which I cannot now stand upon. But this inordinate love of life, as it is a more secret evil, a more refined corruption, is harder to be discovered, and men are loath to be convinced of the evil of it. Now, this particular distinct loving of life, not as in God, but in itself, as a creature-good, is clearly condemned in that first and great commandment—" Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind;" as if he should say, God, the supreme, infinite, perfect, original, essential, self-sufficient Good, is to be loved in the highest, and purest, and strongest manner, that the heart of men is capable to love; and all other things only in him, and under him, and as being of him, and for his sake. Let it be allowed that life is good, yet it must be added, that it is but a created good; let it be allowed that life is comfortable, yet it must be acknowledged that man's chiefest comfort and happiness doth not stand in this animal life. So then, life itself is to be loved in God, who is the fountain and spring of life; it is to be loved in the quality of a created good, and no otherwise. Now, created goods are to be loved only in the Creator, as coming from him, as partaking of him, as leading to him. Argue the case a little

thus: The soul of man is allowed to love its body, with which the great God hath united it, and to love union with this body, which union we call *life;* but this body being a creature, and a creature much inferior to itself, and much more ignoble than itself, cannot in reason be judged to be the fit and adequate object of its strongest and best affections: that must needs be something more excellent than itself; and that cannot be any thing in this world, (for this world hath nothing so noble, so excellent in it as the soul of man,) it must indeed be the Creator himself. Well, seeing God is the supreme, self-sufficient, perfect Good, he is to be loved with all the strength and powers of the soul, singly and entirely: and the will of God being God himself, is not only to be submitted to, or rested in, but to be chosen and loved above all created things, yea, even above life itself, the best of creatures. So then, if it be the will of God to call for our lives, we ought readily to give them up; because we ought to love the will of God much more than our lives. I pray you be impressed with this, that the will of God being pure, holy, and perfect, should not only be submitted to, or rested in, but even loved and chosen above all creatures. Now, the will of God is not that only whereby he teaches men, and prescribes laws to them, but that whereby he rules and governs the world, and disposes of men in any condition of life, or takes away their lives from them. The eternal Fountain of goodness can send forth nothing but what is perfectly good; and that which is perfectly good ought to be loved with a universal, pure, and, as far as possible, perfect love. This you will say, perhaps, is

a high and a hard saying; but let it not seem impossible for a man to love his own life only in God, and in subordination to him; for this God requires, and he requires not things impossible—"If any man come after me, and hate not his own life, he cannot be my disciple;" that is, not simply hate it, but in comparison of me and my will. It is not then impossible, nay, you see it is a necessary duty, without which we cannot be Christ's disciples. The saints of old found it possible. Holy Paul gives this answer readily—"I am ready to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus;" and "I count not my life dear unto me, so that I might finish my course with joy." It is witnessed of the whole army of the saints, "that they loved not their lives unto the death:" that is, they did not value them in respect of God and his truth. Neither let any one flatter himself, and say, Yea, if I were called to die for God, I would rather do it than deny him; for the will of God is as much to be eyed in his sending for us by a natural death as by martyrdom; and a not giving up our lives to him at any time, is as truly to deny him and his will, as not to give them up at the stake, when we are called to it. Besides, how shall we imagine, that he that is unwilling to die in his bed, should be willing to die at a stake? Now, this duty of being mortified to the love of this animal life being so difficult, yet so necessary, and so noble, how doth it become every saint to study to attain to this perfection! which that we may, let us press upon ourselves this consideration, this doctrine. that the glorified saints shall live as the angels of God in heaven. We know that if this body were

broken down, this low life cut off, we should live like angels, not being beholden any more to poor creatures for help or comfort, but should be filled with the fulness of God, filled with his image and glory, and live upon him entirely for evermore. Yea, I may add, that this very living above our own lives, merely at the will of God, is a participation of the angelical life even in this world; therefore labour to be mortified to that love of this life which is here upon earth; yea, to be weary of it, yea, almost ashamed of it.

4. Shall we thus live the lives of the angels, subsisting in God, feasting upon him, filled with him to all eternity? This may moderate our sorrow which we conceive for the loss of any created good, houses, lands, husband, wife, children; yet a little while and we shall not miss them, shall not need them, shall not desire them any more. The blessed angels live a glorious life, and they have none of these, but are perfectly satisfied in the enjoyment of God alone: they have no wives nor children, yet they want none; and yet a little while, and we shall have none either, neither shall we want them, having all things in the God of all things: they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are in conjunction with the Father, with Love, and Goodness, and Truth itself, and so they have no want of any thing. If you have no candles left in the house, yet it is towards day-break, and the sun will rise upon you, and you shall need none, and yet have light enough too. In a word, learn to live independent of them whilst you have them, and you will be the better able to live without them when they are removed.

5. I come now to the fifth and last use that I shall make of this doctrine; and O that you and I may make this happy use of it! Shall the saints be as the angels of God in their way of living upon God, and enjoying all happiness in him alone for ever? shall this certainly be our life in heaven? O! then, labour to begin this life upon earth. If you cannot perfectly transcribe, yet at least imitate, that angelical kind of life. Though you are here imprisoned in a body of earth, and oft cumbered and clogged with bodily infirmities, and called to tend upon bodily necessities, yet, as far as this animal state will permit, live upon God. Do not excuse nor vindicate that low kind of earthly life, do not justify your living below and besides God, but stir up yourselves to behold where your happiness lies, and live not willingly below it. Certainly a godly soul hath more than bare hope in this world: God, the blessed, infinite, and communicative Good, hath not locked himself so far out of sight, but that he gives his people a comfortable beholding of him even whilst they are in their pilgrimage: and what Solomon saith of the life of the godly, he means it of their present life. "The way of life is above to the wise:" their living not only shall be, but is now above; it is a high way of living. They are certainly a puny sort of mechanical Christians, that think and talk only of a heaven to come, and dream of a happiness without them, and distinct from them. The truly godly and godlike soul cannot so content himself; but, being spirited and principled from above, is carried out after the infinite and almighty Good, as a thing is carried towards its centre; and

hastens into his embraces as the iron hastens to the loadstone, and longs to be in conjunction with it. If therefore ye be from heaven, live above all earthly things: "If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above." If ye be born of God, live upon God. Deny self, live beside self; that is, live not to your lusts, live not to the service of your senses, to the lust of the flesh, to the lust of the eye, to the pride of life; let not your souls be servants to your sins, no, nor to your senses; that were for servants to ride on horseback, and princes to walk on foot. Live above self, that is, let your souls quit all their own interest in themselves, and entirely resign themselves to God, as to all points of duty and service. But that is not all; neither is that it which I urge you to from these words: but live above the creature and whatsoever is in it, namely, delighting in God, conversing and communing with him alone as the chiefest Good: desire not any creature any further than as it may help you forward to the Creator; neither delight in it any further than as it either represents some of the divine perfections, witnesses something of divine love, or leads to some divine participation or communion. Seeing we shall come to live upon God, and delight in God alone, without any creature, let us now live upon, love God alone in every creature. Now, to give you a more distinct knowledge of this high and noble life, I will explain it in some particulars, negatively and affirmatively.

I. Negatively.

1. "Live not upon self." I speak not of living unto self, but live not upon self, self-excellencies, self-sufficiencies, any created accomplishments, which

was the life of the Stoics, those great philosophers, who placed happiness in the enjoyment of themselves, which they called "independence of all things." To enjoy one's self indeed is a high duty, a noble privilege, a duty of the gospel: "Possess ye your souls." But how must we enjoy ourselves? why, only in God. He enjoys himself,

(1.) Not who, in a sullen melancholy, retires to a solitary and monastic life, as many of the sourer sort of Papists do.

(2.) Nor he who in a proud mood disdains the perfections of God shining forth in other men; and hiding himself from them through envy, contents himself to sit and admire his own personal accomplishments, as many humorists do.

(3.) Nor he who, finding nothing without him, nor knowing nothing above him, to give his soul her full rest, settles upon a foundation of his own, and admires a self-sufficiency in the temper of his own spirit, a little subdued by philosophical precepts, as the Stoics did——

But he who enjoys himself in God; that is, who doth not view himself in the narrow point of his own being, but, taking a view of himself in the unbounded essence of God, loves, and enjoys, and values himself, and all his personal excellencies, as he is in God, and partakes of his perfections. To live in a way of self-converse is below the end of man's creation, who was made for a higher good; and hereby a man shall never obtain true happiness, for it is peculiar to God alone to be happy in himself. "In a word, a soul that confines itself to itself, and lives, and moves, and rejoices, only within the narrow cell of its own parti-

cular being, deprives itself of that almighty and original Goodness and Glory, that fills the world, and shines through the whole creation."

2. "Live not upon any creature without yourselves." Self indeed is a creature; but yet for clearness in proceeding we shall distinguish them. Now, this is the life of the greatest sort of men,—they live beside God, and move only within the sphere of the creature. You will easily understand that I speak not of the bodies living upon the creature, for so God hath appointed that it shall live; and yet, as to this too, I say with our Saviour, "Man liveth not by bread alone;"—but I speak of the soul of man living upon the creature as its highest good, and feeding upon it as its best fare: they rise up early, and sit up late, and God is not in their thoughts: they are filled with domestic and foreign comforts, but behold not the Father of lights from whom all these descend: they live upon the good things of the world, yet live without God in the world. Now by these men,

(1.) I do not mean those heathens that in the most idolatrous manner do, in the literal sense, set up the creatures for God.

(2.) Nor those Christians that in a most gross manner do make idols of the creatures, and place their happiness in them.

(3.) No, nor only those earthly professors, who follow the world too eagerly, and have such a deep and rooted respect for it, that they can be ordinarily content to suffer creature-employments to justle God and duties out of their hearts and houses; whose worldliness is apparently too hard for their religion. Who then? Shall we come any nearer? Yes:

(4.) Those are guilty of creature-converse who do not enjoy all creatures in God; who love any thing in any creature with a distinct love, who do not love it only in God; who love silver, gold, houses, lands, trading, friends, with a particular, overweening love. O take heed of this creature-love, of valuing any created thing any otherwise than in God, any otherwise than as being from God, partaking of him, and leading to him!

3. "Live not upon ordinances." These are God's institutions; love them, cleave unto them, attend upon them, let no temptation cause you to leave them; but live not upon them, place not your religion, place not your hope, your happiness in them, but love them only in God; attend upon them, yet not so much upon them, as upon God in them; lie by the pool, but wait for the angel; love not, no, not a divine ordinance for its own sake. Why, who doth so? Alas! who almost doth not?

(1.) Thus did they in Ezek. xxxiii. 32. who delighted in the prophet's eloquence, and in the rhetoric of his sermons, as much as in a well-tuned voice and harmonious music: and so do thousands in England, who read the Bible for the style or the story's sake, and love to sit under learned and elegant discourses, more for accomplishment than for conversion: and swarms of priests, who preach themselves more than Christ Jesus, even in his own ordinances; as a proud boy rides a horse into the market, to set forth himself more than his master's goods.

(2.) But there are many not so gross as these, who do yet use ordinances in a way very gross and unspiritual, placing their devotion in them, and sink-

ing their religion into a settled course of hearing or praying; who will wait upon God, as they call it, at some set and solemn times, new moons, and sabbaths, it may be evening and morning; but religion must not be too busy with them, nor intermeddle in their ordinary affairs, or worldly employments; it hath no place there; they do not count it a garment for every day's wear.

(3.) And not only these, but even almost all men are too apt to seek rest in duties and ordinances, or, at least, to be pretty well satisfied with the work done, whether they have conversed with God there or not. O, if you love your souls, seek your happiness higher! Conversing with divine ordinances, I confess, is honourable and amiable, but it is too low a life for an immortal soul.

II. Affirmatively.

Let nothing satisfy you but God himself; take up with no pleasure, no treasure, no portion, no paradise, nay, no heaven, no happiness, below the infinite, supreme, and self-sufficient Good. Let your eye be upon him, and his all-filling fulness; let your desire be unto him, and to the remembrance of his name: follow hard after to know the Lord, and to enjoy the Father through his Son Jesus Christ; let your fellowship be with the Father, and with the Son, by the Spirit. "O love the Lord, all ye his saints,—love him with all your soul, and with all your strength;" yea, and keep yourselves always in the love of God; persevere and increase in the love of God—"Keep yourselves in the love of God." O sweet duty! O amiable, pleasant task! O sweet and grateful command! Away ye crowd of creatures,

I must keep my heart for my God: away, ye gaudy suitors, away, ye glittering toys, there is no room for you; my whole soul, if its capacity were ten thousand times larger than it is, were too scant to entertain the supreme Good, to let in infinite goodness and fulness. O charge it upon yourselves with the greatest vehemence!—Love the Lord, O my soul, keep thyself in the love of God; let the love of God constrain you, and keep yourselves under the most powerful constraints of it. In a word, live upon God as upon uncreated life itself, drink at the fountain, feed upon infinite fulness, depend upon almighty power, refer yourselves to unsearchable wisdom, and unbounded love; see nothing but God in the creature, taste nothing but God in the world, delight yourselves in him, long for communion with him, and communications from him, to receive of his fulness grace for grace. Then do we live most like angels, when we live most purely in God, and find all the powers of our souls spending themselves upon him, and ourselves, our life, and all the comforts of it, flowing from him, and again swallowed up in him. But because we are yet in the body, I shall explain it in these following particulars:—

1. "Converse with God in all your self-excellencies." I bade you before not converse with these; now, I say, converse with God in these. Thus do the angels; they know nothing that they have of their own, they enjoy nothing distinct from God; they are excellent creatures, excellent in knowledge, power, holiness, &c. yet they enjoy all their excellencies in God, and ascribe them all to him,—and so let us labour to do.

(1.) View yourselves, not in your own particular beings, but in the essence of God; look upon yourselves as being and subsisting in the midst of an infinite Essence, in which the whole creation is, as it were, wrapt up, and doth subsist.

(2.) And whatever excellency you find in your souls or bodies, look not upon it as your own; maintain not a mine and thine, a distinction of interests between God and yourselves, but look upon all as God's, and enjoy it in him.

(3.) When you find yourselves tempted to cast a fond and unchaste look upon the beauty, strength, activity, or temper of your own bodies, upon the ingenuity, wisdom, constancy, courage, composedness of your own souls, take heed of settling into a selfish admiration of any of them, but enjoy them in God, and say, This, O my body, this, O my soul, is no other than the portraiture of the blessed God; these created excellencies are broken beams of the infinite, unspotted, uncreated perfections. Having once attained to this, we shall no longer covet to be admired, desire to be commended, fret at being undervalued; I mean, not in a selfish manner, but rather break out in a spiritual passion with the Psalmist: "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

(4.) Nay, let me add, when you find yourselves ready to put your own stamp upon God's best coin, to look upon supernatural gifts and graces with a sinful, selfish admiration, remember that you have them only in Christ Jesus, and enjoy them in your Head; labour to enjoy grace itself only in Christ, as

the apostle: "I, yet not I, but Christ in me." "I labour, yet not I, but the grace of God." So ought we to glory: I believe, I love, I am patient, penitent, humble, yet not I, but the grace of God that is with me, Christ Jesus that dwelleth in me. And indeed a godly man, who thus lives at the very height of his own being, yea, and above it too, knows best how to reverence himself, yea, and to love himself too, and yet without any self-love: for he loves himself in God, and his own endowments as divine ornaments.

2. "Converse with God, and live upon him in the excellencies of all other creatures, and in all your creature-enjoyments." We cannot live without creatures, as the angels do indeed, but let us come as near them as we can, which is by living above creatures: place your happiness in God, and your hearts upon him; labour to find God all things to you, and in you, and to be filled with his fulness; labour to get your understandings filled with the knowledge of God, your wills filled with his divine will, your hearts filled with his infinite goodness and sweetness, your memories filled with the remembrance of his name, your whole souls filled with his holy and pure image, filled with the fruits of his Holy Spirit: nay, let these very bodies be filled not only with his good creatures, but more especially with his good-will in the creatures. It is said, indeed, of the sensual epicures of the world, that their bellies are filled with God's hid treasures, that is, with rare and precious delicacies; but how much better doth God fill the souls of his saints with his hid treasures, when he feedeth them with his divine favour, and dippeth

his hand with them in the dish? This is meat indeed which the saints eat of, which other men, though they feed at the same table, know not of. The glorified saints shall be satisfied wholly and perfectly with the divine image shining gloriously on them, and in them; to which purpose that of the Psalmist may be accommodated: "I shall be satisfied when I awake with his likeness." Well, we cannot be so satisfied in this life it seems; however, though we cannot be so satisfied with it, yet let us not be satisfied without it, nor satisfied with any thing besides it. Resolve, holy soul, "Well, if I must not be fully satisfied with the image of my heavenly Father till I awake, I will lie down and fall asleep hungry as I am then; for I will not fill my mouth with chaff, nor my soul with husks." But, in the meantime, get what you can of God out of creature-enjoyments.

(1.) Enjoy all things for God, and that these two ways:

First, Use all for him. Those riches, honours, interests, friends, which are clogs upon the heels of others, let them be as heels to you to carry you heaven-ward: let your souls be winged with those very enjoyments wherewith the wings of others are pinioned; and that which is fuel to their worldly lusts, let it be as fuel to feed and nourish your spiritual love. To use what we have for God, is the only way of not abusing it—this is one way of enjoying all for God, to use all for him; and yet there is something higher in that phrase of enjoying all for God, than this, namely,

Second, Value no creature-comfort any farther than as it leads to God; and this in a double sense too.

First, Value things to be good only by this, by their leading you unto God. Now, God being the supreme and infinite Good, any thing is so far good as it leads to the enjoyment of him. Now, the enjoyment of God is only in being like to him; holiness is his image; so then, every thing is good that tends to sanctification, and to make men partakers of a divine nature. We are usually mistaken in the true notion of good and evil, of mercies and judgments, judging according to the taste, as foolish patients do: but God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. Measure all things by the proportion they bear, and the tendency they have, to the supreme Good; and call not any thing evil that brings nearer to him, nor any thing good that draws off from him. Second, When you have found a thing that is really good, tending and leading to the chief Good, and to the possession of him—labour to enjoy it, and rejoice in it only under this notion, as such: when you love it, let it be with a pure spiritual love; and so order your delight in it, that it may be said, you do rather rejoice in the end of it than in the enjoyment of it.

(2.) Another way of living upon God in the creature is, to enjoy all things as partaking of him. "Every good and perfect gift is from above." Every beam of created light floweth out of the Father of lights. When the blessed and glorious God framed this stately fabric of the visible world, because there was nothing better in the world than himself, he was pleased to copy out himself in it, and to spread his own infinite perfections over it, and through it, so that every particular good is a blossom of the first Goodness: every created excellency is a dark draught

of God, and a broken beam of this infinite Sun of Righteousness. O labour to do so! Look upon the perfections which you find here below, not so much as the perfections of this or that particular being, but as they are so many drops risen out of the Fountain of all perfections, in whom they all meet and are concentrated. It is well expressed by one, "In a particular being, love the universal Goodness;" let the whole world be as the garden of God to you, where every creature is a flower, from which you may drink something of the divine sweetness. Alas! at what a low and sensual rate do we live when we rejoice in creatures, either as they are excellent, or as they are ours! whereas, indeed, neither of these is true: for they are not excellent, but God is excellent in them; and how can we call any thing our own, when God made us and all things for himself? O how injurious is it to the blessed God, when we rob him of his perfections that he hath imprinted upon the creature, by loving it, and delighting in it, not as in him, but as something distinct from him! Nay, we are then injurious to ourselves, as we shall see by and by. Labour to enjoy and to converse with God in the creatures. "O how precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" cried David, when he had been meditating of the creature's excellencies. Labour to abstract your minds from terrene things, even in the enjoyment of them, and call upon yourselves to love, and live, and feed upon God in them: live not upon the dark side of your mercies, but upon the representations of God in them. Is there any thing good? O this is a taste of infinite goodness! Is there any thing sweet? O how sweet is the God

that made it so! Is there any thing lovely? It is a picture of Him whose name is Love. Is any thing firm, stable, lasting? It is a shadow of that glorious Essence with whom there is no shadow of change. Have you any thing strong? It arises out of that God with whom is everlasting strength. Doth any creature give rest, ease, refreshment? It springs out of the all-satisfying fulness of God. In a word, labour to climb up by every created excellency, as by so many beams, to the Father of lights: let all the world be to you as God's temple, and be ready to say of every place, as Jacob, "How dreadful is this place! surely this is none other but the house of God;" that God who runs through all created beings, and from himself derives several prints of beauty and excellency all the world over. But especially take heed of your own created comforts, that they do not insensibly lead away your hearts, and ensnare you into a sinful, particular, distinct love of them; which is a sin soon committed, hardly discerned, and most hardly reformed. If any be freed from these inordinate affections, sure they are but few, and those few have come dearly by it, as one said in another case: "With a great sum they have obtained this freedom; they have paid for it, not with the foreskins of the Philistines, but with the lives of what they so loved, there being no way to cure this evil distemper but cutting off the member infected with it, the part that it fed upon." As a branch of this head, let me add, Labour to live upon God in the excellencies of other men: value them and all their accomplishments only in God, as he that did admire God, and enjoy God in them. Wherever you see

wisdom, goodness, ingenuity, holiness, justice, or any other accomplishment, say, Here, and there is God. And this is the honest way of making ourselves masters of whatever is another man's, and enjoying it as truly as he himself doth, yea, as truly as if it were our own; when we behold all these beams as coming from the same Fountain of lights, and do love them all in him with a universal love. This is the rare art of having nothing, yet possessing all things; of being rich, though one have nothing; and of being wise, though one know nothing.

(3.) The last way of living upon God in the creature is, to taste and feed upon the love of God in them; not only his common bounty, but his special love in Christ. The good-will of God gives a sweet relish to every morsel, as I hinted before. Even in the midst of all your delightful, pleasant, sweet enjoyments, let your souls be more affected with this than with them; let this be as the manna, lying upon the top of all your outward comforts, which your spirits may gather up and feed upon. But this I touched upon before; therefore I shall add no more concerning it. Thus I have shown you how you may imitate the life of angels, in living upon God, even whilst you live in the body. To this I may add another particular or two.

3. "Converse with God, and live upon him in all his ordinances." Let communion with God be your drift in every duty, and the very life, and soul, and sweetness of every ordinance. You never read of a soul more thirsty after ordinances than David, as might appear abundantly; yet, if you look well into the expressions, you will find, that it was not so much

after them, as after God in them; not after the dead letter, but after the living God: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." "My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Let the word preached or read be as a voice from heaven talking with you; let your conference be a comment upon that word; let meditation be as a kind of bringing down God into your souls, and prayer as a raising up of your souls unto God; nothing but faith and love put into praises. And so of all the rest.

4. "Converse with God in all his providences;" prosperity, adversity, plenty, penury, health, sickness, peace, and perplexity. This is a large theme: but as to prosperity, I have spoken something already, under that head of conversing with God in creature-enjoyments. As for adversity, I have said much more in a large discourse to describe and commend the art of conversing with God in afflictions. Briefly, at this time, converse not with losses, wants, afflictions, but with God in them; and that not only with the justice, righteousness, severity, and sovereignty, of God in them, but with the goodness and mercy of God in them. They are dark providences; we had not need to dwell altogether on the dark side of them. If all the ways of the Lord towards his people be mercy and truth, then his roughest and most dark ways are so too. If God be wholly love, then his very corrections proceed not from hatred. If it be his name to be good, and to do good, where have we learned then to call his afflicting providences evils, and to divide evil, which is but one, even as God is one, into sin and affliction? Surely we speak as men; and if God call them so, he speaks after the

manner of men, as he often doth. If the governing will of God be pure, perfect, and infinitely good and righteous, ought we not to converse with it in a free and cheerful manner, yea, and to love it too? In a word, pore not upon creature-changes, nor the uncertain wheels of motion, that are turning up and down we know not how, nor how oft; but fix yourselves upon that all-seeing Eye, that unbounded Understanding, that unsearchable and infinite Goodness, that derives itself through the whole universe, and sits in all the wheels of motion, governing all the strange motions of the creatures in a wonderful and powerful manner, and carrying them all in their several orbs to one last and blessed end.

Thus imitate the angelical life, even whilst you are in the body. Converse with God in self-excellencies, in the creature-excellencies, ordinances, providences: and yet labour to be more like him still; to abstract your mind from all these, and all material and sensible things, and to converse with God without the help of any creature; I mean in the Spirit, and by a secret feeling of his almighty goodness, and energy of grace, and the communications of a divine life in your souls. In a word, if you would taste of heaven whilst you are upon earth, labour, above all things, for a true conjunction of your hearts with God, in a secret feeling of his goodness, and a reciprocation of love to him; and to find the holy and blessed God exercising his grace and power upon all the faculties of your souls, and rendering them like unto himself, and all these powers of the soul naturally spending themselves upon him freely and entirely, as upon the chiefest Good, which is their

proper and full object. Seeing the saints in glory shall be like unto the angels of God in their way of living in and upon God alone, receive, I pray, this exhortation, which I have so largely prosecuted, and labour to begin that life, as far as you can, upon earth. Is there not reason for such an inference? Doth it not now flow naturally from the doctrine? If you think it do not, I will add two or three particulars, to strengthen this inference, or at least to clear it.

1. It is highly reasonable that we begin to be that which we expect to be for ever, to learn that way of living in which we hope to live to all eternity: so that I infer, upon as strong ground as the apostle, "He that hath this hope purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure."

2. If this be the life of angels, then it is the highest and noblest life that any created being is capable of. As by the bread of angels, and the tongue of angels, the most excellent food, and the most excellent language, is understood in Scripture, so must we understand this life of angels. Now, it is very suitable to the reasonable soul, that immortal, noble being, to aim at the highest and noblest life: "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

3. This shall not only be our life in heaven, but itself is something of heaven, a beginning of heaven. This life is not a thing really distinct from life eternal: "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." "Ye have eternal life." Therefore we read of eternal life abiding in men, and not abiding in them: "Whoso eateth my flesh hath eternal life." A

holy soul thus deified, thus living in and upon God, is as truly glorified upon earth, in some degree, as the world is enlightened by the morning sun, which is as truly, though not so gloriously, as by the sun in its greatest height. Oh, low and ignoble spirits, who can be satisfied with a happiness which shall only be in the world to come! Certainly it is true and proper speech to say, that a participation of God is an anticipation of heaven; and to be like unto him, is to be with him. You see what reason I have to make such an inference, and to form it unto such an earnest exhortation; oh, therefore, I beseech you, before God and his holy angels, to endeavour to be like him, and to live like them!

Objection. Say not, How can men on earth live like angels? *Ans.* 1. But fall on and imitate them, though it be with unequal steps; labour to be as the angels, if you cannot be altogether equal to the angels. 2. We are bidden to live the life of God: "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." "Be ye holy, for I am holy." If I speak high, how high speak these texts?

Objection. Say not, But how can this animal life permit this? *Ans.* 1. Thus men have lived in the body: thus lived Enoch; thus lived Paul; thus lived David, that man after God's own heart, (the greatest and most divine character that can be given of a mortal man,)—"There is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." 2. Cannot we live in the body except we live to the body? You see saints upon earth live above other men upon earth; and yet a little more pains, take the other flight, and you may live above yourselves too, higher than you do. I

will only add a motive or two to this duty of living upon God.

1. "The last enemy to be overcome is creature-love." This is the last enemy that keeps the field, by which alone the greatest sort of men do perish everlastingly: beat down this, and you win the day, and shall wear the crown; nay, the very conquest of it is a crown, as I said before.

2. To live upon God in the creature, is to enjoy the creature in the best sense. You will lose nothing of the creature by this means, but shall enjoy it more fully than ever you did: for the creature is ten thousand times sweeter in God than it is in itself. Yea, in a word, this is the way to enjoy all the world, and to enjoy the accomplishments of all men, and all things, as much as if they were your own.

3. It is the way never to lose any thing. He that lives upon God spends upon a stock that cannot be wasted, drinks at a fountain that cannot be exhausted. So much as we enjoy of God in the creature, we do not lose with it; and that which we do not so enjoy, we deserve to lose. Thus, then, is the secure and honourable life, in comparison of which, the life of a prince is but a wallowing in the mire. "Lord, give us evermore this bread," and hearts to feed upon it. Amen.

FINIS.

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