

A TOKEN FOR MOURNERS

THE ADVICE OF CHRIST TO A DISTRESSED
MOTHER BEWAILING THE DEATH OF HER
DEAR AND ONLY SON



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or the Advice of Christ to a Distressed Mother bewailing the Death of Her Dear and only Son Wherein the Boundaries of Sorrow are duly fixed, Excesses restrained, the common Pleas answered, and divers Rules for the support of GOD'S afflicted Ones prescribed.

by John Flavel

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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, beside the many endearing passages

that for so many years have linked and glewed 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's 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 years 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 those strokes, or rather of my own un-mortified passions were, I have felt, and you and others have heard. Surely I was as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Yea, I may say with them, Lam. 3:19, 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 ray 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 embittered 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 in 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 am 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 have not commended 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 sorrows one moment before God's time for your deliverance be fully come also. Let patience have its perfect work; that comfort which comes in God's way and season, will stick by you, and do you good indeed.

Secondly, I desire, that though you and your afflictions had a sad meeting, yet you and they may have a comfortable parting. If they effect that upon your hearts which God sent them for, I doubt not but you 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 hands, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Thirdly, I heartily wish that these searching afflictions may make the more satisfying discoveries; that you may now see more of the evil 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 ways, Lam. 3:14. When our sin finds 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, Psal. 94:12. 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 on 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 your heart from him, and hath spoken by this rod, saying, Stand aside, child, thou art in my way, and fillest more room in thy parent's hearts 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 might be in a like frame with his that said, Lord, thou shalt beat, and I will bear. It was a good observation that one made, *Anima sedendo et quiescendo fit sapiens*; 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, Heb. 12:11.

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.

Transivere patres, simul hinc transibimus omnes.

Our dear parents are gone, our lovely and desirable children are gone, our bosom relations, that 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 easy and familiar 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 snare or intanglement 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 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

"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, Weep not." - LUKE 7:13.

TO be above the stroke of passion, 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 that is

without natural affections, is deservedly ranked amongst the worst of heathens; and he that 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 becalming in prosperity.

How apt are we to transgress the bounds, both of reason and religion, under a sharp affliction, appears, as 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 wailings 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 unto it.

First, 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 remarked by the evangelist, ver. 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 was with her."

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

Firsts 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 parent multiplied? A child is a part of the parent made up in another skin: But to lay a son in the grave, a son who continues the name, and supports the family; this was ever accounted a very great affliction.

Secondly, This son was not carried from the cradle to the coffin, nor stripped out of its swathing, to be wrapped in its winding-cloth. Had he died in his infancy, before he had engaged affection, or raised expectation, the affliction had not been so pungent, and cutting as now it was: death smote the son in the flower and prime of his time. He was a man, (saith the evangelist) ver. 12 a young man, (as Christ calls him) ver. 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 away 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 hath been thine own condition, as it hath been his that writes it, I need say no more to convince thee that it was a sorrowful state indeed, Christ met this tender mother in.

Thirdly, And which is yet more, he was not only a son, but an only son: so you find, in ver. 12. "He was the only son of his mother;"* one in whom all her hopes and comforts, of that kind, were bound up. For, *Omnis in Ascanio, stat chari cura parentis*, Virgil. All her affections were contracted into this one object. If we have never so many children, we know not which of them to spare; if they stand like olive plants about our tables, it would grieve us to see the least twig amongst them broken down. But surely the death of one out of many is much more tolerable than all in one†.

Hence it is noted in scripture as the greatest of earthly sorrows, Jer. 6:26. "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, Zech. 12:10. "They shall mourn for him, (namely Christ,) whom they have pierced as one mourneth for an only son."

Fourthly, And yet, to heighten the affliction, it is superadded, ver. 12. "And she was a widow." So that the staff of her age, on which 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 burthen lay upon her alone; she had not an husband to comfort her, as Elkanah did Hannah, in 1 Sam. 1:8. "Why weepest thou, and why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better 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.

Secondly, Let us consider the counsel which Christ gave 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 our 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 towards 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 as apt to be touched with the sense of our miseries, Heb. 4:15.

Lastly, The counsel itself, Weep not; herein fulfilling the office of a comforter to them that mourn, whereunto he was anointed, Isa. 61:1, 2, 3. 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 insensate; he only prohibits the excesses, and extravagancies of our sorrows 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, 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 occasion and reason 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, 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 is 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 struggles, 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 ἀμνησία, forgetfulness, and insensibleness, of all that which they saw, or enjoyed, in their estate of separation: It being necessary both for them and others, that it should be so. 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 lives 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 into 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, 1 Thes. 4:17. that we shall see and enjoy them again, at the Lord's coming. And surely this is more than if (with this 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 meet together in their death.

It is as common with men, yea, with good men, to exceed in their sorrows for dead relations[†], as it is to exceed in their love and delights to living

relations; and both of the one, and the other, we may say, as they say of waters, It is hard to confine them within their bounds. It is therefore grave advice which the apostle delivers in this case, 1 Cor. 7:29, 30. "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 an 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 affections 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 to be too deeply concerned for these dying, short-lived things.

To this purpose the apostle exhorts, Heb. 12:5. "My son, despise not thou 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 shouldest 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 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,

1. To discover the signs,
2. To dissuade from the sin,
3. To remove the pleas,
4. To propose the cure of immoderate sorrow.

First, I shall give you the signs of immoderate sorrow, and shew 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.

And, First, How much soever we censure, and condemn immoderate sorrow; yet the afflicted must be allowed an awakened, and 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, Numb. 12:14. "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 shewed 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 corrections; and for this the afflicted are smartly taxed, Jer. 5:3. "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 shew he was not senseless and unaffected, and yet blessed the afflicting God; which, as plainly shewed he was not contumacious and unsubmitive.

Secondly, 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, ingeniously to open his troubles, than suddenly to smother them. There is no sin in complaining to God, but much wickedness in complaining of him. Grievs are eased by groans and heart-pressures relieved by utterance. This was David's course and constant way, who was a man of afflictions, Psalm 142:2, 3. "I poured out my complaint before him, I shewed before him my trouble; when my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knowest 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? The 102d Psalm is intituled, "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, he 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 on 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 my witnesses 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.'

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

We may also make our complaint to men. So did Job, chap. 19. ver. 21. "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, Prov. 17:17 but be they what they will, they cannot pity as God, relieve and succour as he; and oftentimes we may say with Job, chap. 21. ver. 4. "As for me, is my complaint to men? And if it were, why should not my spirit be troubled?" q. d. 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.

Thirdly, 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 you did not foresee it, it is now your duty to search and examine yourselves. So the church, in her affliction, resolved, Lam. 3:40. "Let us search and try our ways." When God is smiting, we should be a searching: Surely our iniquities will enquire after us if we will not enquire 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, Job 10:2. "Shew me

wherefore thou contendest with me;" q. d. 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, Job 7:20. "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 the glory which such confessions take from them, is not lost, whilst 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, Psal. 38:5. "My wounds stink, and are corrupted, because of my foolishness." He is the wisest man that thus befools 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.

Lastly, 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 for 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," Psal. 39:10. 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," Luke 22:42. 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.

But sorrow then becomes sinful and excessive, when,

First, It causeth 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 be-nights all the rest. Our tears for our lost enjoyments 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 sins, we should 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 comforts.

Did we know God, even that sovereign Lord at whose dispose 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 an higher value. Did you understand the fickle, vanishing nature of the creature, what a flower, what a bubble it is; O 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 you 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 the 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? Fy, fy, 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 losses, and impoverish his estate yet left; go, reproach, and blast his reputation, which is yet sweet; what would you think of this? And yet, if you be 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 worse stroke; yet know, you have better mercies to lose than any you have yet lost. Should God cloud your souls 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. Num. 14:12. "Would to God (say

they) we had died in Egypt." And, Num. 11:6. "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.

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

Some Christians have such public spirits, that the church's troubles I swallow up their personal troubles. 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 Phinehas 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 presaged the issue, he sunk down and died, 1 Sam. 4:17, 18. O that was the sinking, the killing word; had the messenger stopt 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, Phil. 2:21. "All seek their own, and not the things that are of Christ:" 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, 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.

Thirdly, 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 stopt 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 troubles 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 thy 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 friend 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? Sure 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.

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

Worldly sorrow works death, 2 Cor. 7:10 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, Prov. 12:25. The stoutest body must stoop under heart-pressures.

It is with the mind of a man, saith one, as with the stone tyrrhenus: 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 never 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 grief, and this some think was the reason that he appeared as a man of fifty, when he was little more than thirty years old, John 8:57. 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 whet the knife that it may 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 our bodies in times of afflictions? 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 to the 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 an 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 over much grief, no, though it be for sin, 2 Cor. 2:7 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 an high point of wisdom in David, and recorded no doubt for our imitation, who, when the child was dead ceased to mourn, arose, washed himself, and eat bread, 2 Sam. 12:20.

Fifthly, 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 severe strokes, acknowledging them to be all just and holy, Psal. 119:75. "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 thus 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," Jonah 4:9. Poor man! he was highly distempered at this time, and out of frame; this was not his true temper, or ordinary frame, but a surprize; the effect of a paroxism of temptation, in which his passions had been over-heated.

Few dare to vent it in such language: But how many have their hearts embittered 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 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 times into high discontents: 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;" q. d. 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 thy children:" Meaning, that he should 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," Job 34:31. Whatever God doth with you, speak well, and think well of him, and his works.

Sixthly, 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 destroy 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," John 11:32 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 trivial, 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 trifles, must be kept for this purpose to renew their sorrow daily, by 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.

Seventhly, Lastly, 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.

Jer. 31:15. "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping: Rachel weeping for her children, 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 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," Exod. 6:9.

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. Thus, Psal. 77:10. "My soul (saith he) 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.

O 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 like water upon the ground, those excellent cordials, prepared and offered to them, out of a froward, or dead spirit, under trouble. Say not with them, Lam. 3:18, 19. "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 dispatched the first part of my design, in shewing you wherein the

sin of mourners doth not lie, and in what it doth.

Secondly, Having cleared this, and shewn you wherein the sin and danger lies; my way is now prepared to the second thing proposed, namely, to dissuade mourners from these 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, 1 Sam. 25:32. who, when he perceived how proper and seasonable 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, it 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 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 our 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 supports 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, and 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 thy misery: but sit down a while, and ponder these three things.

First, That of all persons in the world, thou hast most 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, Rev. 6:8. If a believer die, 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.

O it is far better to be childless or friendless on earth, than hopeless and remediless in hell.

Secondly, 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 ten thousandth part of that guilt that thou hast done: so that thou mightest well imagine it should rather have cut thee down, that hadst 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?

Thirdly, This affliction for which thou mournest, may be the greatest mercy to thee that ever yet befel thee in this world. God hath now made thy heart soft by trouble, shewed 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 chuse 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, Job 36:8, 9. "If they be bound in fetters, and holden in cords of affliction, then he sheweth

them their work and their transgression, that they have exceeded: he openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth them that they shall 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 raisedst up unto thyself, from that poor creature which now lies in the dust, are in one day quite 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 chuse 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.

Considerations

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. Psal. 46:10. "Be still, and know that I am God."

Man and man stand upon even ground; if your fellow-creature does any thing that displeases you, you may not only enquire who did it, but why he did it? You may demand his grounds 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 farther disputes or contests, silence and quiet you, whatever it be that he hath done. Job 33:13. "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 uncontroulable 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, 2 Sam. 3:36. "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 cropt off before it was fully blown, was cropt off by him that owned it, yea, by him that formed it. If his dominion be absolute, sure his disposal should be acceptable.

It was so to good Eli, 1 Sam. 3:18. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good:" And it was so to David, Psal. 39:9. "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,"

Psalm 83:18.

The glorious sovereignty of God, is illustriously displayed in two things, his decrees and his providences: With respect to the first he saith, Rom. 9:15. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." Here is no ground of disputing with him; for so it is said, ver. 20. "Who art thou, O man, that repleist against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?" Hath not the pottter power over the clay?

And as to his providences, wherein his sovereignty is also manifested; it is said, Zech. 2:14. "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 that 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 also taken him: O how quiet should this consideration leave thee? If your landlord, who has many years suffered you to dwell in his house, does at last warn you out of it, though he tells you not why; you will not contend with him, or say he has done you wrong: Much less if he tells 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 in his own hands, 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 now 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 betows 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, Psal. 77:14 that they are full of children; yea, and of children that do 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 soul be secure and safe; yea, and our comfort in the way, as well as end, may be safe enough, though these are 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 mean time 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 intent 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 is that text, Job 24:5, 6. "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 your habitation was prefixed 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.

O 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, 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 cautioned, that the decree of God no way excuses any voluntary, or sinful neglects or miscarriages. God over-rules 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; Psal. 55:23. "Blood-thirsty men shall not live out half their days." Eccl. 7:18. "Why shouldst thou die before thy time." Psal. 102:24. "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days." Isa. 27:10. "I am deprived of the residue of my years." And, Prov. 10:27. "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, whilst we assert an unalterable fixation of the term of death.

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

First, We must distinguish death into Natural and Violent.

The wicked and blood-thirsty man shall not live out half his days; i.e. half so long as he might live, according to the course of nature, or 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.

Again, we must distinguish of the term or limit for death, which is either

General, or Special.

The general limits are now seventy or eighty years, Psal. 90:10. "The days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they are 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 are 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 the special limit.

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

It is not proper at all, 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, wave the controversy, and wind up this consideration with an humble, and serious motion 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, the which we know not: in respect of fitness, they die 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 comfort in our 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.

Consider. 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 now is from the death of your children?

Sad experience made a holy man once 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, 2 Sam. 16:11. "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 others mostly 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 glorious 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, Gen. 26:34. "That when Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith the daughter of Berith the Hittite, which was a grief of mind to 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, Gen. 18:19. "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 bestowed as many and as frequent prayers for his children, and particularly for his son Ishmael, as any of you: We find one, and that a very pathological one, recorded, Gen. 17:18. "O that Ishmael might live before thee:" And yet you know how he proved, a son that yieldeth him no more comfort than Esau did to Jacob 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 an 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 Themistocles his son; nor Miltiades, to see the battle his son Cimon won in the field; nor Zantippus, 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 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 them than thou couldst endure to see? O think what a sad and doleful sight was that to Zedekiah, Jer. 50:10. "The king of Babylon brought his children, and slew them before his eyes." Horrid spectacle! and that leads to,

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

Is it 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, Isa. 57:1, 2 he leaves some, and removes others, but taketh care for the security of all. He provided a grave for Methuselah before the flood. The grave is an 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 broke 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 Jer. 22:10. "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 before-hand, he seems to say to thee, as he did to Peter, John 13:7. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." The eye of providence hath a prospect far beyond thine; probably it would be 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 loosed before-hand, then an easy stroke lays down upon the earth.

Consider. 6. A parting time must needs come, and why is not this as good as another? You knew before-hand your child or friend was mortal, and that the thread that linked 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 surprized 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," Heb. 9:27. 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 loth 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," Job 5:26. 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; i.e. 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 cropt in the bud or blossom; yet in his spiritual capacity he never dies before he is ripe; God can ripen him speedily, he can let out such warm rays and beams of his Holy Spirit upon them, as shall soon mature 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 in, 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, as Num. 12:13. "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.

Consider. 7. Call to mind in this day of trouble, the covenant you have 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 an heavier load of sorrow prest 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 shewed 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, as 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 ear 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 burnings, on 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 no wise 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 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 of 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 promisedst to take in all his disposals? Where is that covenanted submission to his will? Didst thou except 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 reserve 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 an hypocrite; if thou wast sincere in thy covenant, as Christ had no reserve 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.

Consider. 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 raisedst up to thyself great expectations of comfort in old age, cut off? So that thou art now like neither to have a name, or 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 those words of Job, chap. 29. ver. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and comment upon them with many tears; "O that I were as in months past, as in the day 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, in 2 Sam. 23:5. "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath 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, are upon your families, who have an interest in the covenant. For,

First, If you are God's covenant people, though he may afflict, yet he will never forget you, Psalm 3:5 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 object: Why surely it is much more easy for you to forget your dear child, whilst living, and most endearing, (much more when dead and undesirable) than it is for your God to forget you. Isa. 49:15. "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 not I forget thee."

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.

Secondly, 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 that 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, Gen. 42:36. "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.

Thirdly, This covenant is not only well ordered in all things, but sure: the mercies contained in it are called, "the sure mercies of David," Isa. 55:3. Now how sweet, how seasonable a support doth this consideration give to God's afflicted under the rod! you lately made yourselves 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, Gen. 5:29. "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 work of their hands, but also, in enjoying the fruit of their toil and pains for him.

Probably such thoughts you have had, and raised up to yourselves great expectations of comfort in your old age from it; but now you see you built 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 husbands, 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 are 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 the goodliness of it as the flower of the grass, 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," Isa. 40:6, 7, 8. 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, 1 Thess. 4:13, 14. "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."

Q. d. 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 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 Gentilism to outvie Christianity; let not Pagans challenge the greatest Believers, to out-do 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 distinctly ponder these admirable supports which the doctrine of the resurrection affords.

First, 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," Job 19:27. The very same body you laid, or are now about to lay in the grave, shall be restored again: Thou shalt find thine own husband, wife, or child, or friend again: I say the self-same, and not another.

Secondly, 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 wept and 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, replies thus, What (saith he) befel 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 dear 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," 1 Thess. 2:19, 20 which must needs imply his distinct knowledge of them in that day, which must be many hundred years after death hath separated them from each other. Whether this knowledge shall be by the glorified eyes discerning any lineaments or property of individuation 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.

Thirdly, 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, or sinful ones upon perfected spirits of the just. O what lovely creatures will they appear to you then, when that which is now sown in dishonour, shall be raised in honour! 1 Cor. 15:43. And then, to crown all,

Fourthly, You shall have an everlasting enjoyment of them in heaven, never to part again. The children of the resurrection can die no more, Luke 20:36 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, 1 Thes. 4:14. And this the apostle thought an effectual cordial in this case when he exhorted the Thessalonians to "comfort one another with these words."

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

Such 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 leave no ground of doubting touching their death. Others dying in their infancy and youth, though they carried not such an actual hope with them, yet they have left good 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 entertainment for them here than their heavenly Father hath above?

There is no Christian parent in the world, but would rejoice to see his child out-strip and get before him in grace, that he may be more eminent in parts and services 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 gotten 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, John 14:28. "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I go to the Father." q. d. Do not value your

own sensible comfort, 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 a rational and spiritual love; if you 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 friends 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 an 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; stript them out of those garments you provided, and cloathed 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 an higher way than you can, and what though you have lost its 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 at sea with you again.

Consideration 11. Consider how vain a thing all your troubles and self-

vexation is; it no way better's 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 ways 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, (Matth. 6:27.) "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 our sorrowing may sooner break our 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, 2 Sam. 12:23. "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 purpose and work 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 man, so neither can this course and way of his providences be changed. Job 23:13. "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 so, his tears and cries to God before had the nature and use of 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?" Q. d. 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?" Gen. 27:38. But your Father hath more blessings for you than one: his name is the "Father of mercies," 2 Cor. 13:11. 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 even as it was with the captive church, in respect of her special children, in the day of her captivity and reproach, the Lord made up all with advantage to her, even to her own astonishment. Isa. 42:20. "The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, the place is too strait for me; Give place to 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, 1 Chron. 25:9 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 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 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 5:11) "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, Job 42:10. "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 likely 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 dispose.

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 Psal. 18:28. "For thou, Lord, will 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 comforts 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, alter the present sad state I am in, and chase away that trouble and darkness which at present lies upon me: Only beware of offending him, at whose beck your lights and comforts come and go. Michal displeased the Lord, and therefore had no child unto the day of her death, 2 Sam. 6:23.

Hannah waited humbly 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 sees 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, such as these deserve not to be named with.

You have an excellent scripture to that purpose, in Isa. 56:4, 5. "For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths; and chuse 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 daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off."

Men's names are to be continued in their issue, in their male issue especially, and consequently to fail in such as wanted issue, Num. 17:4 and a numerous issue is deemed no small honour, Psal. 127:4, 5. 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 names 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 hath 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 intituled, 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 shewed 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 noted, 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 afterwards 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 all 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-comforts I own in this world. The gracious and tender Lord hath his divine cordials 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 outlet 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 was 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 thoughts of her dear husband in God. And had not the Lord taken that 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 bidden 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, Eph. 6:12 i.e. his kingdom is supported by darkness. Now, there is a two-fold darkness, which gives Satan great advantage; the darkness of the mind, viz. ignorance; and the darkness of the condition, viz. 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 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 that 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, Psal. 104:20. "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; i.e. our suffering-time is his busiest working-time; many a dismal suggestion he then plants, and grafts upon your 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," Psal. 31:22 and Lam. 3:18, 19. "My hope is perished from the Lord, remembering my affliction, and my misery, the wormwood and the gall."

Sometimes he suggests hard thoughts of God, Ruth 1:20. "The Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me." Yea, that he hath dealt more severely with us than any other, Lam. 1:12. "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," Jon. 4:9. What dismal thoughts are these? and how much more afflictive to a gracious soul, than the loss of any outward enjoyment in this world.

And sometimes 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, Psal. 73:13, 14. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning."

By these things Satan gets no small advantage upon 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 our excess of sorrow ye give place to the devil; we are not ignorant of his devices.

Consider. 15. Give no way to excessive sorrows upon the account of affliction, if ye have any regard to the honour of God and religion, which will hereby 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 would they say, if they should hear you yourselves unbelievably cry out, Where is our God? Will they not be ready to cry, this is the religion they make such boast of, which 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 are 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 trouble 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 matter.

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 *magnifica verba*, 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 shew to the world (whatever their common censures are) that it is not so much your care to differ from them in some opinions, and a little strictness, as in humility, meekness, 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 souls? 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.

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

Great are the benefits of a sharp, rousing affliction to the people of God at sometimes, and all might have them at all times, were they more careful to improve them. Holy David thankfully acknowledged, Psal. 119:71. "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 had 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 glewed to this earthly comfort?

Now you see that your affections 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 you were fallen into, 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 this world, God will discover to you, more sensibly and effectually than ever, the vanity both of that and all earthly comforts, so as that you shall from henceforth never let forth your heart, 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 whipped 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.

Consider. 17. Suffer not yourselves to be transported by impatience, and swallowed up of grief, because God hath exercised you under a smart 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 contrived into one upon their relations, 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 before-mentioned, 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, concluding that cold and hunger would kill them) afterwards going on at 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 own feet, to so unjust a death, upon which having called her, and she refusing, was dragged by the heels along that rugged way, to be cast in with her little ones, and 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 turned 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 in, 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 an 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 except water. The two boys being near

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 that 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 choice and eminently gracious woman.

And Mr. Wall, in his *None-but-Christ*, relates as sad a passage of a poor family in Germany, who were driven unto that extremity in the famine, that at last the parents made a motion one to the other to sell one of the 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. 4:10. "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 prophaneness, 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 broken, or the pipe cut off, so that no more comfort can 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, Jer. 2:13. Cisterns have nothing but what they receive, and broken ones cannot hold what is put into them. Why then do you 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 an 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 to bemoan thy loss."

But if God never repair your loss in things of the same kind, you know he can abundantly repair it 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. O how have many good souls been clogged and ensnared in their dying hour, by the loves, cares, and fears they have had about those they must leave behind them in a sinful, evil world!

Your love to them might have proved a snare to you, and caused you to

hang back, as loth to go hence; for these are the things that make men loth to die. And thus it might have been with you, except God had removed them before-hand, 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 you may then be pestered and distracted with upon their account? What shall become of these when I am gone? I am now to leave them, God knows to what wants, 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 that gave them to us: And some have been enabled cheerfully to do so when they were parting from 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 a Luther's faith; some find it a hard thing to disentangle their affections at such a time: But now, if God has 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 rejections, upon any such accounts as these.

Yet a little while, and you shall not miss them, you shall not need them, but you 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 sorrows as you now feel, any more. It is but a little while, and the end of all these things will come. O 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.

3. 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 to 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 sin, it is then in a fair way for its cure, which is the last thine 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.

Pleas

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 stings my soul feels now in it.

The 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, as I imagined it to be: My child is not only dead, but my prayers in the same day shut out and denied.

Answer 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; or capitulate with him, for what term you shall enjoy your outward comforts: If you did so, it was your evil, and God hath justly rebuked it by this stroke. If you did 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 in your prayer.

Answer 2. Your prayers may be answered, though the thing prayed for be with-held, 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, Dan. 9:23 or by suspending the answer for a time, and giving it afterwards, Luke 18:7 or by with-holding from you that mercy which you ask, and giving you a much better mercy in the room of it, Deut. 3:24 compared with Deut. 34:4, 5. Or, lastly, by giving you patience to bear the loss, or want of it, 2 Cor. 11:9.

Now, if the Lord have 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, so engaging as this was: Ah! it is no common loss.

Answer 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, 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.

Answer 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 often times becomes a snare, and is, in its own nature, but a transitory, vanishing thing, and therefore no such great 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 the 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 nourishes in its mouth, and then fades. This therefore should not be reflected on as so great a circumstance to aggravate your trouble.

Answer 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 the 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," Matth. 13:43. In this hope you part with them, therefore act suitably to your hopes.

Plea 3. Oh! 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.

Answer 1. Did your friend die young, or was the bond of any other relation almost dissolved 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; 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 upon earth that hath won heaven, be his days here never so few.

Answer 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.

Answer 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 root 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 you, that God's time is the best time.

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.

Answer 1. Religion allows not unto 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 reprov'd for such an uncomely expression by a heathen; it is enough to make us blush to read what an 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, Εἰ τοῦτο θεοῖς φίλον τοῦτο γενεσθῶ, i.e. 'Let every thing be as the gods would have it.'

Answer 2. It is no 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!

Answer 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 to fill the place of any creature that leaves you? Surely this would better become a man whose portion is in this life, than one that 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.

Answer 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. In Isa. 56:4, 5 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 hopes are secure, and such as shall not make you ashamed, you should not be so cast down.

Answer 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, shall 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 a surprizing stroke; and this makes my stroke heavier than my complaint.

Answer 1. That the death of your relation was so sudden and surprizing, was much your own fault, who ought to have lived in the daily sense of its vanity, and expectation of your separation from it; 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 about you in other families; you frequently saw other parents, husbands, and wives, carrying forth their dead: and what were all these but warnings given to you to prepare for the like trials?

Surely, then, it was your own security and regardlessness that made this affliction so surprizing to you; and who is to be blamed for that, you know.

Answer 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 more slow.

Answer 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 contrived into one; I saw the gradual approaches of it upon my dear relation, who felt every thread of death as it came on toward him, who often cried with Job, chap. 3. ver. 21, 22. "Where fore is light given to him that is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul? Which long for death, but it cometh not, and dig for it more than for hid treasures: Which 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 shew 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 is it 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 that 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.

Answer 1. Though it be an evil to neglect, and slight the means ordained by God for 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 his assistance or 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 it generally doth in time of sickness.

Answer 2. Do you not unjustly charge, and blame 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 to perish in physicians hands, and so many to 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 light they have, at the time and season of action.

Answer 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 guilty of, and also make those things 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 affliction; 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 by your friend, in what degree he was dear to you, and what you could now 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 is passed into eternity, and I know not how it is with his soul; were I sure my relation were with Christ, I should be quiet; but my fears of the contrary are overwhelming; O it is terrible to think of the damnation of one so dear to me.

Answer 1. Admit what the objection supposes, that you have real grounds to fear the eternal condition of your dear relation; yet it is utterly unbecoming 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 cause more sad, and sinking to the spirit of a gracious person: their death is but a trifle to this; but yet if you 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 this matter.

First, His indisputable sovereignty over them, Rom. 9:20. "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 that 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, Lev. 10:3. 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 the Lord.

Secondly, 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.

Answer 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 subtilty of Satan, designing here by 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 affection, or Satan's temptation.

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

Secondly, 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 shame-facedness, reservedness of disposition, and many other things, may hide those small and weak beginnings of grace that are in children, from the observations of the parents. God might see that in them that you never saw; he despiseth not the day of small things.

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

Plea 9. O but I have sinned in this relation, and 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 hath been in me towards my relation.

Answer 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 any other thing whatsoever; and it is a very common thing for conscience, not only to charge these 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.

Answer 2. Admit that which the objection supposes, that God had afflicted you for your sin, 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, Rev. 3:19. He tells the afflicted, for their comfort, "Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten." 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, Hos. 4:17. "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 to 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.

Answer 3. And as to what you now charge upon yourself, that the neglect of duty did spring from the want of love to your relation; 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 humbled.

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.

Answer 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 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.

Answer 2. Though your children are gone, yet God hath many children left in the world, whose bowels you may refresh with what he hath bestowed upon you; and your charity to them will doubtless turn to a more considerable 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 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, is wounding.

Answer 1. Let it rather lift up your hearts 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 shew betimes so perverse a temper, that little comfort can be expected from them.

Answer 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 ends in the affliction, to mortify the corruption it is sent to rebuke, to quiet your hearts in the will of God; this is your work.

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

Answer 1. Though you want at 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 withdrawn from you.

Answer 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 deeps 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.

Answer 3. May not your submissive carriage under the rod provoke God

to hide his face from you. Pray consider it well, nothing is more probable than for 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.

4. 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:

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 do 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 2 Pet. 1:16 and it is very observable how intemperance and impatience are inseparably linked in experience, yea, the experience of the best men. You read, Gen. 37:3. "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age; and made him a coat of many colours."

This was the darling; Jacob's heart was so exceedingly set upon him, his very life was bound up in the life of the lad. Now when the supposed death of the child was brought to him, how did he carry it? See ver. 34, 35. "And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sack cloth 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 into 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 delight 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 owed 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 makes our load so heavy.

O what a terrible thing is it to look, upon our dead friends, 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 meet again at judgment; be exact, punctual, and circum spect, 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 comfort as his soul had found 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 thy God, and there pour out thy heart before him, in free, full, and broken-hearted confessions of sin: 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; intreat one smile, one gracious look, to enlighten thy darkness, and cheer thy drooping spirit. Say with the prophet, Jer. 17:17. "Be thou not 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 that holy man, Psalm 94:19. "In the multitude of my thoughts which I had within me, thy comforts have 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," Psalm 39:9. Consider the hand of the Lord in the whole matter: And that,

First, As a sovereign hand, which hath right to dispose of thee, and all thy comforts, without thy leave or consent, Job 23:13.

Secondly, As a father's hand correcting thee in love and faithfulness. Prov. 3: 11. "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 draws your heart nearer to God, and mortifies 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.

Thirdly, 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.

Fourthly, Lastly, as a moderate and merciful hand that hath punished thee less than thine iniquities deserve: He that hath cast thee into affliction, 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 will bear your affliction with moderation, compare it with the afflictions 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 dear 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 have some parents seen their children die! God holding them as so many terrible spectacles of misery before their eyes; so that they 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 lie weltering from day to day. O you little

know what a bitter cup others have given them to drink? Surely, if you compare, you must 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 corruptions 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 impatience 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 murmuring for the death of your friends, seriously consider your own death as approaching, and that you and your dead friend are distinguished by a small interval and point of time. 2 Sam. 11:13. I shall go to him. 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 which we promised ourselves so much of the sweetness and comforts of our lives from, seems an intolerable thing.

But would you realize your own deaths 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 may 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.

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