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THE
S A I N T S'
EVERLASTING REST:

BY
RICHARD BAXTER.

Abridged by
ISAAC CREWDSON.

LONDON:

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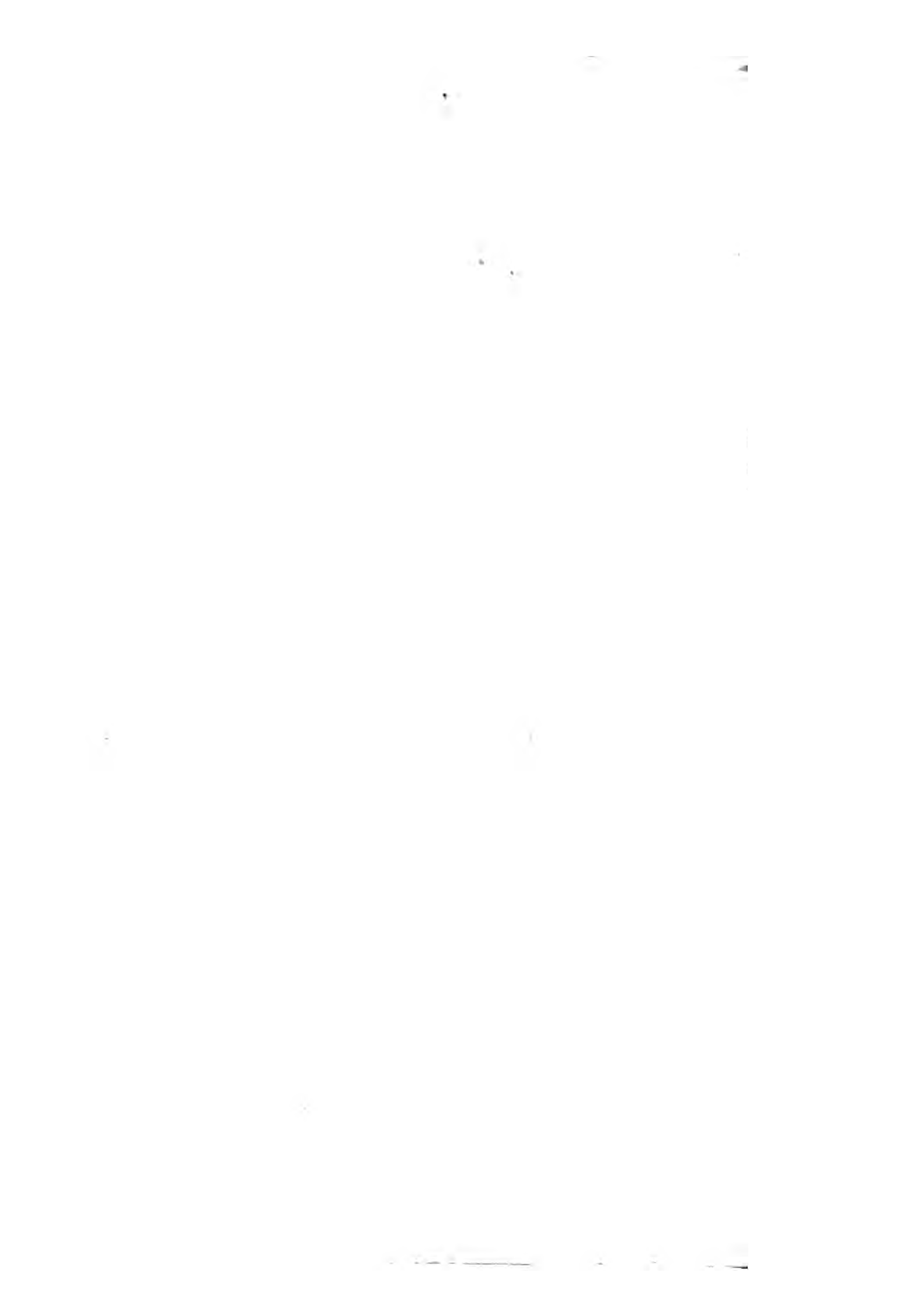
AS the editor seeks no pecuniary emolument from this Work, but issues it solely for the sake of promoting the best interests of his fellow-men ; and as he believes that it may be read with advantage by all classes of the community, he feels bold to solicit those who unite in this view, to aid in its circulation.

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PREFACE.

BAXTER'S "Saints' Everlasting Rest," in its original form, has been singularly blessed to the awakening and conversion of many, and it would be easy to enumerate illustrious characters, eminently pious Christians, to whom it has been peculiarly useful,—animating them on their heavenward journey. The names of Allein and Janeway can hardly be omitted. Addison, Barrow, Boyle, and Usher, were among those who highly valued the writings of Baxter; and it was at the earnest importunity of Archbishop Usher that he wrote his "Call to the Unconverted;" respecting which (in a paper found after his death,) Baxter says, "This little book God hath blessed beyond all that I have written, EXCEPT THE SAINTS' REST."

The Editor, in preparing this work, has used Fawcett's Abridgment of Baxter's Saints' Rest, of which he trusts the most valuable part has

PREFACE.

been retained. In a few instances a little alteration has been made in the arrangement, and occasionally an expression varied. He has been induced to present this compendium to the public, in the hope that, being thus reduced to a smaller compass, it may find its way into a still wider circle; and, through the Divine Blessing, be yet more extensively instrumental in producing fruit unto holiness, the end whereof is everlasting life.

Should any Reader be offended with the language in some of the following pages, the Editor would beg of him to consider whether it has not the sanction of an Authority not to be questioned? If it is the language of our Lord and his Apostles, is it either wise or safe, to forbear the use of such expressions, as, we must conclude, do most fitly describe the awful realities of another world? On this subject, the Editor would also refer him to the last paragraph of the Sixth Chapter.

Ardwick, near Manchester, 1829.

THE
SAINTS' EVERLASTING REST.

CHAPTER I.

*Address to the Reader, with some Account of
the Nature of the Saints' Rest.*

READER, whatever thou art, young or old, rich or poor, I entreat thee, and charge thee, in the name of thy Lord, who will shortly call thee to a reckoning, and judge thee to thy everlasting unchangeable state, that thou give not these things the reading only, and so dismiss them with a bare approbation; but that thou set upon this work, and take GOD in CHRIST for thy only REST, and fix thy heart upon HIM above all.—May the living God, who is the *rest* of his saints, make these our carnal minds so spiritual and heavenly, that loving Him, and delighting in Him, may be the work of our lives; and that neither I that write, nor thou that readest this book, may ever be turned from this path of life; *lest, a promise being left us of entering into this rest, we should come short of it, through our own unbelief or negligence.*

The Lord reveal to me, what I may reveal to you! The Lord open some light, and shew both you and me our inheritance! Not as to Balaam only, whose eyes were open to see the goodness of Jacob's tents, and Israel's tabernacles, where he had no portion. Not as to Moses only, who saw the land which he never entered; but as the pearl was revealed to the merchant in the gospel, who rested not till he had sold all that he had, and bought it; and, as heaven was opened to Stephen, which he was shortly to enter, and the glory shewed him, which should be his own possession!

The things contained in heavenly rest are such as these:—a ceasing from means of grace;—a perfect freedom from all evils;—the nearest enjoyment of God, the chief good;—and a sweet and constant action, of all the powers of body and soul, in this enjoyment of God.

1. One thing contained in heavenly rest is, the ceasing from means of grace. When we are at our journey's end, we have done with the way. *Whether prophecies, they shall fail; whether tongues, they shall cease; whether knowledge, it also, so far as it had the nature of means, shall vanish away.*¹ There shall be no more prayer, because no more necessity; but the full enjoyment of what we prayed for:

1 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

neither shall we need to fast, and weep, and watch any more, being out of the reach of sin and temptations. Preaching is done; the ministry of man ceaseth; the labourers are called in, because the harvest is gathered, the tares burned, and the work finished; the unregenerate past hope, and the saints past fear for ever.

2. There is in heavenly rest, a perfect freedom from all evils. In heaven there is *nothing that defileth*, or is unclean. All *that remains without*;² and there is no such thing as grief or sorrow known there. *We did weep and lament, when the world did rejoice; but our sorrow is turned into joy, and our joy shall no man take from us.*³

3. The principal part of this rest is, our nearest enjoyment of God, the chief good. And here, reader, wonder not if I be at a loss. If men and angels should study to speak the blessedness of that state in one word, what could they say beyond this, that it is the nearest enjoyment of God! Oh! the full joys offered to a believer, in that one sentence of Christ, "Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me!"⁴ They indeed are happy, that

² Rev. xxi. 27. xxii. 15.—³ John xvi. 20, 22.—⁴ John xvii. 24.

stand continually before God, and see his glory, and the glory of the Lamb. "These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb: therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them: they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." What presumption would it have been once, to have spoken, or thought such things, if God had not spoken them before us! I durst not have thought of the saints' preferment *in this life*, as Scripture sets it forth, had it not been the express truth of God. How indecent to talk of being *sons of God—speaking to him—having fellowship with him—dwelling in him, and he in us*;⁵ if this had not been God's own language! How much less, durst we have once thought, of *shining forth as the sun—of being joint-heirs with Christ—of being one in Him, and the Father*;⁶ if we had not all this from the mouth, and under the hand of God! But "hath he said,

⁵ 1 John iii. 1. i. 3. iv. 16.—⁶ Matt. xiii. 43. Rom. viii. 17.

and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Be of good cheer, Christian; the time is near, when God and thou shalt be as near as thou canst desire. Thou shalt dwell in his family; yea more, thou shalt be an heir of his kingdom; thou shalt be one with Him, who is one with the Father; as he himself hath desired for thee: "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me."⁷

4. This rest contains a sweet and constant action of all the powers of the soul and body, in this enjoyment of God. It is not the rest of a stone, which ceaseth from all motion when it attains the centre. This body shall be so changed, that it shall no more be flesh and blood, which cannot inherit the kingdom of God; but a spiritual body. We sow "not that body that shall be, but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body."^{8*}

⁷ John xvii. 21.—⁸ 1 Cor. xv. 37, 38.

* "The Lord Jesus Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." Phil. iii. 21.—*Ed.*

Doubtless as God advanceth our senses, and enlargeth our capacity, so will he advance the happiness of those senses, and fill up with himself all that capacity. O blessed employment of a glorified body! to stand before the throne of God and the Lamb, and to sound forth for ever, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing; for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests. Alleluia, salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God. Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

The memory will not be idle or useless in this blessed work. From that height, the glorified saint can look behind him and before him. And to compare past with present things, must needs raise an inconceivable esteem and sense of his condition. To stand on that mount, whence he can see the wilderness and Canaan both at once; to stand in heaven, and look back on earth, and weigh them together in the balance of a comparing sense and judgment, how must it transport the soul, and make him cry out, "Is this the purchase, that cost so dear as the blood of Christ! No wonder. O blessed price! O blessed love that conde-

scended and designed. Is this the end of believing! Is this the end of the Spirit's workings! Is this the glory which the Scriptures spoke of, and ministers preached of so much! The gospel is indeed good tidings, even tidings of peace and of great joy to all people. Is my mourning, my fasting, my sad humblings, my heavy walkings, come to this? Is my praying, watching, fearing to offend, come to this? Are all my afflictions, Satan's temptations, the world's scorns and jeers, come to this? Art thou not now ashamed, my soul, that ever thou didst question that love which brought thee hither? That thou doubtedst of the faithfulness of my Lord? That thou suspectedst his love? That ever thou didst quench a motion of his Spirit? and that thou shouldst misinterpret those providences, and repine at those ways, which have such an end? Now thou art convinced, that thy Redeemer was saving thee, as well when he crossed thy desires, as when he granted them; when he broke thy heart, as when he bound it up. No thanks to thee, unworthy self, for this crown; but to Jehovah, and the Lamb, be glory for ever.

But oh, the sweet enjoyment is that of love! Now, the poor soul complains, "O that I could love Christ more!" Then, thou canst not but

love him. Now, thou knowest little of his amiableness; then, thine eyes will affect thy heart, and the continual viewing of that perfect beauty, will keep thee in continual transports of love. Christian, doth it not now stir up thy love, to remember the experiences of his love? doth not Divine goodness warm thy heart? What will it do, when thou shalt live in love, and have all in Him, who is all? What a high favour, that God will give us leave to love him! But more than this, he returneth love for love. Christian, thou wilt then be full of love; yet, love as much as thou canst, thou shalt be more beloved. Were the arms of the Son of God open upon the cross, and will not arms and heart be open to thee in glory? Did he begin to love before thou lovedst, and will he not continue now? Did he love thee, an enemy? a sinner? and will he not now immeasurably love thee, a son?—a perfect saint? He that in love, wept over the old Jerusalem, when near its ruin, with what love will he rejoice over the new Jerusalem, in her glory! Christian, believe this, and think on it: thou shalt be eternally embraced in the arms of that love, which was from everlasting, and will extend to everlasting;—of that love, which brought the Son of God from heaven to earth, from earth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to

glory;—that love, which was weary, hungry, tempted, scorned, scourged, buffeted, spit upon, crucified, pierced; which did fast, pray, teach, heal, weep, sweat, bleed, die;—that love will eternally embrace thee.

And know this, believer, to thy present comfort; that while thou hangest on God by faith, neither sin, earth, nor hell, can move thee. Christ will stick closer to thee than a brother, and he is above all enemies, “with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning.” “Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

But who can set forth the joy in this fruition! 'Tis that which all the former lead to, and conclude in; even the inconceivable complacency which the blessed feel, in seeing, knowing, loving, and being beloved of God. All Christ's ways of mercy tend to, and end in, the saints' joys. He wept, sorrowed, suffered, that they might rejoice; he sendeth the SPIRIT to be their COMFORTER, he multiplies promises, he discovers their future happiness, *that their joy may be full*. And hath the Lord such a care of our comfort here? Oh, what will that joy

be, where the soul being perfectly prepared for joy, and joy prepared by Christ for the soul, it shall be our work, our business, eternally to rejoice! In the mean time, walk carefully, watch constantly, and let God measure out to thee, in the present life, thy times and degrees of joy.

And it is not *thy* joy only; it is a mutual joy, as well as a mutual love. Is there joy in heaven at thy conversion, and will there be none at thy glorification? Will not the angels welcome thee thither, and congratulate thy safe arrival?—Yea, it is the joy of Jesus Christ; for now he hath the end of his undertaking, labour, suffering, dying, when we have our joys; *when he is glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe; when he sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.*



CHAPTER II.

On the great Preparatives to the Saints Rest,—the Judgment, and the Saints' Coronation.

1. THE Judgment. Young and old, of all estates and nations, that ever were, from the creation to that day, must here come and receive their doom.—O terrible, O joyful day!

Terrible to those that have forgotten the coming of their Lord! Joyful to the saints, whose waiting and hope was to see this day! Now, every one must give an account of his stewardship; every talent of time, health, wit, mercies, afflictions, means, warnings, must be reckoned for. The sins of youth, which the wicked had forgotten; and their secret sins, shall all be laid open before angels and men. They shall see the Lord Jesus, whom they neglected, whose word they disobeyed, whose ministers they abused, whose servants they hated, now sitting to judge them. Their own consciences shall cry out against them, and call to their remembrance all their misdoings. Which way will the wretched sinner look? Who can conceive the terrible thoughts of his heart? Now the world cannot help him; his old companions cannot. Time was, sinner, when Christ would, and thou wouldst not; now, fain wouldst thou, and he will not. All in vain, to "cry to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." "I charge thee, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead, at his appearing and his kingdom," that thou set thyself to ponder on these things.

But why tremblest thou, O humble, gracious soul! He that would not lose one Noah in a common deluge, nor overlook one Lot in Sodom, will he forget thee at that day? "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."¹ He knoweth how to make the same day, the greatest terror to his foes, and yet the greatest joy to his people. "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?"² If our Judge condemn us not, who shall? Having *confessed me before men, thee will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven.*³

What inexpressible joy, that our Lord, who loveth our souls, and whom our souls love, shall be our Judge! Will a man fear to be judged by his dearest friend? Christian, did Christ come down, and suffer, and weep, and bleed, and die for thee, and will he now condemn thee? Was he judged, condemned, and executed for thee, and will he now condemn thee himself? Hath he done most of the work already, in redeeming, regenerating, sanctifying, and preserving thee, and will he now undo all?

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 9.—² Rom. viii. 1, 33, 34.—³ Matt. x. 32

Well then, let the terror of that day be never so great, though it make the devils tremble, and the wicked tremble, it shall make the saints rejoice. The great magnificence and dreadfulness of that day, the apostle pathetically expresses, "It is a righteous thing with God, to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day."⁴

2. Another preparative to the saints' rest, is their solemn coronation, and receiving the kingdom. For, as Christ their head is anointed both King and Priest, so, under him, are *his people made unto God both kings and priests, to reign, and to offer praises for ever.*⁵ *The crown of righteousness, which was laid up for them, shall by the Lord, the righteous Judge, be given them at that day.*⁶ They have been *faithful unto death, and therefore he will give*

⁴ Thess. i. 6—10. —⁵ Rev. v. 10. —⁶ 2 Tim. iv. 8.

*them a crown of life.*⁷ With these applauding expressions will he give them possession, “Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord:”⁸ and with this solemn proclamation shall he enthrone them; “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, from the foundation of the world.”⁹ Every word full of life and joy.



CHAPTER III.

The Excellencies of the Saints' Rest.

LET us draw a little nearer, and see what further excellencies this rest affordeth.—The Lord hide us in the clefts of the rock, while we approach to take this view! This rest is excellent for being—a purchased possession;—a free gift;—peculiar to saints;—an association with saints and angels;—yet deriving its joys immediately from God;—and because it will be a perfect and eternal rest.

1. It is a most singular honour of the saints' rest, to be called the purchased possession;”¹

⁷ Rev. ii. 10.—⁸ Matt. xxv. 23.—⁹ Matt. xxv. 34.—¹ Eph. i. 14.

that is, the price of the blood of the Son of God. Greater love than this there is not, to lay down the life of the lover : and to have this our Redeemer ever before our eyes, and the liveliest sense of that dying love still upon our souls, how will it fill us with perpetual joy ! Now he cries to us, “ Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by ? behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow ! ” and we scarce regard the mournful voice, nor turn aside to view the wounds. But then, with what astonishing apprehensions, will redeemed saints everlastingly behold their blessed Redeemer, the Purchaser, and the Price, together with the possession ! Neither will the view of his wounds of love renew our wounds of sorrow. He, whose first words to her who had been a great sinner, after his resurrection, were, “ Woman, why weepest thou ? ”—knows how to raise love and joy, without a cloud of sorrow.

2. Another pearl in the saints' diadem is, that it is a free gift. It was dear to Christ, but it is free to us ; our buying is receiving ; we have it freely, *without money, and without price*. Oh, the everlasting admiration, that must needs surprise the saints to think of this freeness. “ What did the Lord see in me, that he should judge me meet for such a

state! That I, who was a poor despised wretch, should be clad in the brightness of his glory! That I, a worm, should be advanced to this high dignity! That I, who was but lately groaning, weeping, dying, should now be as full of joy as my heart can hold! Who can fathom immeasurable love?"

If it were only for nothing, and without our merit, the wonder were great; but it is moreover against our merit, and against our long endeavouring our own ruin. How astonishing will it be, to think of the immeasurable difference between our deservings and receivings! between the state we should have been in, and the state we are in! What love will it cause within us, to think, "*Yonder was the place, that sin would have brought me to, but this is it, that Christ has brought me to! yonder death, was the wages of my sin, but this eternal life, is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ my Lord!*"

3. This rest is peculiar to saints, belongs to no other, of all the sons of men, yet it is common to all the saints; for it is an association of blessed spirits, both saints and angels, whereof Christ is the head; the communion of saints completed. If the forethought, of sitting "down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of

heaven," may be our lawful joy; how much more, the real sight, and actual possession! To join, with Moses, and David, and all the redeemed, in *the song of the Lamb for ever*; to see *Enoch walking with God*; Noah enjoying the end of his singularity; Joseph, of his integrity; Job, of his patience; and all the saints, *the end of their faith*. Not only our old acquaintances, but all the saints, of all ages, whose faces in the flesh we never saw, we shall there know, and enjoy. Yea, angels, as well as saints, will be our acquaintances; they, who had such *joy in heaven*, for our conversion,¹ will indeed rejoice with us in our glorification.

4. As another property of our rest, we shall derive its joys, immediately from God. The Christian now knows, by experience, that his most immediate joys are his sweetest joys; which have least of man, and are most directly from the SPIRIT. Christians, who are much in secret prayer and contemplation, are men of greatest life and joy; because they have all more immediately from God himself. Not that we should cast off hearing, or reading; or neglect any ordinance of God; but to live above them, while we use them, is the way of a Christian. There is joy in these remote

¹ Luke xv. 7, 10.

receivings; but the fulness of joy, is in God's immediate presence. We shall then have light without candle, and perpetual day without sun; "for the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. There shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."²

5. Still more, this rest will be absolutely perfect. We shall then have joy without sorrow. There are none of those waves in that harbour, which now so toss us up and down; we shall there rest from all the evil, both of sin, and of suffering.

Heaven excludes nothing more directly than sin, whether of nature or of conversation. "There shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie."³ What need Christ to have died, if heaven could have contained imperfect souls? "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."⁴ His blood and Spirit have not done all this, to leave us after all defiled. Christian, in heaven thou shalt sin no more: is not this glad news to thee,

² Rev. xxi. 23. xxii. 5.—³ Rev. xxi. 27.—⁴ 1 John iii. 8.

who hast prayed and watched against it so long? Thou shalt have thy desire:—that hard heart, those vile thoughts, which accompanied thee to almost every duty, shall now be left behind for ever.

We shall there rest from all the temptations of Satan. What a grief is it to a Christian, though he yield not to the temptations, yet to be solicited to deny his Lord!—What a torment, to have such horrid motions made to his soul!—such blasphemous ideas presented to his imagination! sometimes, cruel thoughts of God, undervaluing thoughts of 'Christ, unbelieving thoughts of Scripture, or injurious thoughts of providence!—To be tempted, sometimes to turn to present things, to play with the baits of sin, and venture on the delights of flesh, and sometimes to atheism itself: especially when we know the treachery of our own hearts, ready, as tinder, to take fire, as soon as one of these sparks shall fall upon them! Satan hath power to tempt us here in the wilderness, but he entereth not the holy city: he may take us up into an exceeding high mountain, but the Mount Sion he cannot ascend.

All our temptations from the world, and the flesh, shall also cease. O the hourly dangers that we here walk in! Every sense, and

member, is a snare; every creature, and every duty, is a snare to us. We can scarce open our eyes, but we are in danger of envying those above us, or despising those below us; of coveting the honours and riches of some, or beholding with pride and unmercifulness, the rags and beggary of others. If we see beauty, it is a bait to lust; if deformity, to loathing and disdain: how soon do slanderous reports, vain jests, and wanton speeches, creep into the heart! How constant and strong a watch does our appetite require! Have we comeliness, and beauty? what fuel for pride! Have we strength of reason, and gifts of learning? how prone to be puffed up, hunt after applause, and despise our brethren!—Are we unlearned? how apt then, to despise what we have not! Are we in places of authority? how strong is the temptation to abuse our trust, and to make our will our law. Are we inferiors? how prone to grudge at others' pre-eminence, and bring their actions to the bar of our judgment? Are we rich, and not too much exalted? Are we poor, and not discontented? Are we not lazy in our duties, or make a Christ of them? Not that God hath made all these things our snares; but through our own corruption they become so to us;—ourselves, are the greatest snare to our-

selves. This is our comfort, our rest will free us from all these. There all things shall join with us, in the high praises of our great Deliverer.

Then, we shall rest from all our own personal sufferings. This may seem a small thing, to those that live in ease and prosperity; but to the daily afflicted soul, it makes the thoughts of heaven delightful. O my soul, bear with the infirmities of thine earthly tabernacle; it will be thus but a little while; the sound of thy Redeemer's feet is even at the door.

6. The last jewel of our crown is, that it will be an everlasting rest. Without this, all were comparatively nothing. The very thought of leaving it, would imbitter all our joys. But O blessed eternity! where our lives are perplexed with no such thoughts, nor our joys interrupted with any such fears! O my soul, let go thy dreams of present pleasure, and loose thy hold of earth, and flesh; study frequently, study thoroughly, this one word, **ETERNITY**. What! live, and never die! rejoice, and ever rejoice! O happy souls in hell, should you but escape, after millions of ages! O miserable saints in heaven, should you be dispossessed, after the ages of a million of worlds! **EVERLASTING!** O that the

sinner would study this word; methinks it would startle him out of his dead sleep! O that the gracious soul would study it; methinks it would revive him, in his deepest agony!

Thus I have endeavoured to shew thee a glimpse of approaching glory; but how short are my expressions of its excellency! Reader, if thou be an humble, sincere believer, and wait with longing and labouring for this rest, thou wilt soon see, and feel, the truth of all this, and wilt find that what is here said, falls far short of the whole truth. In the mean time, let this much, kindle thy desires, and quicken thy endeavours. Up and be doing, run, and strive, and fight, and hold on; for thou hast a certain, glorious prize before thee. God will not mock thee; do not mock thyself, nor betray thy soul by delaying, and all is thine own. What kind of men, dost thou think, would Christians be in their lives and duties, if they had still this glory fresh in their thoughts? What frame would their spirits be in, if their thoughts of heaven were lively and believing? Would their hearts be so heavy? or would they take up their comforts from below? May the Lord heal our carnal hearts, lest we enter not into this rest, because of unbelief.

CHAPTER IV.

The Character of the Persons for whom this rest is designed.

THE persons for whom this rest is designed, are "a holy people;" deeply convinced of the evil, and misery, of a sinful state; the vanity of the creature, and the all-sufficiency of Christ; their will is renewed, they engage themselves to Christ in covenant, and persevere to the end.

1. They are "a holy people" and are called "the people of God." That they are but a part of mankind, is too apparent in scripture and experience. Fewer they are, than the world imagines; yet not so few, as some drooping spirits think, who are suspicious that God is unwilling to be their God, when they know themselves willing to be his people.

2. The new life in the people of God discovers itself by conviction, or a deep sense of divine things: as for instance—They are con-

vinced of the evil of sin. The sinner is made to know, and feel, that the sin, which was his delight, is loathsome, and that it is a greater evil than plague or famine; being a breach of the righteous law of the most high God, dishonourable to him, and destructive to the sinner. Now, the sinner no more hears the reproofs for sin, as words of course; but the mention of his sin speaks to his very heart, and yet he is contented you should shew him the worst. He was wont to marvel, what made men keep up such a stir against sin, what harm it was for a man to take a little forbidden pleasure; he saw no such heinousness in it, that Christ must needs die for it, and a Christless world be eternally tormented in hell. Now, the case is altered; God hath opened his eyes, to see the inexpressible vileness of sin.

They are convinced of their own misery by reason of sin. They who before, read the threats of God's law, as men do the story of foreign wars, now, find it their own story, and perceive they read their own doom; as if they found their names written in the curse, or heard the law say, as Nathan to David, "Thou art the man." He now finds himself a condemned man; and that nothing was wanting but mere execution, to make him

absolutely, and irrecoverably miserable. This conviction is a work of the HOLY SPIRIT, wrought in some measure, in all the regenerate.—How should *he* come to Christ for pardon, that did not first find himself guilty and condemned? or for life, that never found himself spiritually dead! *The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*

3. They are also convinced of the creature's vanity, and insufficiency. Every man is naturally, an idolater. Our hearts turned from God in our first fall, and ever since, the creature hath been our god.—This is the grand sin of nature. Every unregenerate man, ascribes to the creature divine prerogatives, and allows it the highest room in his soul. Christ may be *called* Lord, and Saviour; but the real expectation is from the creature. It was our first sin, to aspire to be as gods; and it is the greatest sin, that is propagated in our nature, from generation to generation. When God should guide us, we guide ourselves; when he should be our Sovereign, we rule ourselves; the law which he gives us, we find fault with, and would correct; when he should take care of us, (and must, or we perish,) we will take care of ourselves; when we should submit to his providence, we usually quarrel with it, and think we could

make a better disposal than God hath made. —When we should study and love, trust and honour God, we study and love, trust and honour, ourselves. We would have men's eyes and dependence on *us* instead of on God, and men's thanks returned to us; and would gladly be extolled and admired by all. Thus, we are naturally our own idols. But down falls this Dagon, when God does once renew the soul. It is the chief design of that great work, to bring the heart back to God himself. He convinceth the sinner, that the creature can neither make him happy, nor recover him from his misery. God does this, not only by his word, but by his providence also. This is the reason, why affliction so frequently concurs, in the work of conversion. Arguments which speak to the quick, will force a hearing, when the most powerful words are slighted. If a sinner hath made his credit his god, and God shall cast him into the lowest disgrace; or bring him, who idolized his riches, into a condition wherein they cannot help him; or cause them to take wing, and fly away; what a help is here to this work of conviction! If a man hath made pleasure his god, whatsoever a roving eye, a curious ear, a greedy appetite, or a lustful heart could desire, and God should take these

from him, or turn them into gall and wormwood, what a help is here to conviction! When God shall cast a man into languishing sickness, and stir up against him his own conscience, and then, as it were, say to him, "Try if thy credit, riches, or pleasures, can help thee! Can they heal thy wounded conscience? support thy tottering tabernacle? or save thee from mine everlasting wrath? See now, whether these will be to thee instead of God and Christ." O how this works now with the sinner! Our very deceiver is undeceived.

4. The people of God, are likewise convinced of the absolute necessity, the full sufficiency, and perfect excellency, of Jesus Christ; as a man in famine is convinced of the necessity of food; or a man that had heard his sentence of condemnation, of the absolute necessity of pardon. Now, the sinner feels an insupportable burden upon him, and sees there is none but Christ can take it off. He perceives the law proclaims him a rebel, and none but Christ can make his peace: he is as a man pursued by a lion, that must perish, if he finds not a present sanctuary: he is now brought to this dilemma; either he must have Christ to justify him, or be eternally condemned; have Christ to save

him, or burn in hell for ever; have Christ to bring him to God, or be shut out of his presence everlastingly: and no wonder if he cry, as the martyr, "None but Christ, none but Christ." *All things are counted but dung now, that he may win Christ.* As the sinner sees his misery, and the inability of himself, and all things to relieve him, so he perceives there is no saving mercy out of Christ. He sees, though the creature cannot, and himself cannot, yet Christ can. Though the fig-leaves of our own unrighteous righteousness, are too short to cover our nakedness, yet the righteousness of Christ is large enough. Ours is disproportionate to the justice of the law, but Christ's extends to every tittle. If he intercede, there is no denial; such is the dignity of his person, and the value of his merits, that the Father grants all he desires.—Before, the sinner knew Christ's excellency, as a blind man knows the light of the sun; but now, as one that beholds its glory.

5. After this deep conviction, the will discovers also its change: as for instance—the sin, which the understanding pronounces evil, the will turns from with abhorrence. Not that the sensitive appetite is changed, or any way made to abhor its object; but when *it* would prevail against reason, and carry

us to sin against God, this disorder and evil, the will abhors.—The misery also which sin hath procured, is not only discerned, but bewailed. It is impossible, that the sinner should now look, either on his trespass against God, or yet on his own self-procured calamity, without some contrition : if he cannot weep, he can heartily groan ; and his heart feels, what his understanding sees. The creature is renounced as vanity ; and turned out of the heart. Not that it is undervalued, or the use of it disclaimed ; but its idolatrous abuse, and its unjust usurpation. Can Christ be the way, where the creature is the end ? Can we seek to Christ to reconcile us to God, while in our hearts we prefer the creature before him ? As turning from the creature to God, and not by Christ, is no true turning ; so believing in Christ, while the creature hath our hearts, is no true believing. Our aversion from sin, renouncing our idols, and our right receiving Christ, is all but one work. Having been convinced, that nothing else can be his happiness, the sinner now finds it is in God. Convinced also, that Christ alone is able, and willing to make peace for him, he most affectionately accepts of Christ, for Saviour and Lord. Paul's preaching was "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus

Christ :"⁸ *and life eternal, consists in knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.*⁹ To take Jehovah for our God, is the natural part of the covenant; the supernatural part is, to take Christ for our Redeemer: the former is first necessary, and implied in the latter. To accept Christ without affection and love, is not justifying faith; for FAITH IS THE RECEIVING OF CHRIST WITH THE WHOLE SOUL. *He that loveth father or mother more than Christ, is not worthy of him, nor is justified by him.* Faith accepts him for Saviour and Lord; for in both relations must he be received, or not at all. Faith, not only acknowledges his sufferings, and accepts of pardon and glory, but acknowledges his sovereignty, and submits to his government and way of salvation.

6. As an essential part of the character of God's people, they now enter into a cordial covenant with Christ, in which they persevere. With this covenant, Christ delivers up himself, in all comfortable relations to the sinner; and the sinner delivers up himself, to be saved, and ruled by Christ.—Now the soul resolutely concludes, "I have been blindly led by flesh and lust, by the world and the devil, almost to my utter destruction; I will now be wholly

⁸ Acts xx. 21.—⁹ John xvii. 3.

at the disposal of my Lord, who hath bought me with his blood, and will bring me to his glory.

Such are the essentials of this people of God. Not a full portraiture of them in all their excellencies. I beseech thee, reader, as thou hast the hope of a Christian, or the reason of a man, judge thyself, as one that must shortly be judged by a righteous God, and faithfully answer these questions. I will not inquire, whether thou rememberest the time, or order, of these workings of the Spirit; there may be much uncertainty and mistake in that: if thou art sure they are wrought in thee, it is not important though thou knowest not when, or how, thou camest by them. Hast thou been thoroughly convinced of a prevailing depravity, through thy whole soul? and how vile sin is? Dost thou consent to the law, that it is true and righteous, and perceive thyself sentenced to death by it? Hast thou seen the utter insufficiency of every creature, either to be itself thy happiness, or the means of removing this thy misery? Hast thou been convinced that thy happiness is only in God, as the end, and in Christ, as the way to him? and that thou must be brought to God, through Christ, or perish eternally? Have thy convictions been like those of a man

that thirsts ; and not merely a change in opinion, produced by reading, or education ? Have both thy sin, and misery, been the abhorrence, and burden of thy soul ? Hast thou renounced all thy own righteousness ? Hast thou turned thy idols out of thy heart ? Dost thou accept of Christ, as thy only Saviour, and expect thy justification, recovery, and glory, from him alone ? Are his laws most powerful commanders of thy life ? Do they ordinarily, prevail against the commands of the flesh, and against thy credit, profit, pleasure, or life ? Has Christ the highest room in thy affections, so that, though thou dost not love him as thou wouldst, yet nothing else is loved so much ? If this be truly thy case, thou art one of the people of God ; and, as sure as the promise of God is true, this blessed rest remains for thee. Only see thou *abide in Christ, and endure to the end ; for if any man draw back, his soul shall have no pleasure in him.* But if no such work be found within thee ; whatever thy deceived heart may think, or how strong soever thy false hopes may be, thou wilt find to thy cost, except thorough conversion prevent it, that the Rest of the Saints belongs not to thee. O that thou wert wise, that thou wouldst understand this, that thou wouldst

consider thy latter end! That yet, while thy soul is in thy body, and opportunity and hope before thee, thine ears may be open, and thy heart yield to the persuasions of God, that so thou mayest rest among his people, and enjoy the “inheritance of the saints in light!”

That this rest shall be enjoyed by the people of God, is a truth which the Scripture, if its testimony be further needed, clearly asserts in a variety of ways. As the firmament with stars, so are the sacred pages, bespangled with these divine engagements. Christ says, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.¹ I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom,”² &c. &c.—All the means of grace, the operations of the Spirit upon the soul; every command to repent and believe, to fast and pray, to knock and seek, to strive and labour, to run and fight, do prove, that there remains a rest for the people of God.

Scripture, not only proves, that this rest remains for the people of God, but also, that it remains for none but them; so that the rest of the world shall have no part in it. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”³

1 Luke xii. 32.—2 Luke xxii. 29, 30.—3 Heb. xii. 14.

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.⁴ No whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God.⁵ The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.⁶ "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.⁷ That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."⁸ Had the ungodly returned, before their life was expired, and been heartily willing to accept of Christ, for their Saviour and their King, and to be saved by him *in his way*, and upon his most reasonable terms, they might have been saved. God freely offered them life, and they would not accept it: nay, although God pressed them earnestly, and persuaded them importunately, they would not: the pleasures of

⁴ John iii. 3, 36.—⁵ Ephes. v. 5.—⁶ Psalm ix. 17.

⁷ & Thess. i. 7, 9.—⁸ 2 Thess. ii. 12

flesh seemed more desirable to them, than the glory of the saints. Satan offered them the one, and God offered them the other, and they had free liberty to choose which they would, and they chose *the pleasure of sin for a season*, before the everlasting rest with Christ.

CHAPTER V.

The great Misery of those who lose the Saints' Rest.

IF thou, reader, art a stranger to Christ, and to the holy nature and life of his people, who are before described, and shalt live and die in this condition, let me tell thee, thou shalt never partake of the joys of heaven, nor have the least taste of the saints' eternal rest. I may say, "I have a message to thee from God;" that, as the word of God is true, thou shalt never see the face of God with comfort. This sentence, I am commanded to pass upon thee; take it as thou wilt, and escape it if thou canst. I know thy humble and hearty subjection to Christ, would procure thy escape; he would then acknowledge thee for one of his people,

and give thee a portion in the inheritance of his chosen.—If this might be the happy success of my message, I should be so far from repining, like Jonah, that the threatenings of God are not executed upon thee, that I should bless the day, that ever God made me so happy a messenger. But if thou end thy days in thy unregenerate state, as sure as the heavens are over thy head, and the earth under thy feet, thou shalt be shut out of the rest of the saints, and receive thy portion in everlasting fire. I expect thou wilt turn upon me, and say, “When did God shew you the book of life, or tell you who they are that shall be saved, and who shut out?” I answer, I do not name thee, nor any other; I only conclude it of the unregenerate in general, and of thee, if thou be such a one. Nor do I go about to determine, who shall repent, and who shall not; much less that thou shalt never repent. I had rather shew thee what hopes thou hast before thee, if thou wilt not sit still, and lose them. I would far rather persuade thee to hearken in time, before the door be shut against thee, than tell thee, there is no hope of thy repenting and returning. But if the foregoing description of the people of God, does not agree with the state of thy soul, is it then a hard question, whether thou shalt ever be saved? Need I ascend up

into heaven to know, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord; or, that only the pure in heart shall see God; or, that except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God? Need I go up to heaven, to inquire that of Christ, which he came down to earth to tell us, and sent his Spirit in his apostles to tell us; and which he and they have left upon record to all the world?—And though I know not the secrets of thy heart, and therefore cannot tell thee by name, whether it be thy state, or not; yet if thou art but willing, and diligent, thou thyself mayest know, whether thou art an heir of heaven, or not. It is the main thing I desire, that if thou art yet miserable, thou mayest discern and escape it: but how canst thou escape, if thou neglect Christ, and salvation? It is as impossible, as for the devils themselves to be saved. When Belshazzar saw the finger of a man's hand, that wrote upon the wall, his knees smote one against another. What trembling then should seize on thee, who hast the hand of God against thee, not in a sentence or two, but in the very scope of the scriptures, threatening the loss of an everlasting kingdom! Because I would fain have thee lay it to heart, I will shew thee—the nature of thy loss of heaven—together with its aggravations.

I. In their loss of heaven, the ungodly lose God himself,—all delightful affections towards God,—and the blessed society of angels and saints.

1. The ungodly shall have no comfortable relation to God, nor communion with him. As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, but said unto him, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;” so God will not admit them to the inheritance of his saints, nor endure them to stand in his presence, but will profess unto them, “I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” They are ready now, to lay as confident claim to Christ, and heaven, as if they were sincere believing saints. The swearer, the drunkard, the whoremaster, the worldling, can say, Is not God our Father, as well as yours? But, when Christ separates his followers from his foes, and his faithful friends from his deceived flatterers, where then will be their presumptuous claim? Then, they shall find that God is not their Father; because they would not be his people. As they would not consent that God, by his Spirit, should dwell in them, so the tabernacle of wickedness shall have no fellowship with him, nor the wicked inhabit the city of God. Only they that walked with God here, shall live and be

happy with him in heaven.—Little does the world know what a loss that soul hath, who loses God! What a dungeon would earth be, if it had lost the sun! Yet this is nothing to the loss of God. As the enjoyment of God is the enjoyment of all, so the loss of God is the loss of all.

2. They also lose all delightful affections towards God:—that transporting knowledge; those delightful views of his glorious face; the inconceivable pleasure of loving him; the apprehensions of his infinite love to us; the constant joys of his saints; and the rivers of consolation with which he satisfies them.—Is it nothing to lose all this? Your hearts, sinners, were not set upon God in your lives; you would rather have continued on earth, if you had known how. Is it meet then, that you should be members of the celestial choir?

3. They shall be deprived of the blessed society of angels and glorified saints. Instead of being companions of those happy spirits, they must be members of the corporation of hell, where they shall have companions of a far different nature. Sinners, you will be shut out of that company, from which you first shut out yourselves; and be separated from them, with whom you would not be joined.

II. I know many will be ready to think they could spare these things, in this world, well

enough; and why may they not do without them in the world to come? therefore, to shew them that this loss of heaven will then be most tormenting, let them now consider—Their understandings will be cleared to know their loss,—their consciences will make a closer application of it to themselves,—their perceptions will no longer be stupified,—nor their memories be treacherous.

1. The understanding of the ungodly will then be cleared, to know the worth of that which they have lost. Now they lament not their loss of God, because they never knew his excellence; nor the loss of that holy employment and society, for they were never sensible what they were worth. A man that has lost a jewel, and took it but for a common stone, is never troubled at his loss; but when he comes to know *what* he has lost, then he laments it. Though the understandings of the damned will not be sanctified, yet they will be cleared from a multitude of errors. They now think that their honours, estates, pleasures, health, and life, are better worth their labour, than the things of another world; but when these things have left them in misery, when they experience the things, which before they did but read and hear of, they will be of another mind. They would not believe that the fire would burn, till

they were cast into it : but when they feel, they will then believe. What deep apprehensions of the wrath of God, the madness of sinning, the misery of sinners, have those souls that now endure this misery, in comparison with those on earth, that do but hear of it ! What sensibility of the worth of life, has the condemned man that is going to be executed, compared with what he was wont to have, in the time of his prosperity ! Much more will the actual loss of eternal blessedness, make the damned exceedingly apprehensive of the greatness of their loss.

2. Their consciences also, will make a truer and closer application of this doctrine to themselves, which will exceedingly tend to increase their torment. The want of this self-application, is the main cause why they are so little troubled now. They are hardly brought to believe, that there is such a state of misery ; but more hardly to believe, that it is likely to be their own. This, makes so many sermons lost to them, and all threatenings and warnings in vain. Let a minister of Christ shew them their misery ever so plainly, they will not be persuaded they are so miserable ; let him tell them of the glory they must lose, and the sufferings they must feel, and they think he means not them, but some notorious sinners. It is

one of the most difficult things, to bring a wicked man to know that he is wicked, and to make him see himself in a state of wrath and condemnation. Though they may easily find, by their strangeness to the new birth, and their enmity to holiness, that they never were partakers of them; yet they as verily expect to see God, and be saved, as if they were the most sanctified persons in the world.

3. Then will their perceptions likewise be more lively, and no longer stupified. A hard heart now makes heaven and hell seem but trifles. We have shewed them everlasting glory and misery, and they are as men asleep; our words are as stones cast against a wall, which fly back in our faces; we talk of terrible things, but it is to dead men; we search the wounds, but they never feel us; we speak to rocks, rather than to men; the earth will as soon tremble as they. But when these dead souls are revived, what passionate sensibility! what pangs of horror! what depth of sorrow, will there then be! How long will they rage against their former madness! The lamentations of the most affectionate wife, for the loss of her husband, will be nothing to theirs, for the loss of heaven. O the self-accusing, and self-tormenting fury of those forlorn creatures! how

will they even tear their own hearts, and be God's executioners upon themselves!

4. Their memories, will moreover, be as large and strong as their understanding and affections. Though they would account annihilation a singular mercy, they cannot lay aside any part of their being. Understanding, conscience, affections, memory, must all live to torment them. As, by these, they should have fed upon the love of God, and drawn forth perpetually the joys of his presence; so, by these, must they feed upon his wrath, and draw forth continually the pains of his absence.

It will torment them, to think of the greatness of the glory they have lost. If it had been a loss to be repaired, it had been a smaller matter; but Oh! to lose that exceeding, eternal weight of glory! To think also, of the possibility they once had of obtaining it. "Time was, when I was as fair for the kingdom as others; I was set upon the stage of the world; if I had performed my part faithfully, I might have been among yonder blessed saints. The Lord did set before me life and death, and I chose death. The prize was held out to me; if I had run well, I might have obtained it;— if I had striven, I might have had the victory." It will torment them to remember, that their obtaining the crown was not only possible, but

very probable. "I had once the Spirit ready to have assisted me. I was proposing to be another man, to cleave to Christ, and forsake the world. I was once, even turning from my base seducing lusts. I had cast off my old companions, and was associating with the godly. Yet I turned back, lost my hold, and broke my promises. Oh, how fair was I once for heaven! I almost had it, and yet I have lost it."

It will exceedingly torment them, to remember their lost opportunities. Weeks, and months, and years, did I lose which had I improved, I might now have been happy. Wretch that I was! could I find no time to study the work, for which I had all my time! Had I time for mirth, and vain discourse, and none for prayer? O precious time! once I knew not what to do with it; now it is gone, and cannot be recalled. Oh, that I had but one of those years to live over again; how speedily would I repent! how earnestly would I pray! how strictly would I live! But it is now too late, alas! too late.

It will add to their calamity, to remember how often they were persuaded to return. "Fain would the ministers of Christ have had me escape these torments. With what love and compassion did they beseech me! and yet

I did but make a jest of it: how did they open to me my very heart! Oh, how glad would they have been, if they could have seen me cordially turn to Christ! My godly friends admonished me. They told me what would become of my wilfulness and negligence at last; but I neither believed nor regarded them. How long did God himself condescend to entreat me! How did the Spirit strive with my heart, as if He was loth to take a denial! How did Christ stand knocking and crying to me, 'Open, sinner, open thy heart, why dost thou delay? Wilt thou not be pardoned, and sanctified, and made happy?' Oh, how the recollection of such divine pleadings, will passionately transport the damned with self-indignation! 'Must I tire out the patience of Christ? must I make the God of heaven follow me in vain, till I had wearied him with crying to me, repent, return? Oh, how justly is that patience now turned into fury, which falls upon me with irresistible violence! When the Lord cried to me, Wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be? my heart, or at least my practice, answered, Never. And now when I cry, Oh, when shall I be freed from this torment? how justly do I receive the same answer, Never, never.'"

It will also be most cutting, to remember

on what easy terms they might have escaped their misery. It was but to repent, and cordially accept Christ for their Saviour; to renounce the world and the flesh; to forsake the ways of their own devising, and walk in his holy delightful way—"Ah," thinks the tormented wretch, "how justly do I suffer all this, who would not be at so small pains to avoid it! Where was my understanding, when I called the Lord a hard master, and thought the service of the devil and the flesh the only freedom? When I censured the holy way of God as needless preciseness? when I thought the laws of Christ too strict. If Christ had bid me do some great thing, even to suffer death a hundred times over, should I not have done it?—how much more, when he only said, 'Believe, and be saved. Seek my face, and thy soul shall live. Take up thy cross, and follow me, and I will give thee everlasting life.' O gracious offer! O easy terms! O cursed wretch, that would not be persuaded to accept them!"

The remembrance of what they sold their eternal welfare for, will be most tormenting. When they compare the value of the pleasures of sin, with the value of the recompense of reward, how will the vast disproportion astonish them! to think of the low delights of

the flesh, or the applause of mortals, or the possession of heaps of gold; and then to think of everlasting glory, "This, is all I had for my soul, my God, my hopes of blessedness!" "O miserable wretch! did I set my soul to sale for so base a price? did I sell my Saviour, like Judas, for a little silver? what a mad exchange did I make! What if I had gained all the world, and lost my soul? but, alas! for how small a part did I give up my part in glory!" O that sinners would think of this, when they are swimming in the delights of the flesh, and studying how to be rich and honourable in the world! when they are desperately venturing upon known transgression, and sinning against the checks of conscience.

It will yet add to their torment, when they consider, that they wilfully procured their own destruction. To think it was the choice of their own will, and that none in the world could have forced them to sin against their will; this will be a cutting thought. "Had I not enemies enough in the world, (thinks this miserable creature,) but I must be an enemy to myself? God would never give the devil, nor the world, power to force me to commit the least transgression; they could but entice; it was myself that yielded, and

did the evil : never had I so great an enemy as myself. Thus will it gnaw the heart of sinners to remember, that they were the cause of their own undoing.

O that God would persuade thee, reader, to take up these thoughts now, for preventing the inconceivable calamity of taking them up in hell. Say not, that they are only imaginary; read what Dives thought, "being in torments."¹

CHAPTER VI.

The sufferings and misery of those, who, besides losing the Saints' Rest, lose the Enjoyments of Time, and suffer the Torments of Hell.

As godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come; and if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then all meaner things shall be added unto us: so also, are the ungodly threatened with the loss both of spiritual and temporal blessings; and because they sought not first God's kingdom and righteousness,

¹ Luke xvi. 24.

therefore they shall lose both it, and that which they did seek; and there shall be taken from them that little which they have.—If they could but have kept their present enjoyments, they would not have much cared for the loss of heaven. If they had lost and forsaken all for Christ, they would have found all again in him: for he would have been all in all to them: but now they have forsaken Christ for other things, they shall lose Christ, and that also, for which they forsook him; even the enjoyments of time—besides suffering the torments of hell.

I. Among the enjoyments of time, they shall particularly lose—their presumptuous belief of their interest in the merits of Christ;—all their hopes;—all their false peace of conscience;—all their carnal mirth, and all their sensual delights.

1. They shall lose their presumptuous belief of their interest in the merits of Christ. This false belief now supports their spirits, and defends them from the terrors that would otherwise seize upon them; but what will ease their trouble, when they can believe no longer? If a man be near to the greatest mischief, and yet strongly conceit that he is in safety, he may be as cheerful as if all were well. As true faith is the leading grace in

the regenerate, so is false faith the leading vice in the unregenerate. Why do such multitudes sit still, when they might have pardon, but that they verily think they are pardoned already, or have little doubt but they shall be. If you could ask thousands in hell, what madness brought them thither? they would answer, "We made sure of being saved, till we found ourselves damned. We would have been more earnest seekers of regeneration, and the power of godliness, but we verily thought we were Christians before." Reader, I must in faithfulness tell thee, that the confident belief of their good state, which the careless, unholy, unhumbled multitude so commonly boast of, will prove in the end a most dreadful delusion. It is Satan's stratagem, that being blindfold they may follow him the more boldly.

2. They shall lose also all their hopes. In this life, though they were threatened with the wrath of God, yet the hope of their escaping it bore up their hearts. We can now scarce speak with the vilest drunkard, or swearer, or scoffer, but he hopes to be saved for all this. Oh the sad state of these men, when they must bid farewell to all their hopes! "When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish; and the hope of

unjust men perisheth." "The eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost." It is the most pitiable sight this world affords, to see an ungodly person dying and to think of his soul and his hopes departing together. With what a sad change he appears in another world! If a man could but ask that hopeless soul; Art thou as confident of salvation as thou wast wont to be? What a sad answer would be returned! O, that careless sinners would be awakened to think of this in time!

Reader, rest not till thou canst give a reason of thy hopes, grounded upon scripture promises; that they purify thy heart; that they quicken thy endeavours in godliness; that the more thou hopest, the less thou sinnest; and the more exact is thy obedience. If thy hopes be such as these, go on in the strength of the Lord, hold fast thy hope, and never shall it make thee ashamed. But, if thou hast no sound evidence of a work of grace on thy soul, cast away thy hopes; despair of ever being saved, except thou be born again; or of seeing God without holiness; or of having part in Christ, except thou love him above all. This kind of despair is one of the first steps to heaven. If a man be

quite out of his way, what must be the first means to bring him in again? He must despair of ever coming to his journey's end, in the way that he is in. If his home be eastward, and he is going westward, as long as he hopes he is right, he will go on; and as long as he goes on hoping, he goes farther amiss. When he despairs of coming home except he turn back, then he will return, and then he may hope. So it is, sinner, with thy soul. Thou art born out of the way to heaven, and hast proceeded many a year; thou goest on, and hopest to be saved, because thou art not so bad as many others. Except thou throwest away these hopes, and seest that thou art quite out of the way to heaven, thou wilt never return and be saved. There is nothing more likely to keep thy soul out of heaven, than thy false hopes of being saved, while thou art out of the way to salvation. See then, how it will aggravate the misery of the damned, that, with the loss of heaven, they shall lose all that hope of it, which now supports them.

3. They will lose all that false peace of conscience, which makes their present life so easy. Who would think, that sees how quietly the multitude of the ungodly live, that they must very shortly lie down in everlasting

flames! They are as free from the fears of hell, as an obedient believer; and for the most part have less disquiet of mind, than those who shall be saved. Happy men, if this peace would prove lasting! But "when they shall say peace and safety: then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."² The soul of every man by nature, is Satan's garrison: all is at peace in such a man, till Christ comes, and gives it alarms of judgment and hell, batters it with the ordnance of his terrors, forces it to yield to his mere mercy, and take him for the governor; then doth he cast out Satan, *overcome him, take from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils*, and then doth he establish a firm and lasting peace. If, therefore, thou art yet in that first peace, never think it will endure. Oh! that God might break in upon thy careless heart, and shake thee out of thy false peace, and make thee lie down at the feet of Christ, and say, "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?"

4. They shall lose all their carnal mirth. The talk of death and judgment was irksome to them, because it damped their mirth. They could not endure to think of their sin and

danger, because these thoughts sunk their spirits. They could laugh away sorrow, and sing away care, but to meditate and pray, they fancied, would be enough to make them miserable, or run mad. Poor souls, what a misery will that life be, where you shall have nothing but sorrow; intense, heart-piercing, multiplied sorrow; when you shall neither have the joys of saints, nor your own former joys? Do you think there is one merry heart in hell; or one jesting tongue? You now cry, a little mirth is worth a great deal of sorrow. But, surely, a little godly sorrow, which would have ended in eternal joy, had been worth much more than all your foolish mirth; for the end of such mirth is sorrow

5. They shall also lose all their sensual delights. That which they esteemed their chief good, must they lose, as well as God himself. The rich man is there, no more clothed in purple and fine linen, nor faring sumptuously every day: there, is no expecting the admiration of beholders. They shall spend their time in sadness, and not in sports and pastimes. How will it even cut them to the heart, to look each other in the face! What an interview will there then be, cursing the day that ever they saw one another! O that sinners would now think of this, and

instead of helping to deceive and destroy each other, would help one another towards heaven. O, that men knew what they desire, when they would so fain have all things suited to the desires of the flesh! It is but to desire their temptations to be increased, and their snares strengthened.

II. As the loss of the saints' rest will be aggravated, by losing the enjoyments of time, it will be much more so, by suffering the torments of hell. The exceeding greatness of such torments, may appear by considering,—that it is God who will punish the wicked;—the place or state of torment;—that these torments will be without mitigation;—and without end.

1. Consider, it is God whom sinners have offended, so it is no less than God, who will punish them for their offences. Woe to him that falls under the strokes of the Almighty! “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” It were nothing in comparison to this, if the world were against them, or if the strength of all creatures were united in one, to inflict their penalty. They had now, rather venture to displease God, than displease a landlord, a customer, a master, a friend, a neighbour, or their own flesh; but then, they will wish a thousand times in vain,

that they had been hated of all the world, rather than have lost the favour of God.

2. Consider the place or state of torment. What a consuming fire is the wrath of God! If it be kindled *here* but a little, how do we wither like grass! The sea shuts her mouth upon some, the earth opens and swallows up others; the pestilence destroys by thousands. Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, are burnt with fire from heaven. The whole world except only eight persons are drowned. What a standing witness of the wrath of God, is the present deplorable state of the Jews! Yet the glorifying of the mercy and justice of God, is intended most eminently for the life to come. As God will then glorify his mercy, in a way that is now beyond the comprehension of the saints who must enjoy it; so also, will he manifest his justice, to be indeed the justice of God.

The everlasting flames of hell will then be the portion of the rebellious. Those eyes, which were wont to be delighted with curious sights, must there see nothing but what shall terrify them: an angry God above, and about them, only devils and damned souls. How will they look back, and say, "Are all our feasts, and games, and revels come to this?" Those ears, which were accustomed to music

and songs, shall hear the shrieks and cries of their damned companions; children crying out against their parents, that gave them encouragement and example in evil; husbands and wives, masters and servants, ministers and people, magistrates and subjects, charging their misery upon one another, for discouraging in duty, conniving at sin, and being silent, when they should have plainly foretold the danger.

3. Far greater will these torments be, because without mitigation. In this life, when told of hell, or if conscience troubled their peace, they had comforters at hand; their carnal friends, their business, their company, their mirth; they could drink, play, or sleep away their sorrows; but now, all these remedies are vanished. Their hard, presumptuous, unbelieving heart, was a wall to defend them against trouble of mind. Satan was himself their comforter, as he was to our first mother. "Hath God said, ye shall not eat?—ye shall not surely die.—Doth God tell you that you shall lie in hell?—It is no such matter. God is more merciful.—Or if there be a hell, what need you fear it?—Are not you Christians? Was not the blood of Christ shed for you?" Thus, as the Spirit of Christ is the Comforter of the saints, so Satan is the comforter of the

wicked. Never was a thief more careful, lest he should awake the people, when he is robbing the house, than Satan is, not to awaken a sinner. But when the sinner is dead, then Satan hath done flattering and comforting.

4. But the greatest aggravation of these torments, will be their eternity. When millions of ages are past, they are as fresh to begin as the first day. If there were any hope of an end, it would ease the damned to foresee it, but FOR EVER is an intolerable thought. How will they call and cry, "O death! whither art thou gone? now come, and cut off this doleful life. O, that these pains would break my heart, and end my being! O, that I might once at last die! O, that I had never had a being!" These groans will the thoughts of eternity wring from their hearts. Sinner, remember how time is almost gone. Thou art standing at the door of eternity; and death is waiting to open the door, and put thee in. Go sleep out a few more nights, and stir about a few more days on earth, and then thy nights and days shall end; and thou must enter upon that state, which shall never be changed. As the joys of heaven are beyond our conception, so are the pains of hell.

But methinks I see the obstinate sinner desperately resolving, "If I must be damned, there is no remedy: rather than I will live as the Scriptures require, I will put it to the venture; I shall escape as well as the rest of my neighbours, and we will even bear it as well as we can." Alas! poor creature, let me beg of thee, before thou dost so flatly resolve; that thou wouldst lend me thy attention to a few questions, and weigh them with the reason of a man. Who art thou, that thou shouldst bear the wrath of God? What is thy strength? is it not as the strength of stubble to the fire; or as chaff to the wind; or as dust before the whirlwind? If thy strength were as iron, and thy bones as brass; if thy foundation were as the earth, and thy power as the heavens; yet shouldst thou perish at the breath of his indignation. How much more, when thou art but flesh; kept a few days from being eaten with worms, by the mere support and favour, of him whom thou art thus resisting! If thou hadst seen the plagues of Egypt; or the earth swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; would not these sights have daunted thy spirits? How then, canst thou bear the plagues of hell? Why art thou dismayed with small sufferings such as befall thee here? a fit of the gout, or stone,

the loss of a limb ; or falling into beggary and disgrace ? and yet all these laid together, will be one day, accounted a happy state, in comparison of that which is suffered in hell. Why does the approach of death so much affright thee ? O, how cold it strikes to thy heart ! and would not the grave be accounted a paradise, compared with the place of torment which thou slightest ? Is it an intolerable thing to burn a part of the body, by holding it in the fire ? what then, will it be to suffer ten thousand times more for ever in hell ? Why does the thought or mention of hell, occasion any disquiet in thy spirit ?—and canst thou endure the torments themselves ?—If thou shouldest see the devil appear to thee, in some terrible shape ; would not thy heart fail thee, and thy hair stand an end ? and how wilt thou endure to live for ever, where thou shalt have no other company but devils, and the damned ; and shalt not only see them, but be tormented with them, and by them ? Woe to thee, sinner, for thy mad security ! may the Lord bring thee to thy right mind by repentance.

And now, reader, I demand thy resolution ; what use wilt thou make of all this ? Shall it all be lost to thee ? or wilt thou consider it in good earnest ?—Thou hast cast away many a

warning of God ; wilt thou do so by this also? Take heed, God will not always stand warning and threatening: the hand of vengeance is lifted up, the blow is coming, and woe to him on whom it lighteth ! Dost thou throw away the book, and say, It speaks of nothing but hell and damnation ?—thus thou usest also to complain of the preacher. But wouldst thou not have us to tell thee of these things ?—should we be guilty of the blood of thy soul, by keeping back that which God hath charged us to make known ? Wouldst thou perish in ease and silence, and have us to perish with thee, rather than displease thee by speaking the truth ? If thou wilt be guilty of such cruelty, God forbid we should be guilty of such folly. This kind of preaching, or writing, is the ready way to be hated ; and the desire of applause is so natural, that few delight in such a displeasing way. But consider, ARE THESE THINGS TRUE, OR ARE THEY NOT ? If they were not true, I would heartily join with thee, against any that fright people without a cause. But if these threatenings are the word of God, what a wretch art thou, that wilt not hear it, and consider it ! Preaching heaven and mercy to thee, is entreating thee to seek them, and not reject them ; and preaching hell, is but to persuade

thee to avoid it. If thou wert quite past hope of escaping it, then it were in vain to tell thee of hell; but as long as thou art alive, there is hope of thy recovery, and therefore all means must be used, to awake thee from thy lethargy. Alas! what heart can now possibly conceive, or what tongue express, the pains of those souls that are under the wrath of God! In the name of the Lord Jesus, *have mercy, have pity, man, upon thy own soul!* If thy horse see but a pit before him, thou canst scarcely force him in; and wilt thou obstinately cast thyself into hell, when the danger is foretold thee! *Who can stand before the indignation of the Lord! and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?*³ Methinks thou shouldst need no more words, but presently cast away thy sins, and wholly deliver thyself to Christ. But if thou be hardened unto death, yet say not another day, but that thou wast faithfully warned, and hadst a friend, that would fain have prevented thy damnation.

CHAPTER VII.

*The Necessity of diligently seeking the
Saints' Rest.*

IF there be so certain and glorious a rest for the saints, why is there no more industrious seeking after it? One would think, if a man did but once hear of such unspeakable glory to be obtained, and believe what he heard to be true, he should be transported with the vehemency of his desire after it, and would almost care for nothing else, but how to get this treasure. And yet people, who hear of it daily, and profess to believe it, as a fundamental article of their faith, do as little mind it, or labour for it, as if they had never heard of any such thing; or did not believe one word they hear. This reproof is applicable to—the worldly-minded,—the profane multitude,—the formal professors, and in degree, even to the godly themselves.

1. The worldly-minded, are so taken up in seeking the things below, that they have neither heart nor time to seek this rest. O foolish sinners, who hath bewitched you? See what riding and running, and catching for a

thing of nought, while eternal rest lies neglected! What contriving and caring, to get a step higher in the world than their brethren, while they neglect the kingly dignity of the saints! What insatiable pursuit of fleshly pleasures! What unwearied diligence in raising their posterity, enlarging their possessions, (perhaps for a poor living from hand to mouth,) while judgment is drawing near; but how it shall go with them then, never puts them to one hour's consideration. Yet these men cry, "May we not be saved without so much ado?" Ah, vile deceitful world! how often have we heard, thy most faithful servants at last complaining; "Oh, the world hath deceived me, and undone me!" and yet succeeding sinners will take no warning.

2. As for the profane multitude, they will not be persuaded to be at so much pains for salvation, as to perform the common outward duties of religion. If they have the gospel preached in the town where they dwell, it may be, they will give the hearing to it one part of the day, and stay at home the other; or if the master come to the congregation, yet part of the family must stay at home. If they want the plain and powerful preaching of the gospel, how few are there in a whole town, who will travel a mile or two to hear abroad;

though they will go many miles to the market for provision for their bodies? They know that in the Bible is the written law of God, by whom they must be acquitted or condemned in judgment; and that *the man is blessed who delights in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth meditate day and night*; yet will they not be at the pains to read a chapter once a day. Though they are commanded to pray without ceasing, and to pray alway; yet they will neither pray in their families, nor in secret. Though Daniel would rather be cast to the lions, than forbear praying three times a day in his house, where his enemies might hear him; yet these men will rather venture to be an eternal prey to Satan, the roaring lion, than thus seek their own safety. Or their cold and heartless prayers invite God to a denial; for among men it is taken for granted, that he who asks but slightly and seldom, cares not much for what he asks. They judge themselves unworthy of heaven, who think it is not worth their more constant and earnest requests. If you could see what men do in their secret chambers, how few would you find in a whole town, that spend one quarter of an hour, morning and night, in earnest supplication to God for their souls! Thus do they slothfully neglect all endeavours

for their own welfare, except some public duty in the congregation, which custom or credit engages them to.

3. Another sort are formal professors, who will be brought to an outward duty, but to the inward work of religion, they will never be persuaded. They will preach, or hear, or read, or talk of heaven, or pray in their families, and take part with the persons or causes that are good, and desire to be esteemed among the godly; but you cannot bring them to the more spiritual duties; as to be constant and fervent in secret prayer and meditation; conscientious in self-examination; heavenly-minded; to watch over their hearts, words, and ways; to mortify the flesh, and not make provision to fulfil its lusts; to love and heartily forgive an enemy, and prefer their brethren before themselves; to lay all they have, or do, at the feet of Christ, and prize his service and favour before all. Hypocrites will never be persuaded to these things: if any hypocrite entertains the gospel with joy, it is only on the surface of his soul, he never gives the seed any depth of earth; it changes his opinion, but melts not his heart, nor sets up Christ there, in full power and authority. As his religion lies most in opinion, so he is usually a conceited dealer in controversies; rather

than an humble embracer of known truth, with love and obedience. Temptation carries him away, because his heart is not established with Christ and grace. He does not in private, humbly bewail his soul's imperfections; but gathers his greatest comforts, from his being of such a judgment or party.

The like may be said of the worldly hypocrite, who chokes the gospel with the thorns of worldly cares and desires. He is convinced, that he must be religious, or he cannot be saved; and therefore he reads, and hears, and prays, and forsakes his former company and courses; but he resolves to keep his hold of present things. His judgment may say, God is the chief good; but his heart and affections do not say so. The world hath more of his affections than God, and therefore *it* is his god. Though he does not run after opinions and novelties, like the former, yet he will be of that opinion, which will best serve his worldly advantage. How feeble is he in secret prayer! how superficial in examination, and meditation! how poor in heart watchings! how nothing at all in loving and walking with God, rejoicing in him, or desiring him. So that both these, and many other sorts of hypocrites, though they will go with you in the easy outside of religion,

will never be at the pains of inward and spiritual duties.

4. And even the godly themselves, are too lazy seekers of their everlasting rest: alas! what a disproportion is there between our light and heat! our profession and prosecution! Who makes that haste, as if it were for heaven? How still we stand! how idly we work! how we talk, and jest, and trifle away our time! how deceitfully we perform the work of God! how we hear, as if we heard not! and pray, as if we prayed not; and examine, and meditate, and reprove sin, as if we did it not; and enjoy Christ, as if we enjoyed him not! as if we had learned to use the things of heaven, as the apostle teacheth us to use the things of the world. Christ calls to us, "To-day, if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts; work while it is day, for the night cometh when none can work:" and yet we stir as if we were half asleep. What haste do death and judgment make! how fast do they come on! they are almost at us, and yet what little haste we make! Methinks, men make but a trifle of their eternal state; they look after it but a little by the bye; they do not make it the business of their lives. If I were not sick myself of the same disease, with what tears should I mix

this ink! and with what heart grief should I mourn over this universal deadness!

Do magistrates among us seriously perform their work? Are they zealous for God? Do they build up his house? Are they tender of his honour? and fly in the face of sin and sinners, as the disturbers of our peace, and the only cause of all our miseries? Do they improve all their power, and wealth, and all their influence, for the greatest advantage to the kingdom of Christ, as men that must shortly give an account of their stewardship?

How few are those ministers that are serious in their work! Do we cry out of men's disobedience to the gospel, in the demonstration of the Spirit; and deal with sin as the destroying fire in our towns, and by force pull men out of it? Do we persuade people, as those should, that know the terrors of the Lord? Do we press Christ, and regeneration, and faith, and holiness, believing, that without these, men can never have life? Do our bowels yearn over the ignorant, careless, and obstinate multitude? When we look them in the face, do our hearts melt over them, lest we should never see their face in rest? Do we, as Paul, tell them weeping, of their fleshly and earthly disposition? and teach them publicly, and from house to house, at all seasons,

and with many tears? and do we entreat them, as for their souls' salvation? Or rather do we not study to gain the approbation of critical hearers? Does not carnal prudence control our fervour, and make our discourses lifeless, on subjects the most piercing? How gently do we handle those sins, which will so cruelly handle people's souls! In a word, our want of seriousness about the things of heaven, leads men into formality, and brings them to this customary, careless hearing, which undoes them.

And are the people more serious than magistrates or ministers? How can it be expected? Reader, look but to thyself, and resolve the question: ask conscience, and suffer it to tell thee truly. Hast thou set thy eternal rest before thine eyes: and as the great business thou hast to do in this world, hast thou watched and laboured, with all thy might, that no man take thy crown? Hast thou pressed on, through opposition, towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Can conscience witness thy secret cries, and groans, and tears? Can your family witness, that you taught them the fear of the Lord, and warned them not to go to that place of torment? Can your neighbours witness, that you reprove the ungodly,

and take pains to save the souls of your brethren? Let all these witnesses judge this day, between God and you, whether you are in earnest about eternal rest. Are thy love to Christ, thy faith, thy zeal, and other graces, strong or weak? Art thou ready to die, if this should be the day? Judge by this, and it will quickly appear, whether thou hast been a labourer or a loiterer.

O blessed rest, how unworthily art thou neglected! O glorious kingdom, how art thou undervalued! I hope thou, reader, art sensible, what a desperate thing it is to trifle about eternal rest; and how deeply thou hast been guilty of this thyself: and I hope also, thou wilt not now suffer this conviction to die. Should the physician tell thee, "If you will observe one thing, I doubt not to cure your disease;" wouldst thou not observe it? So I tell thee, if thou wilt observe but this one thing for thy soul, I make no doubt of thy salvation; shake off thy sloth, and put to all thy strength, and be a Christian indeed; I know not then what can hinder thy happiness. Seek God with all thy heart, and no doubt thou shalt find him. Unthankful as thou hast been to Jesus Christ, yet seek him heartily, obey him unreservedly, and thy salvation is as sure as if thou hadst it already. But full as

Christ's satisfaction is, free as the promise is, large as the mercy of God is; if thou only talk of these, when thou shouldst eagerly entertain them, thou wilt be never the better for them! and if thou loiter, when thou shouldst labour, thou wilt lose the crown. Fall to work then speedily, and seriously, and bless God that thou hast yet time to do it. I will here add a variety of animating considerations; and as Moses said to Israel, *Set thy heart unto all the words which I testify unto thee this day; for it is not a vain thing, because it is thy life.*

Consider how reasonable it is, that our diligence should be answerable to the work we have to do, and to the shortness and uncertainty of our time. The ends of a Christian's desires and endeavours are so great, that no human understanding can comprehend them. What is so excellent, or so important, as the salvation of our own and other men's souls, by escaping the torments of hell, and possessing the glory of heaven? And can a man be too much affected with things of such moment? Do not we know, that if our prayers prevail not, and our labour succeeds not, we are undone for ever?—The work of a Christian here, is very great and various. The soul must be renewed; corruptions must be mortified; custom, temp-

tations, and worldly interests, must be conquered; flesh must be subdued; conscience on good grounds be quieted; and assurance of pardon and salvation attained.—Though God must give us these without our merit, yet he will not give them without our earnest seeking and labour. Besides, there is much knowledge to be got, many means to be used, and duties to be performed; wives, children, servants, neighbours, friends, enemies, all of them call for duty from us. Judge then, whether it be wisdom, either to delay or loiter.—Time passeth on; yet a few days, and we shall be here no more; we know not whether we shall have another sermon, or sabbath, or hour. How active should they be, who know they have so short a space for so great a work!

It should excite us to diligence, when we consider our talents, and our mercies. The talents which we have received are many and great. What people have had plainer instructions, or more forcible persuasions, or more constant admonitions? Sermons, till we have been weary of them; and sabbaths, till we profane them; excellent books in such plenty, that we know not which to read. What people have had God so near them? or have had heaven and hell so opened

unto them? How should they fly that are thus winged! A small measure of grace be-seems not such a people, nor will an ordinary diligence in the work of God excuse them. All our lives have been filled with mercies. We are fed and clothed with mercy; we have mercies within and without; to number them, is to count the stars, or the sand of the sea-shore. Shall God think nothing too much for us; and shall we think all too much that we do for him? When I compare my slow and unprofitable life, with the frequent and wonderful mercies received, it shames me, it silences me, and leaves me inexcusable. Let us further consider, that trifling in the way to heaven is lost labour. Many who, like Agrippa, are but almost Christians, will find in the end they shall be, but almost saved. A man that is lifting a weight, if he put not sufficient strength to it, had as good put none at all.—How many duties have Christians lost, for want of doing them thoroughly! “Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able;”³ who, if they had striven, might have been able. Therefore put to a little more diligence and strength, that all you have done already be not in vain.—Besides, is

³ Luke xiii. 24.

not much precious time already lost? With some of us, childhood and youth are gone; with some their middle age also; and the time before us is very uncertain. What time have we slept, talked, or played away, or spent in worldly thoughts and cares! How little of our work is done! The time we have lost cannot be recalled; should we not then redeem and improve the little which remains. Doubt not but the recompense will be according to your labour. Whatever we do or suffer, everlasting rest will pay for all. We may all say, as Paul, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love."

Nor does it less deserve to be considered, that striving, is the divinely appointed way of salvation; that all men either do or will approve it; that the best Christians at death lament their negligence; and that heaven itself is often lost for want of striving, but is never had on easier terms. The sovereign wisdom of God has made striving necessary to salvation. When men tell us, we are too strict, whom do they accuse? God, or us? If it were a fault, it would lie in him that commands, and not in us who obey. These

are the men that ask us, whether we are wiser than all the world besides? and yet they will pretend to be wiser than God. How can they reconcile their language with the laws of God? "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.⁴ Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.⁵ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.⁶ Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.⁷ If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"⁸ Let them bring all the seeming reasons they can, against the holy violence of the saints; this sufficeth me to confute them all, that God is of another mind, and he hath commanded me to do much more than I do; and though I could see no other reason for it, his will is reason enough. Who should fix the terms of salvation, but he that bestows the gift of salvation? So that let the world, the flesh, or the devil, speak against a holy laborious life, this is my answer, God hath commanded it. True, it is now a way every where spoken against; but let me tell you, most that speak against it, in their

⁴ Matt. xi. 12.—⁵ Luke xiii. 24.—⁶ Phil.—ii. 12.

⁷ 2 Peter i. 10.—⁸ 1 Peter iv. 18.

judgments approve of it; and those that are now against it, will shortly be of another mind.

It is for want of more diligence, that heaven itself is often lost. When some that have *heard the word, and anon with joy received it, and have done many things, and heard the ministers of Christ gladly,*⁹ shall yet perish; should not this rouse us out of our security? How far hath many a man followed Christ, and yet forsaken him, when worldly interests were to be renounced! God hath declared, that heaven is not to be had on easier terms. Rest must follow labour. If men could be saved without this, they would never regard it; but when God hath declared, that without serious diligence here, thou shalt not rest hereafter, is it not wisdom to exert thyself to the utmost?

But to persuade thee, if possible, reader, to be serious in thine endeavours for heaven, let me add more considerations. As for instance, consider,—God is in earnest with thee; and why shouldst thou not be so with him? In his commands, his threatenings, his promises, he means as he speaks. In his judgments he is serious. Was he not so, when he drowned the world? when he consumed Sodom

⁹ Matt. xiii. 20. Mark vi. 20.

and Gomorrah? and when he scattered the Jews? Is it time then to trifle with God? Jesus Christ was serious in purchasing our redemption. In teaching, he neglected his meat and drink; in prayer, he continued all night; in suffering, he fasted forty days, was tempted, betrayed, spit upon, buffeted, crowned with thorns, sweat as it were great drops of blood, was crucified, pierced, died. And should we not be serious in seeking our own salvation?—The Holy Spirit is serious in soliciting us to be happy. His motives are frequent, pressing, and importunate; He striveth with us; He is grieved when we resist him: and should we not be serious then in obeying and yielding to his motions?—God is serious in hearing our prayers, and bestowing his mercies: He regardeth every groan and sigh, and puts every tear into his bottle: and shall we expect real mercies, when we are slight and superficial in the work of God? The ministers of Christ are serious in exhorting and instructing you; they beg of God, and of you; and shall other men be so painful and careful for your salvation, and you be so careless of your own?

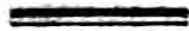
How diligent is Satan in all kinds of temptation! How diligent are all the ministers of Satan! The servants of the world and the devil work as if they could never do enough;

they seem to bear down ministers, sermons, and all before them; and shall they be more diligent for damnation, than thou for salvation? Hast thou not a better master, sweeter employment, and a better reward?—Time was, when thou wast diligent thyself in serving Satan and the flesh, if it be not so yet. How eagerly didst thou follow thy sports, thy evil company, and sinful delights! and wilt thou not now, be as earnest and violent for God? Thou art to this day, in earnest about the things of this life; and is not the business of thy salvation of far greater moment?

Now, reader, having laid down these undeniable arguments, I demand thy resolution: Wilt thou yield obedience, or not? I am confident thy conscience is convinced of thy duty.—Darest thou now go on, in thy common, careless course, against the plain evidence of reason and the commands of God, and against the light of thy own conscience? Darest thou live as loosely, sin as boldly, and pray as seldom as before? Darest thou profane the sabbath, slight the service of God, and think of thine everlasting state, as carelessly as before? Or dost thou not rather resolve to gird up the loins of thy mind, and set thyself wholly to the work of thy salvation, and break through the oppositions, and slight the scoffs of the world,

and lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset thee, and run with patience the race that is set before thee? I hope these are thy full resolutions. Yet, because I know the obstinacy of the heart of man, and because I am solicitous that thy soul might live, I once more entreat thy attention to the following questions; and I command thee from God, that thou stifle not thy conscience, nor resist conviction; but answer them faithfully, and obey accordingly.—If, by being diligent in godliness, you could grow rich, get honour and preferment in the world, be recovered from sickness, or live in prosperity on earth; what pains would you take in the service of God? and is not the saints' rest a more excellent happiness than all this? If God usually punished with some present judgment, every act of sin, as he did the lie of Ananias and Sapphira; what kind of lives would you lead? and is not eternal wrath far more terrible? If you knew that this were the last day you had to live in the world, how would you spend it? and you know not, but it may be your last, and are sure your last is near. If you had seen the judgment-seat, and the books opened, and the wicked stand trembling on the left hand of the Judge, and the godly rejoicing on the right hand, what persons would you have been after

such a sight? This sight you shall one day surely see. If you had laid in hell but one hour, and there felt the torments you now hear of, how seriously would you then speak of hell, and pray against it! and will you not take God's word for the truth of this, except you feel it? Or if you had possessed the glory of heaven but one year, what pains would you take, rather than be deprived of such incomparable glory!



CHAPTER VIII.

How to discern our Title to the Saints' Rest.

Is there such a glorious rest, so near at hand? and shall none enjoy it but the people of God? What mean most of the world then, to live so contentedly, without assurance of their interests in this rest, and neglect the trying of their title to it? When the Lord hath so fully opened the blessedness of that kingdom, which none but obedient believers shall possess; and so fully expressed those torments, which the rest of the world must eternally suffer; methinks they that believe this to be certainly true,

should never be at any quiet in themselves, till they were fully assured of their being heirs of the kingdom. What strange folly is this, that men who know they must presently enter upon unchangeable joy or pain, should yet live as securely and merrily in uncertainty of their doom, as if all were made sure, and there was no danger! Are these men alive or dead? are they awake or asleep? If they have but a suit at law, how careful are they to know whether it will go for or against them! but in the business of their salvation, they are content to be uncertain. If you ask most men a reason of the hope that is in them, they will say, "Because God is merciful, and Christ died for sinners," and the like general reasons, which any man in the world may give as well as they; but put them to prove their interest in Christ, and in the saving mercy of God, and they can say nothing to the purpose. If you should say to them, "What case is thy soul in? Is it sanctified, and pardoned, or not?" they would say, as Cain of Abel, "I know not; am I my soul's keeper? I hope well; I trust God with my soul; I shall speed as well as other men do; I thank God, I never made any doubt of my salvation."—Thou hast cause to doubt, because thou never didst doubt; and yet more, because thou hast been so careless in thy con-

fidence.—What do thy expressions discover, but a wilful neglect of thy own salvation? As a ship-master that should let his vessel alone, and say, “I will venture it among the rocks, and waves, and wind; I will trust God with it; it will speed as well as other vessels.” What horrible abuse of God is this, to pretend to trust God, to cloak thy own wilful negligence! If thou didst really trust God, thou wouldst also be ruled by him, and trust him in his own appointed way. He requires thee to *give diligence to make thy calling and election sure*, and so trust him. And he hath marked thee out a way in scripture, by which thou art charged to *search and try thyself*.

How canst thou open the Bible, and read a chapter, but it should terrify thee? Every leaf should be to thee as Belshazzar's writing on the wall, except only that which draws thee to try and reform. If thou readest the promises, thou knowest not whether they shall be fulfilled to thee: if thou readest the threatenings, for any thing thou knowest, thou readest thy own sentence. No wonder thou art an enemy to plain preaching, and sayest of the minister, as Ahab of the prophet, “I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.” What comfort canst thou find in thy friends, and honours, and houses, and lands, till thou

knowest thou hast the love of God with them, and shalt have rest with him when thou leavest them. How canst thou think of thy dying hour? Thou knowest it is near, and there is no avoiding it. If thou shouldst die this day, (and who knows what a day may bring forth?) thou art not certain whether thou shalt go to heaven or hell. Thy bed is very soft, or thy heart is very hard, if thou canst sleep soundly in this uncertain case.

If this general uncertainty of the world about their salvation were remediless, then it must be borne as other unavoidable miseries: but, alas! the common cause is wilful negligence. Men will not be persuaded to use the remedy. The great means to conquer this uncertainty, is self-examination, or the serious and diligent trying of a man's heart, and state, by the rule of scripture. Go through a congregation of a thousand men, and how few of them shall you meet with, that ever bestowed one hour in all their lives, in a close examination of their title to heaven! Ask thy own conscience, reader, when was the time that thou solemnly, as in the sight of God, didst examine thy heart, whether it be renewed or not? whether it be set most on God, or the creatures, on heaven or earth?

But because this is a work of so high importance, and so commonly neglected, I will there-

fore shew what hinders men from trying and knowing their state;—then offer some motives to examine;—and directions;—together with some marks out of scripture, by which you may try and know, whether you are the people of God or not.

1. Among the many hinderances which keep men from self-examination, we cannot doubt but Satan will do his part. If all the power he hath, or all the means and instruments he can employ, can do it, he will be sure to keep you from this. He is loth the godly should have the joy and advantage against corruption, which the faithful performance of self-examination would procure them. As for the ungodly, he knows if they should once earnestly examine, they would find out their own danger, and so be very likely to escape him. How could he get so many to hell, if they knew they were going thither? and how could they avoid knowing it, if they did but thoroughly try; having such a clear light and sure rule in the scripture to discover it? Satan knows better how to angle for souls, than to shew them the hook and line, or fright them away with his own appearance. Therefore he labours to keep them from a searching ministry; or to keep the minister from helping them to search; or to take off the edge of the

word, that it may not pierce and divide; or to turn away their thoughts; or to possess them with prejudice; or to cast them into a sleep; or to steal away the word, by the cares and talk of the world; or some way to prevent its operation.

Another great hinderance to self-examination, arises from wicked men. Their example; their company and discourse; their continually insisting on worldly concerns; their raillery and scoffs at godly persons; also their persuasions, allurements, and threats; are each of them exceeding great temptations to security. God doth scarcely ever open the eyes of a poor sinner, to see that his way is wrong, but presently there is a multitude of Satan's apostles, ready to deceive, and settle him again in the quiet possession of his former master. "What!" say they, "do you make a doubt of your salvation, who have lived so well, and done nobody any harm? God is merciful; and if such as you shall not be saved, what will become of a great many? What do you think of all your forefathers? and what will become of all your friends and neighbours that live as you do? will they all be damned? Come, come, if you hearken to these preachers, they will drive you out of your wits. Are not all men sinners? And did not Christ die to save sinners? Never

trouble your head with these thoughts, and you shall do well." O how many thousands have such charms kept asleep, in deceit and security, till death and hell have awakened them! The Lord calls to the sinner, and tells him, The gate is strait, the way is narrow, and few find it: try, and examine, give diligence to make sure. The world cries; Never doubt, never trouble yourselves with these thoughts. In this strait, sinner, consider, it is Christ, and not your forefathers, or neighbours, or friends, that must judge you at last; and if Christ condemn you, these cannot save you; therefore common reason may tell you, that it is not from the words of ignorant men, but from God, you must fetch your hopes of salvation. When Ahab would inquire among the multitude of flattering prophets, it was his death. They can flatter men into the snare, but they cannot bring them out. "Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience: be not therefore partakers with them."¹

But the greatest hinderances are in men's own hearts.—Some are so ignorant, that they know not what self-examination is, nor what a minister means, when he persuadeth them to

¹ Ephes. v. 6, 7.

try themselves; or they know not that there is any necessity for it, but think every man is bound to believe that his sins are pardoned, whether it be true or false; and that it is a great fault to make any question of it: or they do not think the assurance can be attained, or that there is any great difference between one man and another, but that we are all Christians, and therefore need not trouble ourselves any further; or at least they know not wherein the difference lies. Some will not believe, that God will ever make such a difference betwixt men, in the life to come. Some are so stupified, that, say what we can, they lay it not to heart, but give us the hearing, and there is the end. Some are so possessed with self-love and pride, that they will not so much as suspect they are in any danger. Some are so guilty, that they dare not try; and yet they dare venture on a more dreadful trial. Some are so in love with sin, and so dislike the way of God, that they will not try their ways, lest they be forced from the course they love, to that which they loath. Many are so busy in the world, that they cannot set themselves to the trial of their title to heaven; others so slothful, that they will not be at the pains. But the most common and dangerous impediment, is that false faith and hope, commonly called presumption, which

bears up the hearts of the greatest part of the world, and so keeps them from suspecting their danger.

And if a man should break through all these hinderances, and set upon the duty of self-examination, yet assurance is not presently attained. Too many deceive themselves in their inquiries after it, through one or other of the following causes. There is such confusion and darkness in the soul of an unregenerate man, that he can scarcely tell what he doeth, or what is in him; as in a house, where nothing is in its proper place, it will be difficult to find what is wanted. Most men accustom themselves to be strangers at home, and too little observe the temper and motions of their own hearts. Men are partial in their own cause; ready to think their great sins small, and their small sins none; their gifts of nature to be the work of grace, and to say, *All these have I kept from my youth; I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing.* Most men search but by halves: if it will not easily and quickly be done, they are discouraged and leave off. They try themselves by false marks and rules; not knowing wherein the truth of Christianity doth consist, some looking beyond, and some short of, the scripture standard: and frequently they miscarry in

this work, by attempting it in their own strength. As some expect the Spirit should do it without them, so others attempt it themselves, without seeking or expecting the help of the Spirit. Both these will certainly miscarry in their assurance.

Some other hinderances keep, even true Christians, from comfortable certainty; as for instance—the weakness of grace. Small things are hardly discerned. Many Christians content themselves with a small measure of grace, and do not follow on to spiritual strength and manhood. The chief remedy for such would be, to follow on their duty, till their grace be increased. Wait upon God in the use of his prescribed means, and he will undoubtedly bless you with increase. O! that Christians would bestow most of that time, to getting more grace, which they bestow in anxious doubtings whether they have any or none! and lay out those serious affections in praying for more grace, which they bestow in fruitless complaints! I beseech thee, Christian, take this advice as from God; and then, when thou believest strongly, and lovest fervently, thou canst no more doubt of thy faith and love, than a man that is hot can doubt of his warmth. Some Christians hinder their own comfort, by looking more at signs, which tell them what

they are; than at precepts, which tell them what they should do. As if their present case must needs be their everlasting case; and if they be now unpardoned, there was no remedy. Were he not mad, that would lie weeping because he is not pardoned, when his prince stands by, all the while offering him a pardon, and persuading him to accept of it?—Justifying faith, Christian, is not thy persuasion of God's special love to thee, but the accepting of Christ to make thee lovely. It is far better to accept Christ as offered, than spend so much time in doubting whether we have Christ or not.

Another cause of distress to Christians is, their mistaking assurance, for the joy that sometimes accompanies it. As if a child should take himself for a son no longer, than while he sees the smiles of his father's face, or hears the comfortable expressions of his mouth: and as if the father ceased to be a father, whenever he ceased those smiles and speeches.—The trouble of souls is also increased, by their not knowing the ordinary way of God's conveying comfort. They think they have nothing to do but wait, when God will bestow it; but they must know that matter of comfort is in the promises, and thence they must fetch it, diligently meditating upon the promises: and in this way they

may expect the Spirit will communicate comfort to their souls. Add to this, their expecting a greater measure of assurance than God usually bestows: as long as they have any doubting, they think they have no assurance.

One great, and too common cause of distress is, the secret maintaining of some known sin.— This puts out or dimmeth the eye of the soul, and stupifies it, that it can neither see nor feel its own condition: but especially, it provokes God to withdraw his comforts, and the assistance of his Spirit, without which we may search long enough, but can never have assurance. God hath made a separation between sin and peace. As long as thou dost cherish thy pride, thy love of the world, the desires of the flesh, or any unchristian practice, thou expectest comfort in vain. If a man set up his idols in his heart, and come to God to inquire for comfort; instead of comforting him, God *will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols.*²

Another very great and common cause of the want of comfort is, when grace is not kept in constant and lively exercise. The way of painful duty, is the way of fullest comfort.—Peace and comfort are Christ's great encouragements to faithfulness and obedience; and therefore,

² Ezek. xiv. 3—9.

though our obedience does not merit them, yet they usually rise and fall with our diligence in duty. As prayer must have faith and fervency to procure it success, besides the blood and intercession of Christ, so must all other parts of our obedience. If thou growest seldom and customary, and cold in duty, especially in thy secret prayers to God, and yet findest no abatement in thy joys, I cannot but fear thy joys are carnal. Some degree of comfort follows every good action, as heat proceeds from fire; the very act of loving God is inexpressibly sweet. A man that is cold should labour till heat be excited; so he that wants assurance must not stand still, but exercise his graces, till his doubts vanish.

The want of consolation in the soul, is also sometimes owing to constitutional melancholy. It is no more wonder for a conscientious man, under melancholy, to doubt, and fear, and despair, than for a sick man to groan. Without the physician, your labours with such a man will usually be in vain. You may silence, but you cannot comfort him. He cries out of sin, and the wrath of God, when the chief cause is in his distemper.

2. As for motives to persuade thee to the duty of self-examination, I entreat thee to consider the following. To be deceived about thy

title to heaven is very easy.* Almost all men among us verily look to be saved; yet Christ tells us, *there be few that find the strait gate, and narrow way, which leadeth unto life*: should we not then search diligently, lest we should be deceived. It is the grand design of the devil, in all his temptations, to deceive you, and keep you ignorant of your danger, till you feel the everlasting flames! And will you join with him to deceive yourself? If you do this for him, you do the greatest part of his work. Consider also, what would be the effects of this self-examination. If thou be upright and godly, it will lead thee straight towards assurance of God's love; if thou be not, though it will trouble thee at present, yet it will tend to thy happiness, and at length lead thee to the assurance of that happiness. What boldness and comfort mayst thou have in prayer, when thou canst say, "Our Father," in full assurance! What sweet thoughts wilt thou have of God! how precious will be thy thoughts of Christ, and the blood he hath shed, and the benefits he hath procured! how welcome will the word of God be to thee; how sweet will be the pro-

* "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matt. vii. 22, 23.—*Ed.*

mises, when thou art sure they are thine own ! It will multiply the sweetness of every common mercy. How comfortably mayest thou then bear thy afflictions ! how lively will it make thee in the work of the Lord, and how profitable to all around thee ! what vigour will it infuse into all thy graces and affections, kindle thy repentance, inflame thy love, quicken thy desires, and confirm thy faith ; be a fountain of continual rejoicing ; overflow thy heart with thankfulness, raise thee high in the delightful work of praise, help thee to be heavenly-minded, and render thee persevering in all !

Though I am certain these motives have weight of reason in them ; yet I am jealous, reader, lest thou lay aside the book, as if thou hadst done the work, and never set thyself to the practice of the duty. The case in hand is of the greatest moment, whether thou shalt everlastingly live in heaven or hell. I here request thee, in behalf of thy soul, nay, I charge thee, in the name of the Lord, that thou defer no longer, but take thy heart to task in good earnest, and think with thyself, “ Is it so easy, so common, and so dangerous, to be mistaken ? Are there so many wrong ways ? Is the heart so deceitful ? Why then do I not search into every corner, till I know my state ? Must I so shortly undergo the

trial at the bar of Christ? and do I not presently try myself? What case were I in, if I should then miscarry! May I know by a little diligent inquiry now; and do I stick at the labour?" But perhaps thou wilt say, "I know not how to do it." In that I am now to give thee directions; but, alas! it will be in vain, if thou art not resolved to practise them. Wilt thou therefore, before thou goest any further, here promise before the Lord, to set thyself upon the speedy performance of the duty, according to the directions I shall lay down from the Holy Scriptures. I demand nothing unreasonable or impossible. It is but to bestow a few hours, to know what shall become of thee for ever.

3. The directions, how to examine thyself, are such as these: Make choice of the most convenient time and place, and, if possible, let it be the present time; empty thy mind of all other cares and thoughts, that they may not distract or divide thy mind: then before God in hearty prayer, desire the assistance of His Spirit, to discover to thee the plain truth of thy condition, and to enlighten thee in the whole progress of this work. Let conscience do its office; and let not thy heart trifle away the time when it should be diligently at work. Do as the psalmist, "My spirit (said he)

made diligent search." And when thou hast discovered thy true state; labour to get thy heart affected with its condition, according to the sentence passed on it. Trust not to this one discovery, so as to try no more; nor let it hinder thee in the daily search of thy ways; neither be discouraged if the trial must be often repeated. Especially take heed, if unregenerate, not to conclude of thy future state by the present. Do not say, "Because I am ungodly, I shall die so; because I am a hypocrite, I shall continue so." Do not despair: nothing but thy unwillingness can keep thee from Christ, though thou hast hitherto, abused his mercy and dissembled with him.

4. Now let me add some marks, by which thou mayest try thy title to the saints' rest. I will only mention these two,—taking God for thy chief good—and heartily accepting Christ for thy only Saviour and Lord.

Every soul that hath a title to this rest, doth place his chief happiness in God. This rest consisteth in the full and glorious enjoyment of God. He that maketh not God his chief good and ultimate end, is in heart an idolater. Let me ask then, dost thou truly account it thy chief happiness to enjoy the Lord, or dost thou not? Canst thou say; "The Lord is my portion? whom have I in

heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee?" If thou be an heir of rest, it is thus with thee. Though the flesh will be pleading for its own delights, and the world will be creeping into thine affections; yet in thine ordinary, settled, prevailing judgment and affections, thou preferrest God before all things in the world.—Though thou dost not seek thy rest so zealously as thou shouldst; yet it hath the chief of thy desires and endeavours, so that nothing else is desired or preferred before it: and though the flesh may sometimes shrink, yet thou art resolved to go through all. Thy esteem for it will also be so high, and thy affection to it so great, that thou wouldst not exchange thy title to it, and hopes of it, for any worldly good whatsoever.

And, as thou takest God for thy chief good, so thou dost heartily accept of Christ for thy only Saviour and Lord, to bring thee to this rest. The former mark, was the sum of the first and great command of the law, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart:" the second mark, is the sum of the command of the gospel, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved:" and the performance of these two, is the whole of godliness and Christianity. This mark is but the definition of faith. Dost thou heartily

consent that Christ alone shall be thy Saviour? and no further trust to thy duties and works, than as means appointed in subordination to him? and look at them, as not in the least measure able to satisfy the curse of the law; or as a legal righteousness, or any part of it, but consent to trust thy salvation on the redemption made by Christ? Art thou also content, to take him for thy only Lord and King, to govern and guide thee by his laws and Spirit; and to obey him, even when he commandeth the hardest duties, and those which most cross the desires of the flesh? Is it thy sorrow, when thou breakest thy resolution herein? and thy joy, when thou keepest closest in obedience to him? Wouldst thou not change thy Lord and Master for all the world? Thus is it with every true Christian.

Observe, it is the consent of thy heart, or will, which I especially lay down to be inquired after. I do not ask, whether thou be assured of salvation? nor whether thou canst believe that thy sins are pardoned, and that thou art beloved of God, in Christ? These are no parts of justifying faith, but excellent fruits of it, and they that receive them are comforted by them; but perhaps thou mayest never receive them whilst thou livest, and yet be a true heir of rest. Do not say then, "I cannot believe

that my sins are pardoned, or that I am in God's favour ; and therefore I am no true believer :” this is a most mistaken conclusion.— The question is, whether thou dost heartily accept of Christ, that thou mayest be pardoned, reconciled to God, and so saved ? dost thou consent that he shall be thy Lord, who hath bought thee, and that he shall bring thee to heaven in his own way ? This is justifying, saving faith, and the mark by which thou must try thyself. Yet still observe, that all this consent must be hearty and real, not feigned or with reservations. It is not saying, as that dissembling son, “ I go, sir ;” and going not. If any, have more of the government of thee than Christ, thou art not his disciple. I am sure these two marks are such as every Christian hath ; and none but sincere Christians.

On the whole, as ever Christians would have comforts that will not deceive them, let them make it the great labour of their lives to grow in grace, to strengthen, and advance, the interest of Christ in their souls, and to weaken, and subdue, the interest of the flesh. Deceive not yourselves, with a persuasion that Christ hath done all, and left you nothing to do. To overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil ; and in order to that, to stand always armed upon our watch, and valiantly and patiently to

fight it out; is of great importance to our assurance and salvation: indeed so great, that he who performeth it not, is no more than a nominal Christian. Not to every one that presumptuously believeth, but "to him that overcometh," saith Christ, "will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God, and he shall not be hurt of the second death but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels: and I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name."³

CHAPTER IX.

*The Duty of the People of God to excite others
to seek this Rest.*

HATH God set before us such a glorious prize as the saints' rest, and made us capable of such inconceivable happiness? Why then do not all the children of this kingdom exert

³ Rev. ii. 7, 11, 17. iii. 5, 12.

themselves more, to help others to the enjoyment of it? Alas, how little are poor souls about us, beholden to most of us! We see the glory of the kingdom, and they do not: we see the misery of those that are out of it, and they do not: we see some wandering quite out of the way, and know, if they hold on, they can never come there; and they themselves discern it not. And yet we will not seriously show them their danger and error, and help to bring them into the way, that they may live. How few Christians are there to be found, that set themselves with all their might to save souls! No thanks to us, if heaven be not empty, and if the souls of our brethren perish not for ever. Considering how important this duty is, to the glory of God, and the happiness of men, I will show,—how it is to be performed,—why it is so much neglected,—and then offer some considerations to persuade to it.

I. The duty of exciting and helping others to obtain the saints' rest, doth not mean, that every man should turn a public preacher, or that any should go beyond the bounds of their particular callings; much less does it consist in promoting a party spirit; or in speaking against men's faults behind their backs, but, in having our hearts affected with the misery

of our brethren's souls,—and in taking all opportunities to instruct them in the way of salvation.

Our hearts must be affected with the misery of our brethren's souls. We must be compassionate toward them, and yearn after their recovery and salvation. If we earnestly longed after their conversion, and our hearts were solicitous to do them good, it would set us on work, and God would usually bless it.

We must take all opportunities we possibly can, to instruct them how to attain salvation. If the person be ignorant, labour to make him understand the chief happiness of man; how far he was once possessed of it; the covenant God then made with him; how he broke it; what penalty he incurred, and what misery he brought himself into; teach him his need of a Redeemer; how Christ did mercifully interpose; what the new covenant is; how men are drawn to Christ, and what are the riches and privileges which believers have in Him. If he is not moved by these things, then show him the excellency of the glory he neglects; the extremity and eternity of the torments of the damned; the certainty, nearness, and terrors, of death and judgment; the vanity of all things below; the sinfulness of sin; the preciousness of Christ; the necessity

of regeneration, faith, and holiness; and the true nature of them. If, after all, you find him entertaining false hopes, then urge him to examine his state; show him the necessity of doing so; help him in it; nor leave him till you have convinced him of his misery and remedy. Show him how vain and destructive it is, to join Christ and his duties, with a view to compose his justifying righteousness; yet be sure to draw him to the use of all means; such as hearing and reading the word, calling upon God, and associating with the godly: persuade him to forsake sin, avoid all temptations to sin, especially evil companions, and to wait patiently on God in the use of means, as the way in which God will be found.

But because the manner of performing this work is of great moment, observe therefore these rules.—Enter upon it with right intentions: aim at the glory of God in the person's salvation. Do it not to get a name, or esteem to thyself, or to bring men to depend upon thee, or to get thee followers; but in obedience to Christ, in imitation of him, and in tender love to men's souls. Do it speedily; as thou wouldst not have them delay their return, do not thou delay to seek their return. While thou art purposing to teach and help him, the man goes deeper in debt; sin is taking root;

custom fastens him; temptations to sin multiply; conscience grows seared; the heart hardened; the devil rules; Christ is shut out; the Spirit is resisted; God is daily dishonoured; his law violated; time runs on; death and judgment are at the door: and what if the man die, and drop into hell, while thou art purposing to prevent it? If, in the case of his bodily distress, thou must not say to him, "Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee;" how much less mayest thou delay the succour of his soul! That physician is no better than a murderer, who negligently delayeth till his patient be dead or past cure. Lay by excuses then, and all lesser business, and "exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."⁴

Let thy exhortation proceed from compassion and love. To jeer and scoff, to rail and vilify, is not a likely way to reform men, or convert them to God. Go to poor sinners with tears in your eyes, that they may see you believe them to be miserable, and that you unfeignedly pity their case. Deal with them with earnest humble entreaties; let them perceive it is the desire of your hearts to do them

⁴ Heb. iii. 13.

good; that you have no other end but their everlasting happiness; and that it is your sense of their danger, and your love to their souls, that forceth you to speak; even because you know the terrors of the Lord, and for fear you should see them in eternal torments. Say to them, "Friend, you know I seek no advantage of my own; the method to please you, and keep your friendship, were to sooth you in your way, or let you alone; but love will not suffer me to see you perish, and be silent. I seek nothing at your hands, but that which is necessary to your own happiness: it is yourself that will have the gain and comfort, if you come to Christ." If we were thus to go to every ignorant and wicked neighbour, what blessed fruit should we quickly see!—Do it with all possible plainness and faithfulness: do not make their sins less than they are, nor encourage them in a false hope. If you see the case dangerous, speak plainly; "Neighbour, I am afraid God hath not yet renewed your soul; I doubt you are not yet recovered from the power of Satan to God; I doubt you have not chosen Christ above all, nor unfeignedly taken him for your sovereign Lord: if you had, surely you durst not so easily disobey him, nor neglect his worship; you could not so eagerly follow the world, and talk of nothing

but the things of the world. If you were in Christ, you would be a new creature; you would have new thoughts, new talk, new company, new endeavours, and a new conversation. Certainly, without these you can never be saved: you may think otherwise, and hope otherwise, as long as you will, but your hopes will all deceive you, and perish with you."

Thus must you deal faithfully with men, if ever you intend to do them good. It is not in curing men's souls, as in curing their bodies, where they must not know their danger, lest it hinder the cure. They are here agents in their own cure; and if they know not their misery, they will never bewail it, nor know their need of a Saviour. Do it also seriously, zealously, and effectually. Labour to make men know, that Heaven and Hell are not matters to be played with, or passed over with a few careless thoughts. "It is most certain, that one of these days, thou shalt be in everlasting joy or torment: and doth it not awaken thee? Are there so few that find the way of life? so many that go the way of death? Is it so hard to escape? so easy to miscarry? and yet do you sit still, and trifle? What do you mean? The world is passing away; its pleasures, honours, and profits, are fading, and leaving you: Eternity is a little before you: God is

just and jealous; his threatenings are true; the great day will be terrible: time runs on: your life is uncertain: you are far behind-hand: your case is dangerous: if you die to-morrow, how unready are you! with what terror will your souls go out of your bodies! and do you yet loiter? Consider, God is all this while waiting your leisure; his patience beareth; his long-suffering forbearth; his mercy entreateth you: Christ offereth you his blood and merits: the Spirit is persuading; conscience is accusing: Satan waits to have you. This life is your time—now or never. Had you rather burn in hell, than repent on earth? have devils your tormentors, than Christ your governor? will you renounce your part in God and glory, rather than renounce your sins? O friends, what do you think of these things? God hath made you men: do not renounce your reason, where you should chiefly use it." It is not a few dull words, between jest and earnest, between sleep and awake, that will rouse a dead-hearted sinner. If a house be on fire, you will not make a cold oration on the nature and danger of fire; but will run and cry, fire! fire! To tell a man of his sins, as softly as Eli did his sons; or to reprove him as gently as Jehoshaphat did Ahab, "Let not the king say so;" usually doth as much harm

as good : lothness to displease men, makes us undo them.

Yet lest you run into extremes, I advise you to do it with prudence and discretion.—Choose the fittest season : when the earth is soft, the plough will enter. Christian faithfulness requires us, not only to do good, when it falls in our way, but to watch for opportunities.—Suit yourselves to the temper of the person. The affections of the convinced, should be chiefly excited. The obstinate must be sharply reprov'd. The timorous must be dealt with tenderly. Love, and plainness, and seriousness, take with all. Let all your reproofs and exhortations be backed with the authority of God. Turn them to the very chapter and verse where their sin is condemned, and their duty commanded. They, may reject your words, who dare not reject the words of the Almighty.

Be frequent with men in this duty of exhortation : we are commanded to *exhort one another daily ; and with all long-suffering*. The fire is not always brought out of the flint at one stroke ; nor men's affections kindled at the first exhortation. Follow sinners with long, loving, and earnest entreaties, and give them no rest in their sin. This is true charity, the way to save men's souls, and will afford you comfort upon review.—Strive to bring all

your exhortations to an issue: God usually blesses their labours, whose very heart is set upon the conversion of their brethren, and who are therefore inquiring after the success of their work. If you reprove a sin, cease not till the sinner promises you to leave it, and avoid the occasion of it. If you are exhorting to a duty, urge for a promise to set upon it presently. If you would draw men to Christ, leave not, till you have made them confess the misery of their present unregenerate state; and the necessity of Christ, and of a change; and have promised you to fall close to the use of means. Oh that all Christians would take this course, with all their neighbours that are enslaved to sin, and strangers to Christ! Once more, be sure your example exhort, as well as your words. Let them see you constant, in all the duties you persuade them to; let them see in your lives, that superiority to the world which your lips recommend; let them see, by your constant labours for heaven, that you indeed believe, what you would have them believe. A holy and heavenly life, is a continual pain to the consciences of sinners around you, and continually solicits them to change their course.

II. Let us now a little inquire, what may be the causes of the gross neglect of this duty;

that the hinderances being discovered, may the more easily be overcome.—One hinderance, is men's own sin and guilt. They have not themselves been ravished with heavenly delights; how then should they draw others so earnestly to seek them? They have not felt their own lost condition, nor their need of Christ, nor the renewing work of the Spirit; how then can they discover these to others? They are guilty of the sins they should reprove, and this makes them ashamed to reprove. Another is, a secret infidelity prevailing in men's hearts. Did we verily believe, that all the unregenerate and unholy shall be eternally tormented, how could we hold our tongues, or avoid bursting into tears, when we look them in the face? especially when they are our near and dear friends. Thus doth secret unbelief consume the vigour of each grace and duty. O Christians if you did verily believe that your ungodly neighbours, your wife, husband, or child, would certainly lie for ever in hell, except they be thoroughly changed, before death shall snatch them away, would not this make you address them day and night, till they were persuaded? Were it not for this unbelief, our own, and our neighbours' souls, would gain more by us than they do.

These attempts are also much hindered, by our want of love and compassion for men's

souls. We look on miserable souls, and pass by, as the priest and Levite by the wounded man. What though the sinner, wounded by sin, and captivated by Satan, do not desire thy help himself; yet his misery cries aloud. If God had not regarded our miseries, before he heard the cry of our prayers, and been moved by his own pity, before he was moved by our importunity, we might long have continued the slaves of Satan. You will pray to God for them, to open their eyes, and turn their hearts; and why not endeavour their conversion, if you desire it? and if you do not desire it, why do you ask it? Why do you not pray them to consider and return, as well as pray to God to convert and turn them? If you should see your neighbour fallen into a pit, and should pray to God to help him out, but neither put forth your hand to help him, nor once direct him to help himself, would not any man censure you, for your cruelty and hypocrisy? It is as true of the soul as the body. "If any man seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" or what love hath he to his brother's soul?

We are also hindered by a base man-pleasing disposition. We are so desirous to keep in credit and favour with men, that it makes us

sadly neglect our own duty. He is a foolish and unfaithful physician, that will let a sick man die for fear of troubling him. If our friends are distracted, we please them in nothing that tends to their hurt; and yet when they are besides themselves in point of salvation, and in their madness posting on to damnation, we will not stop them, for fear of displeasing them. How can we be Christians, that love the praise of men more than the praise of God? for if we seek to please men, we shall not be the servants of Christ.—It is common to be hindered by sinful bashfulness. When we should shame men out of their sins, we are ourselves ashamed of our duties. May not these sinners condemn us, when they blush not to swear, be drunk, or neglect the worship of God; and we blush to tell them of it, and persuade them from it? Bashfulness is unseemly in cases of necessity. It is not a work to be ashamed of, to obey God, in persuading men from their sins to Christ. Reader, hath not thy conscience told thee of thy duty many a time, and put thee on to speak to poor sinners; and yet thou hast been ashamed to open thy mouth, and so let them alone to sink or swim? O read and tremble: “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed,

when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels."⁵ An idle and impatient spirit hindereth us. It is an ungrateful work, and sometimes makes men our enemies; besides, it seldom succeeds at the first, except it be followed on. You must be long teaching the ignorant, and persuading the obstinate. We consider not what patience God used towards us, when we were in our sins. Woe to us, if God had been as impatient with us, as we are with others. Another hinderance, is self-seeking; "All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's," and their brethren's. With many, pride is a great impediment. If it were to speak with a great man, and it would not displease him, they would do it; but to go among the poor, and take pains with them in their cottages; where is the person that will do it? Alas! these men little consider how low Christ stooped to us! And with some, their ignorance of the duty hindereth them from performing it: either they know it not to be a duty, or at least not to be their duty. If this be thy case, reader, I hope thou art now acquainted with thy duty, and wilt set upon it.

Do not object to this duty, that you are unable to manage an exhortation;* but either set

⁵ Mark viii. 38.

* Read Exodus chapter iv. 10, 11.—*Ed.*

those on the work who are more able, or faithfully and humbly use the small ability you have, and tell them, as a weak man may do, what God says in the Bible. Decline not the duty, because it is your superior who needs advice and exhortation. Order must be dispensed with in cases of necessity: though it be a husband, a parent, a minister, you must teach him in such a case. If parents are in want, children must relieve them; if a husband be sick, the wife must fill up his place in family affairs; if the rich are reduced to beggary, they must receive charity; if the physician be sick, somebody must look to him: so the meanest servant must admonish his master, and the child his parent, and the wife her husband, and the people their minister; so that it be done when there is real need, and with all possible humility, modesty, and meekness.—Do not say, this will make us all preachers; for every good Christian is a teacher, and hath a charge of his neighbour's soul. Do not despair of success. Cannot God give it? and may it not be by thy means? Do not plead, it will only be casting pearls before swine. When you are in danger to be torn in pieces, Christ would have you forbear; but what is that to you that are in no such danger? as long as they will hear, you have encouragement to speak.—Say not, “It

is a friend on whom I much depend, and by telling him his sin and misery, I may lose his love, and be undone." Is his love more to be valued than his safety? or thy own benefit by him, than the salvation of his soul? or wilt thou connive at his damnation, because he is thy friend? is that thy best requital of his friendship? Hadst thou rather he should burn in hell for ever, than thou shouldst lose his favour, or the maintenance thou hast from him?

III. But that all who fear God, may be excited to do their utmost to help others to this blessed rest, let me entreat you to consider the following motives. Would you not think him unnatural, that would suffer his child, or neighbours, to starve in the streets, while he has provision at hand? and is not he more unnatural, that will let them eternally perish, and not open his mouth to save them? If God had bid you make some great sacrifice to save them, you would surely have refused, when you will not bestow a word upon them. Is not the soul of a husband, or wife, or child, or neighbour, worth a few words? Cruelty to men's bodies is a great sin; but to their souls much more, as the soul is of greater worth than the body, and eternity than time. Consider what Christ did toward the saving of souls. He thought them worth his blood; and shall we not think them

worth our breath? Consider what fit objects of pity ungodly people are. They are dead in trespasses and sin, have not hearts to feel their miseries, nor to pity themselves. It is the nature of their disease, to make them pitiless to themselves, yea, their own most cruel destroyers.—Consider, it was once thy own case. It was God's argument to the Israelites, to be kind to strangers, because themselves had been strangers in the land of Egypt.—Consider thy relation to them; it is thy neighbour, thy brother, whom thou art bound to love as thyself. He that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, doth not love God whom he never saw; and doth he love his brother, that will see him go to hell, and never try to hinder him?

Consider what a load of guilt this neglect lays upon thy own soul.* Consider what a joy it will be in heaven, to meet those there, whom you have been a means to bring thither; to see their faces, and join with them for ever in the praises of God, whom you were the happy instruments of bringing to the knowledge and obedience of Jesus Christ!—Consider how many souls you may have drawn into the way of damnation, or hardened in it. We have had, in the days of our ignorance, our companions in sin, whom we incited or encouraged; and doth

* Read Ezekiel chapter xxxiii. 1—9. and ponder it.—*Ed.*

it not become us, to be willing to do as much to save men, as we have done to destroy them?— Consider how diligent are all the enemies of these poor souls, to draw them to hell. The devil is tempting them day and night; their inward lusts are still working for their ruin; the flesh is still pleading for its delights; their old companions are increasing their dislike of holiness; and art thou unwilling to help them?

Consider how deep the neglect of this duty will wound, when conscience is awakened.— When a man comes to die, conscience will ask him, “What good hast thou done in thy lifetime? The saving of souls is the greatest good work; what hast thou done towards it? How many hast thou dealt faithfully with?” I have often observed, that the consciences of dying men very much wound them for this omission. For my own part, when I have thought myself near death, my conscience hath accused me more for this, than for any sin: it would bring every ignorant profane neighbour to my remembrance, to whom I never made known their danger: it would tell me, “thou shouldest have gone to them in private, and told them plainly of their desperate danger, though it had been when thou shouldst have eaten, or slept, if thou hadst no other time.” Conscience would remind me how at such or such a time, I was in

company with the ignorant, or was riding by the way with a wilful sinner, and had a fit opportunity to have dealt with him, but did not; or at least did it to little purpose. Consider, your neighbours will shortly die, and so will you: speak to them therefore while you may. Though this is a work of the greatest charity, yet every one may perform it; the poorest, as well as the rich. Once more, consider the happy consequences of this work, where it is faithfully done. You may be instrumental in saving souls, for which Christ came down and died, and in which the angels of God rejoice: such souls will bless you here and hereafter. God will have glory by it: the church will be multiplied and edified by it: your own souls will enjoy more improvement and vigour in a divine life, more peace of conscience, more rejoicing in spirit. Of all the personal mercies that I ever received, next to the love of God in Christ to my own soul, I must most joyfully bless him for the plentiful success of my endeavours upon others. O what fruits then might I have seen, if I had been more faithful! I know we need to be very jealous of our deceitful hearts in this point, lest our rejoicings should come from our pride. Naturally, we would have the praise of every good work ascribed to ourselves. Yet, to imitate our Father in good-

ness and mercy, and to rejoice in the degree of them we attain to, is the duty of every child of God. I therefore tell you my own experience, to persuade you, that if you did but know what a joyful thing it is, you would follow it through the greatest discouragements.

Up then, every man that hath a tongue, and is a servant of Christ, and do something of your Master's work. And how can you serve him more eminently than in saving souls? He that will pronounce you blessed at the last day, and invite you to the kingdom prepared for you, because you fed him, and clothed him, and visited him, in his poor members, will surely pronounce you blessed for bringing souls to his kingdom. But as this duty belongs to all Christians, so especially to some, according as God hath called them to it, or qualified them for it. To them therefore I will more particularly address the exhortation.

All you who are peculiarly acquainted with some ungodly men, and that have peculiar interest in them, God looks for this duty at your hands. Christ himself did eat and drink with publicans and sinners; but it was to be their physician, and not their companion. Who knows but God gave you interest in them to this end, that you might be the means of their recovery? They that will not regard the words

of a stranger, may regard a brother, or sister, or husband, or wife, or friend.

Physicians, that are much about dying men, should in a special manner make conscience of this duty. It is their peculiar advantage, that they are with men in sickness and dangers, when the ear is more open, and the heart less stubborn, than in time of health; and that men look upon their physician, as a person in whose hands is their life, or at least who may do much to save them, and therefore they will the more regard his advice. You that are of this honourable profession, do not think this a work besides your calling, as if it belonged to none but ministers; except you think it besides your calling to be compassionate, or to be Christians.* O, help therefore to fit your patients for heaven! and whether you think they are for life or death, teach them both how to live and die, and give them some physic for their souls, as you do for their bodies. Blessed be God, that very many of the chief physicians of this age have, by their eminent piety, vindicated their profession from the common imputation of atheism and profaneness.

Men of wealth and authority, and that have many dependants, have excellent advantages for this duty. O, what good might lords and gentlemen do, if they had but hearts to improve

their influence over others! Have you not all your honour and riches from God? doth not Christ say, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required? If you speak to your dependants, for God and their souls, you may be regarded, when even a minister shall be despised. As you value the honour of God, your own comfort, and the salvation of souls, improve your influence over your tenants and neighbours: visit their houses; see whether they honour God in their families; and take all opportunities to press them to their duty. Despise them not. Remember, God is no respecter of persons. Let men see that you excel others in piety, compassion, and diligence in God's work, as you do in the riches and honours of the world.

As for the ministers of the gospel, it is the very work of their calling, to help others to heaven. Be sure to make it the main end of your preaching. He is the able, skilful minister, that is the best skilled in instructing, convincing, persuading, and consequently of winning souls: and that is the best sermon, that is best in these. If you seek not God, but yourselves, God will make you the most contemptible of men. It is true of your reputation, what Christ says of your life, he that loveth it shall lose it.— Let the vigour of your persuasions shew, that

you are sensible, on how weighty a business you are sent. Preach with that seriousness and fervour, as men that believe their own doctrine, and that know their hearers must be prevailed with, or be damned. Think not, that all your work is in your studies and pulpit. You are shepherds, and should know your sheep; and what is their disease; and mark their straying; and help to cure them, and fetch them home:* learn of Paul, not only to teach your people publicly, but from house to house. Inquire how they grow in knowledge and holiness, and on what grounds they build their hopes of salvation, and whether they walk uprightly, and perform the duties of their several relations: see whether they worship God in their families. Be familiar with them, that you may maintain your interest in them, and improve it all for God. If any too little savour the things of the Spirit, let them be pitied, but not neglected. If any walk disorderly, labour to recover them with diligence, and patience. If they be ignorant, it may be your fault. Be not asleep, while the wolf is waking. Deal not slightly with any. Some will not tell their people plainly of their sins, because they are great men, and some because they are godly; as if none but the poor and the wicked should be

* Read Ezekiel, chapter xxxiv. 1—10.—*Ed.*

dealt plainly with. Yet labour to be skilful and discreet, that the manner may answer to the excellency of the matter. *Study to shew yourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth;*¹—Let your conversation be teaching, as well as your doctrine. Be as forward in a holy and heavenly life, as you are in pressing others to it. Let your discourse be edifying and spiritual. Suffer any thing, rather than the gospel and men's souls should suffer. Let men see that your hearts are set upon the welfare of souls. Whatsoever meekness, humility, condescension, or self-denial, you teach them from the gospel, teach them also by your undissembled example. Study and strive after unity and peace. If ever you would promote the kingdom of Christ, and your people's salvation, do it in the way of peace and love. It is a hard a thing to maintain in your people, a sound understanding, a tender conscience, a lively, gracious, heavenly frame of spirit; and an upright life, amidst contention, as to keep a candle lighted in the greatest storm. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing."

All you, whom God hath intrusted with the care of children and servants, I would also per-

¹ 2 Tim. 2—15.

suade to this great work, of helping others to the heavenly rest. Consider, what plain and pressing commands of God, require this at your hands. "These words thou shalt teach diligently unto thy children; and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in the house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."² Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it."³ "Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."⁴ God himself says of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord."⁵ Consider, God hath made your children your charge, and your servants too, and woe to you, if you suffer them to be ignorant, or wicked, for want of your instruction or correction. Consider what work there is for you, in their dispositions and lives: they have hereditary diseases bred in their natures: the things you must teach them, are contrary to the interest and desires of their flesh. Consider what sorrows you prepare for yourselves, by the neglect of your children; if they prove "thorns in your eyes," it may be they are of your own planting. On the other

² Deut. vi. 6, 7.—³ Prov. xxii. 6.—⁴ Ephes. vi. 4.

⁵ Gen. xviii. 19.

side, think what a comfort you may have, if you be faithful in this duty. If you should not succeed, you have freed your own souls, and have peace in your own consciences. If you do, the comfort is inexpressible, in their love and obedience, their supplying your wants, and delighting you in all your remaining path to glory: yea, all your family may fare the better, for one pious child or servant: but the greatest joy will be, when you shall say, Lord, here am I, and the children thou hast given me: and shall joyfully live with them for ever. City and country groan under the neglect of this weighty duty; yea, it is a great cause of all our miseries both in the church, and in the state, even the want of a holy education of children. I also entreat parents to consider, what excellent advantages they have, for helping their children. They are with you while they are tender and flexible: you have a twig to bend, not an oak: none have such interest in their affections as you have: you have also the greatest authority over them: their dependence is upon you for a maintenance: and you best know their temper and inclinations.

Especially, you mothers, remember this, who are more with your children while young, than their fathers. What pains are you at for their bodies! what do you suffer to bring them

into the world! and will you not be at some pains for the saving of their souls? Your affections are tender; and will it not move you, to think of their perishing for ever? I beseech you, teach them, admonish them, watch over them, and give them no rest till they are brought to Christ. If you cannot do what you would for them, yet do what you can. Remember Eli. And, as you would not be charged before God with their souls, nor have them cry out against you in everlasting fire, see that you teach them how to escape it, and bring them up in holiness and the fear of God.

If you are not willing to do it, now you know it to be so great a duty, you are no true subjects of Jesus Christ. If you are willing, but know not how, I will add a few words of direction to help you. Lead them, by your own example, to prayer, reading, and other religious duties; labour to inform their understandings; store their memories; rectify their wills; quicken their affections; keep tender their consciences; restrain their tongues, and reform and watch over their outward conversation. To these ends get them Bibles and pious books, and see that they read them: examine them often what they learn; especially spend the Lord's day in this work, and suffer them not to spend it in sports and idleness. Shew

them the meaning of what they read or learn. Keep them out of evil company, and especially show them the necessity, excellency, and pleasure, of serving God; and labour to fix all upon their hearts.

CHAPTER X.

*The Saints' Rest is not to be expected
on Earth.*

WE are not yet come to our resting place. How great then is our sin and folly, to seek and expect it here. Where shall we find the Christian that deserves not this reproof? We would have continual prosperity, because it is easy and pleasing to the flesh; but we consider not the unreasonableness of such desires. When we enjoy convenient houses, goods, lands, and revenues; or the necessary means God hath appointed for our spiritual good; we seek *rest* in these enjoyments. Whether we are in an afflicted or prosperous state, it is apparent we exceedingly make the creature our *rest*. Do we not desire creature-enjoyments more violently, when we want them, than we desire God himself? do we not

delight more in the possession of them, than in the enjoyment of God? and if we lose them, doth it not trouble us more than our loss of God? Is it not enough, that they are refreshing helps in our way to heaven, but they must also be made our heaven itself? Christian reader, I would willingly make thee sensible of this great sin. In order to this, I beseech thee to consider,—the reasonableness of present afflictions,—and the unreasonableness of resting in present enjoyments.

I. To shew the reasonableness of present afflictions, consider,—they are the way to rest;—they keep us from mistaking our rest, and from losing our way to it;—they quicken our pace towards it;—and under them, God's people have often the sweetest foretastes of their rest.

1. Consider, that labour and trouble are the common way to rest, both in the course of nature and grace. Do you not travel and toil first, and rest after? Why should we desire the course of grace to be perverted, any more than the course of nature? It is declared, “that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God:” and, that “if we suffer, we shall also reign with Christ.” And what are we, that God's statutes should be reversed for our pleasure?

2. Afflictions are exceedingly useful, to keep us from mistaking our rest. What warm, and eager thoughts, have we of the world, till afflictions moderate them! Afflictions speak convincingly, and will be heard when preachers cannot. Many a poor Christian at times, bends his thoughts to wealth, or flesh-pleasing, or applause, and so loses his relish of Christ, and the joy above; till God breaks in upon his riches, or children, or conscience, or health, or breaks down his mountain which he thought so strong: and then, when he lieth in Manasseh's fetters, or is fastened to his bed with pining sickness, the world is nothing, and heaven is something. If our dear Lord did not put these thorns under our head, we should sleep out our lives, and lose our glory.

3. Afflictions are also God's most effectual means, to keep us from losing our way to our rest. Without this hedge of thorns on the right hand and left, we should hardly keep the way to heaven: if there be but one gap open, how ready are we to find it, and turn out at it! When we grow wanton, or worldly, or proud, how doth sickness or other affliction reduce us! We may say with David, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray," and many thousand recovered sinners may cry, "O healthful sickness! O gainful losses! O blessed day that

ever I was afflicted!" Not only the green pastures, and still waters, but the rod and staff, they comfort us. Though the Word and Spirit do the main work, yet suffering so unbolts the door of the heart, that the word hath easier entrance.

4. Afflictions likewise serve to quicken our pace, in the way to our rest. What a difference there is, betwixt our prayers in health, and in sickness! betwixt our repentings in prosperity, and adversity! Judge, Christian, whether thou dost not go more watchfully and speedily in the way to heaven, in thy sufferings, than in thy more pleasing and prosperous state. Could we once believe God, and judge of his dealings by his word, and by their usefulness to our souls, and reference to our rest, then we should have a truer judgment of our afflictions.

5. Once more consider, God seldom gives his people so sweet a foretaste of their future rest, as in their deep afflictions. Especially, when our sufferings are more directly for his cause, then he seldom fails to sweeten the bitter cup. The martyrs have possessed the highest joys. When did Christ preach such comforts to his disciples, as when their hearts were sorrowful at his departure?* Say not,

* Read John 14, 15, 16, 17 Chapters.—*Ed.*

“ I could bear any other affliction but this.” If God had afflicted thee where thou canst bear it, thy idol would neither have been discovered nor removed. Neither say, “ If God would deliver me out of it, I could be content to bear it.” Is it nothing that he hath promised, it shall work for thy good? Say not, “ If my affliction did not disable me from my duty, I could bear it.” It doth not disable thee, for that duty which tendeth to thy own personal benefit; but is the greatest quickening help thou canst expect. As for thy duty to others, it is not thy duty when God disables thee. Do not plead, “ If I had but that consolation which you say God reserveth for suffering times, I should suffer more contentedly; but I do not perceive any such thing.” The more you suffer for righteousness' sake, the more of this blessing you may expect. Are not the comforts you desire neglected or resisted? Have your afflictions fitted you for comfort? It is not mere suffering, that prepares us for comfort, but the success and fruit of suffering upon our hearts.

II. To show the unreasonableness of resting in present enjoyments, consider,—it is idolizing them;—it is the way to have them refused, withdrawn, or imbittered;—the objects we

here enjoy are insufficient to afford us rest;— it is seeking rest where it is not to be found;— the creatures, without God, would aggravate our misery;—and to confirm all this, we may consult our own experience, and that of others.

1. It is idolatry to make any creature, or means, our *rest*. To be the rest of the soul is God's own prerogative. As it is apparent idolatry, to place our rest in riches, or honours; so it is but a more refined idolatry, to take up our rest in excellent means of grace. How ill must our dear Lord take it, when we give him cause to complain, as he did of our fellow-idolaters, “ My people have been lost sheep, they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting place :” and to say, “ My people can find rest in any thing rather than in me, they can delight in one another, but not in me : they can rejoice in my creatures, and ordinances, but not in me : yea, in their very labours and duties they seek for rest, but not in me : they had rather be any where, than be with me.”

2. It is the way to cause God, either to deny the mercies we ask, or to take from us those we enjoy, or at least imbitter them to us. If the Lord see you begin to settle in the world, and say, “ Here I will rest,” if he love

you, no wonder if he take that from you, with which he sees you are destroying yourselves. It hath long been my observation of many, that when they have attempted great works, and have just finished them; or have aimed at great things in the world, and have just obtained them; or have lived in much trouble, and have just overcome it; and began to look on their condition with content, and rest in it; they are then usually near to death or ruin. When a man is once at this language, "Soul, take thy ease;" the next news often is, "Thou fool, this night," or this month, or this year, "thy soul shall be required."

3. The objects we here enjoy, are insufficient to afford us rest. If novelty supports not, our delights on earth grow dull. What is there in all the world to give us rest? they that have most of it, have the greatest burden:—they that rejoice most in it, do all cry out at last, of its vanity and vexation. Men promise themselves a heaven upon earth; but when they come to enjoy it, it flies from them. He that has any regard to the work of the Lord, may easily see, that the very end of it, is to take down our idols, to make us weary of the world, and seek our *rest* in him. Where does he cross us most, but where we promise ourselves most content?

Nor are we now capable of *rest*, because a preparation must go before it. Are we fit for the crown, before we have overcome? or for the prize, before we have run the race? or to receive our penny, before we have worked in the vineyard? or to be rulers of ten cities, before we have improved our ten talents? or to enter into the joy of our Lord, before we have well done, as good and faithful servants? God will not alter the course of justice, to give you rest before you have laboured, nor the crown of glory till you have overcome. Take heed then, Christian, how thou darest to contrive and care for a rest on earth; or to murmur at God, for thy trouble and toil, and wants in the flesh.

4. It is seeking rest where it is not to be found. Your labour will be lost, and, if you proceed, your soul's eternal rest too. Our rest is only in the full obtaining of our ultimate end. Should Israel have fixed their rest in the wilderness, among serpents, and enemies, and weariness, and famine? Should a soldier rest in the thickest of his enemies? And are not Christians such travellers, such soldiers? Have you not fears within, and troubles without? Are we not in continual dangers? We cannot eat, drink, labour, hear, converse, but in the midst of snares; and

shall we sit down and rest here? O Christian, follow thy work; look to thy dangers, and hold on to the end; win the field, and come off the ground, before thou thinkest of a settled rest. But if nothing else will convince us, yet sure the remainders of sin, which do so easily beset us, should quickly satisfy a believer, that here is not his rest. I say therefore to every one that thinketh of rest on earth, "Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest, because it is polluted."⁵

5. To have creatures and means without God, is an aggravation of our misery. If God should say, "Take my creatures, my words, my servants, my ordinances, but not myself;" would you take this for happiness? If you had the words of God, and not the Word which is God; or could cry with the Jews, "The temple of the Lord," and had not the Lord of the temple; this were a poor happiness. Was Capernaum the more happy, or the more miserable, for seeing the mighty works which they had seen, and hearing the words of Christ which they did hear? Surely that which aggravates our sin and misery, cannot be our rest.

6. To confirm all this, let us consult our own and others' experience. Millions have

⁵ Micah ii. 10.

made trial ; but did any ever find a *sufficient rest* for his soul on earth ? Delights, I deny not, but they have found, but *rest*, they never found : and shall we think to find that, which never man could find before us ? Ahab's kingdom is nothing to him without Naboth's vineyard ; and did that satisfy him, when he obtained it ? Were you, like Noah's dove, to look through the earth for a resting place, you would return confessing that you could find none. Go ask honour, is there rest here ? you may as well rest on the top of tempestuous mountains, or in Etna's flames. Ask riches, is there rest here ? Even such, as is in a bed of thorns. - If you inquire for rest of worldly pleasure, it is such as the fish hath in swallowing the bait ; when the pleasure is sweetest, death is nearest. Go to learning, and even to divine ordinances, and inquire whether there, your souls may rest ? You might indeed receive from these, an olive branch of hope, as they are means to your rest, and have relation to eternity ; but in regard of any satisfaction in themselves, you would remain as restless as ever. How well might all these answer us, " Am I in God's stead," that you come to me for soul-rest ? Not all the states of men in the world, neither court nor country, towns nor cities, shops nor fields, treasuries, libraries,

solitude, society, studies, nor pulpits, can afford any such thing as this rest. If you could inquire of the dead of all generations, or of the living through all dominions, they would all tell you, "Here is no rest." Or if other men's experience move you not, take a view of your own. Can you remember the state that did fully satisfy you?

If then, either scripture or reason, or the experience of ourselves, and all the world, will satisfy us, we may see there is no resting here; and yet how guilty are the generality of us of this sin? How many halts and stops do we make, before we will make the *Lord our rest!* How must God even drive us, and fire us out of every condition, lest we should sit down and rest there! If he gives us prosperity, riches, or honour, we do in our hearts dance before them, as the Israelites before their calf, and say, *these are thy gods*; and conclude *it is good to be here*. If he imbitter all these to us, how restless are we, till our condition be sweetened, that we may sit down again, and rest where we were! If he proceed in the cure, and take the creature quite away, then how do we labour, and cry, that God would restore it. And while we are deprived of our former idol, rather than come to God, we delight ourselves in the hope of recovering it,

and make that very hope our rest; or search about from creature to creature, to find out something to supply the room: yea, if we can find no supply, yet we will rather settle in this misery, and make a rest of a wretched being, than leave all and come to God. O the amazing averseness of our souls to God! Yea, when he is bringing us over to himself, and hath convinced us of the worth of his ways and service, the last deceit of all is here; we will rather settle upon those ways that lead to him, and those ordinances that speak of him, and those gifts which flow from him, than we will come entirely over to himself. Christian, marvel not that I speak so much of resting in these; beware lest it prove thy own case. I suppose thou art so far convinced of the vanity of riches, honour, and pleasure, that thou canst more easily disclaim these; and it is well if it be so: but the means of grace thou lookest on with less suspicion, and thinkest thou canst not delight in them too much, especially seeing most of the world despise them, or delight in them too little. I know they must be loved and valued; but when we are content with ordinances without God, and had rather be at a sermon than in heaven, and a member of the church here, than of the perfect church above, this is a sad mistake. So

far let thy soul take comfort in means, as God doth accompany them, remembering this is not heaven, but the first-fruits. If God were as willing to be absent from us, as we from him, and as loth to be our rest, as we to rest in him, we should be left to an eternal restless separation. Above all, see that you watch and pray against settling any-where short of heaven, or reposing your souls on any thing below God.

CHAPTER XI.

The Importance of leading a heavenly Life upon Earth.

Is there such a rest remaining for us? Why then are our thoughts no more upon it? Why are not our hearts continually there? Why dwell we not there, in more constant contemplation? What is the cause of this neglect? Are we reasonable in this, or are we not? Hath the eternal God provided us such a glory, and promised to take us up to dwell with himself, and is not this worth thinking of? Do we believe this, and yet forget and neglect it? If God will not give us leave to approach this light, what mean all his earnest

invitations? Why doth he so condemn our earthly-mindedness, and command us to *set our affections on things above*? Ah, vile hearts! if God were against it, we were more likely to be for it. Like our predecessors, the sinful Israelites, when God would have them march for Canaan, then they mutiny, and will not stir; but when God bids them not go, then they will be presently marching. Though God says, Love not the world, nor the things of the world, yet we dote upon it: how frequently can we think of our pleasures, our friends, our labours, our flesh and its lusts, yea, our wrongs and miseries, our fears and sufferings? But where is the Christian, whose heart is on his rest? What is the matter? Are we so full of joy that we need no more? Or is there nothing in heaven for our joyous thoughts? Or rather, are not our hearts carnal and stupid?

I am now speaking to those, whose hopes are in heaven, and shall I be discouraged from persuading such to be heavenly-minded? Fellow-Christians, if *you* will not hear and obey, who will? Well may we be discouraged from exhorting the blind ungodly world, and may say as Moses, "Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me, how then shall Pharaoh hear me?" I require thee,

reader, as ever thou hopest for a part in this glory, that thou presently take thy heart to task; chide it for its wilful strangeness to God, turn thy thoughts from the pursuit of vanity, bend thy soul to study eternity, busy it about the life to come, habituate thyself to such contemplations, and let not those thoughts be seldom and cursory, but bathe thy soul in heaven's delights; and if thy backward soul begin to flag, and thy thoughts to wander, call them back, hold them to their work, bear not with their laziness, nor connive at one neglect.—And when thou hast, in obedience to God, tried this work, got acquainted with it, and kept a guard on thy thoughts till they are accustomed to obey, thou wilt then find thyself in the suburbs of heaven, and know that there is indeed a sweetness in the work, and way of God; and that the life of Christianity, is a life of joy. Thou wilt meet with those abundant consolations, after which, thou hast prayed, panted, and groaned, and which so few Christians do ever here obtain, because they know not this way to them, or else make not conscience of walking in it. Say not, “We are unable to set our own hearts on heaven; this must be the work of God only.” Though God be the chief disposer of your hearts, yet next under him, you have the

greatest command of them yourselves. **WITHOUT CHRIST YOU CAN DO NOTHING**, yet under Him you may do much, and must, or else it will be undone, and yourselves undone through your neglect. *

But because I know, while we have flesh about us, and any remains of that carnal mind, which is enmity to God, and to this noble work, that all motives are little enough, I will here lay down some considerations, in order to incite you to resolve on this excellent duty. More particularly consider—it will evidence your sincere piety—it is the way to live most comfortably; it will be the best preservative from temptations to sin,—it will enliven your graces and duties!—it will be your best cordial in all afflictions!—it will render you most profitable to others!—it will honour God!—without it you will disobey the commands of God, and lose his most gracious and delightful discoveries in the Holy Scriptures;—it is also reasonable, to have your hearts with God, as His is so much on you,—and in heaven, where you have so much interest and relation;—besides, there is nothing but heaven, worth setting your hearts upon.

1. Consider, a heart set upon heaven will be an unquestionable evidence of your sin-

cerity, and a clear discovery of a true work of saving grace upon your souls. You are often asking "how shall we know that we are truly sanctified?" here you have a sign infallible, from the mouth of Jesus Christ himself; "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.¹ God is the saints' treasure and happiness; Heaven is the place where they must fully enjoy him; a heart therefore set upon heaven, is no other than a heart set upon God: and surely a heart set upon God through Christ, is the truest evidence of saving grace. When learning will be no proof of grace; when knowledge, duties, gifts, will fail; when arguments from thy tongue, or hand, may be confuted; yet then will this, from the bent of thy heart, prove thee sincere. Christian, as thou wouldst have a proof of thy title to glory, labour to get thy heart above. If sin and Satan keep not thy affections from heaven, they will never be able to keep *thee* from heaven.

2. A heavenly mind, is the nearest and truest way to a life of comfort. The countries far north, are cold and frozen, because they are distant from the sun: and what makes such frozen uncomfortable Christians, but their living so far from heaven? If we would try this

¹ Matt. vi. 21.

life with God, and keep these hearts above, what a spring of joy would be within us! If, as David professes, the light of God's countenance more gladdens the heart, than corn, and wine; then surely they that draw nearest, and most behold it, must be fullest of these joys. Whom should we blame then, that we are so void of consolation, but our own negligent hearts? God hath provided us a crown of glory, and promised to set it shortly on our heads, and we will not so much as think of it. He bids us behold and rejoice, and we will not so much as look at it; and yet we complain for want of comfort. It is by *believing*, that we are filled with joy and peace,² and no longer than we continue believing. It is in hope, the saints rejoice, and no longer than they continue hoping. The Holy Spirit worketh our comforts, by setting our own spirits on work upon the promises, and raising our thoughts to the source of our comforts. He does not bestow our joys while we are idle, or taken up with other things. He gives the fruits of the earth while we plough, and sow, and weed, and water, and dung, and dress, and with patience expect his blessing; so, doth he give the joys of the soul. I entreat thee, reader, as thou valuest the life of con-

² Rom. xv. 13.

stant joy, and that good conscience which is a continual feast, to set upon this work seriously, and learn the art of heavenly-mindedness, and thou shalt find the increase an hundred-fold, and the benefit abundantly exceed thy labour. But this is the misery of man's nature ; though every man naturally hates sorrow, and loves a joyful life, yet few love the way to joy, or will endure the pains by which it is obtained ; they content themselves with earthly pleasures, rather than ascend to heaven to seek it ; and yet when all is done, they must have it thence, or be without it.

3. A heart in heaven, will be a most excellent preservative against temptations to sin. It will keep the heart well employed. When we are idle, we tempt the devil to tempt us. If you were but busy in your lawful callings, you would not be so ready to hearken to temptations ; much less, if you were also busy above with God. A mind set on heaven can reply to the tempter, as Nehemiah did, " I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come : " it hath not leisure to be lustful or wanton, ambitious or worldly.

A heavenly mind is the freest from sin, because it hath truer and livelier apprehensions of spiritual things. Over him that hath a deep insight into the evil of sin, the vanity

of the creature, and the brutishness of fleshly, sensual delights, temptations have little power. Earth is the place for Satan's temptations, and earth the ordinary bait; but how shall these ensnare the Christian, who walks with God. Is converse with wise men, the way to make one wise? much more is converse with God. The men of the world, that dwell below, and know no other conversation but earthly, no wonder if their understanding be darkened, and Satan takes them captive at his will: no wonder they mistake gain for godliness, sin for grace, their own wills for the law of Christ, and in the issue, hell for heaven. But when a Christian withdraws himself from his worldly thoughts, and begins to converse with God, methinks he is, as Nebuchadnezzar, taken from the beasts of the field to the throne, and his reason returneth unto him.

A heavenly mind, is also fortified against temptations, because the affections are thoroughly prepossessed with the high delights of another world. He that loves most, and not he that only knows most, will most easily resist the motions of sin. O, that thou wouldst be often feeding on the hidden manna,—and tasting the delights of heaven! How would this confirm thy resolutions, and make thee despise the vanities of the world!

Besides, whilst the heart is set on heaven, a man is under God's protection. If Satan then assault thee, God is more engaged for thy defence, and will doubtless stand by thee, and say, "My grace is sufficient for thee." When a man is in the way of God's blessing, he is in the less danger of sin's enticing. Amidst thy temptations, christian reader, use much this powerful remedy: keep close with God by a heavenly mind; follow thy business with Christ, and thou wilt find this a surer help than any other.

4. The diligent keeping of thy heart on heaven, will maintain the vigour of all thy graces, and put life into all thy duties. The heavenly Christian, is the lively Christian. It is our strangeness to heaven, that makes us so dull. We run so slowly, and strive so lazily, because we so little mind the prize. Set upon this employment, and others will see the face of thy conversation shine; and say, surely he hath been with God in the mount. But if you lie complaining of deadness and dulness, that you cannot love Christ, nor rejoice in his love, that you have no life in prayer, nor any other duty; and yet neglect this quickening employment; you are the cause of your own complaint. Is not "thy life hid with Christ in God?" where must thou go but to Christ

for it? *Thou wilt not come to Christ that thou mayest have life.*

If thou wouldst have light and heat, why art thou no more in the sunshine? For want of this recourse to heaven, thy soul is a lamp that is not lighted, and thy duties as a sacrifice which hath no fire. Fetch one coal daily from this altar, and see if thy offering will not burn. Light thy lamp at this flame, and feed it daily with oil from hence, and see if it will not gloriously shine. Keep close to this reviving fire, and see if thy affections will not be warm. In thy want of love to God, lift up thy eye of faith to heaven, behold his beauty, contemplate his excellencies, and see whether his amiableness and perfect goodness will not ravish thy heart. As exercise maintaineth appetite, strength, and vigour to the body; so these heavenly exercises will quickly cause the increases of grace and spiritual life. Besides, it is not false, or strange fire, which you fetch from heaven, for your sacrifices. The zeal which is kindled by meditations on heaven, is likely to be heavenly zeal. Some men's fervency, is only drawn from their books, and some from the sharpness of affliction, and some from the mouth of a powerful minister, and some from the attention of an auditory; but he that knows this way to

heaven, and derives it daily from the true fountain, shall have his soul revived with the water of life, and enjoy that quickening which is peculiar to the saints. Say not, how can mortals ascend to heaven? Faith hath wings, and meditation is its chariot. Faith is as a burning glass to thy sacrifice, and meditation sets it to the face of the sun; only take it not away too soon, but hold it there awhile, and thy soul will feel the happy effect. Reader, dost thou not think, when thou seest a lively Christian, and hearest his lively fervent prayers, and edifying discourse “O how happy a man is this! O that my soul were in this blessed condition!” Why, I here advise thee from God, set thyself conscientiously to this work, wash thee frequently in this Jordan, and thy leprous dead soul will revive, and *thou shalt know that there is a God in Israel*, and that thou mayest live a vigorous and joyful life, if thou dost not wilfully neglect thy own mercies.

5. The frequent, believing views of glory, are the most precious cordials in all afflictions. These cordials, by cheering our spirits, render sufferings far more easy; enable us to bear them with patience and joy; and strengthen our resolutions, not to forsake Christ for fear of trouble. Had it not been for that little,

(alas, too little) taste which I had of rest, my sufferings would have been grievous, and death more terrible. I may say, "Unless this promised rest had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction." "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock."⁸ All sufferings are nothing to us, so far as we have these supporting joys. When persecution and fear have shut the doors, Christ *can* come in, and say to his disciples, "Peace be unto you." Paul and Silas can be in heaven, even when they are thrust into the inner prison, their bodies scourged with many stripes, and their feet fast in the stocks. If the Son of God will walk with us, we are safe in the midst of flames. Moses "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; because he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." Even "Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross,

⁸ Psalm xxvii. 4, 5.

despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." This is the noble advantage of faith, it can look on the means and end together. The great reason of our impatience is, because we gaze on the evil itself, but fix not our thoughts on what is beyond it. They that see Christ only on the cross, or in the grave, do shake their heads, and think him lost; but God saw him dying, buried, rising, glorified, and all at one view. Faith will in this imitate God, so far as it hath the glass of a promise to help it. Could we but clearly see heaven, as the end of all God's dealings with us, surely none of his dealings could be so grievous. We should find, that though heaven and sin are at a great distance; yet heaven and a prison, or banishment, or a den of lions, or sickness, or death, are at no such distance.

6. He that hath his conversation in heaven, is the profitable Christian to all about him. When a worldly man will talk of nothing but the world, and a politician of state affairs, and a mere scholar of human learning, and a common professor of his duties; the heavenly man will be speaking of heaven. O how refreshing and useful are his expressions! How his words pierce and melt the heart! How doth his *doctrine drop as the rain, and his speech*

distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass, while his lips publish the name of the Lord, and ascribe greatness unto his God! Is not his sweet discourse of heaven, like the precious ointment, which being poured upon the head of Christ, filled the house with odour? All that are near may be refreshed by it. Happy the people that have a heavenly minister! Happy the children and servants that have a heavenly-minded father or master! Happy the man that hath a heavenly companion, who will watch over thy ways, strengthen thee when thou art weak, cheer thee when thou art drooping, and comfort thee, with the comfort wherewith he himself hath been so often comforted of God! This is he, that will be blowing at the spark of thy spiritual life, and drawing thy soul to God. Come to this man's house, and sit at his table, will he not feast thy soul with spiritual food? travel with him by the way, and will he not quicken thee in thy journey to heaven? If thou wrong him, he can pardon thee, remembering that Christ hath pardoned his great offences; if thou be angry, he is meek, considering the meekness of his heavenly pattern. Or if he fall out with thee, he is soon reconciled, when he recollects,

that in heaven you must be everlasting friends. This is the Christian of the right stamp, and all about him, are better for him.

7. No man so highly honoureth God, as he whose conversation is in heaven. Is not a parent disgraced, when his children feed on husks, are clothed in rags, and keep company with none but rogues and beggars! Is it not so to our heavenly Father, when we, who call ourselves his children, feed on earth; and the garb of our souls, is like that of the naked world; and our hearts familiarly converse with, and cleave to the dust, rather than stand continually in our Father's presence? Surely we live below the children of a King, not according to the height of our hopes, nor the provision of our Father's house, and the great preparations made for his saints. It is well we have a Father of tender bowels, who will own his children in rags.—But when a Christian can live above, and rejoice his soul with the things that are unseen; how is God honoured by such a one! The Lord will testify for him, “This man believes me, and takes me at my word; he rejoiceth at my promise, before he hath possession; he can be thankful for what his bodily eyes never saw; his heart is with me; he loves my presence, and he shall surely enjoy it in my kingdom for ever. “Blessed are they that have

not seen, and yet have believed." "Them that honour me, I will honour." How did God esteem himself honoured by Caleb and Joshua, when they went into the promised land, and brought back to their brethren, a taste of the fruits, and spake well of the good land, and encouraged the people!

8. A soul that doth not set its affections on things above, disobeys the commands of God, and loses his most gracious and delightful discoveries in the Holy Scriptures. The same God that hath commanded thee to believe, and to be a Christian, hath commanded thee to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, to set *thy* affections on things above, not on things on the earth."¹ The same God that hath forbidden thee to murder, or steal, hath forbidden thee to neglect this great duty; and darest thou wilfully disobey him? Why not make conscience of one, as well as the other? He hath made it thy duty, as well as the means of thy comfort, that a double bond may engage thee not to forsake thy own mercies. Besides, what are all the most glorious descriptions of heaven, all those discoveries of our future blessedness, and precious promises of our rest, but lost to thee? Are not these the stars in

¹ Col. iii. 1, 2.

the firmament of scripture, and the golden lines in that book of God? Methinks thou shouldst not part with one of those promises, no, not for a world. As heaven is the perfection of all our mercies, so the promises of it in the gospel, are the very soul of the gospel. Is a comfortable word from the mouth of God of such worth, that all the comforts in the world are nothing to it? And dost thou neglect and overlook so many of them? Why should God reveal so much of his counsel, and tell us beforehand of the joys we shall possess, but to make us know it for our joy? If it had not been to fill us with the delights of our fore-known blessedness, he might have kept his purpose to himself, and never have let us know it till we come to enjoy it. Yea, when we had got possession of our rest, he might still have concealed its eternity from us, and then the fears of losing it, would have much diminished the sweetness of our joys. But it hath pleased our Father to open his counsel, and let us know the very intent of his heart, that our joy might be full, and that we might live as the heirs of such a kingdom. And shall we now overlook all? Shall we live in earthly cares and sorrows, and rejoice no more in these discoveries, than if the Lord had never made them known? If thy prince had but sealed thee a

patent of some lordship, how often wouldst thou cast thine eyes upon it, and make it thy delightful study, till thou shouldst come to possess the dignity itself?—And hath God sealed thee a patent of heaven, and dost thou let it lie by thee, as if thou hadst forgotten it?—O, that our hearts were as high as our hopes, and our hopes as high as these infallible promises!

9. Is it not reasonable that our hearts should be on God, when the heart of God is so much on us?—If the Lord of glory can stoop so low, as to set his heart on sinful dust, methinks we should easily be persuaded to set our hearts on Christ and glory, and ascend to him, in our daily affections, who so much condescends to us. Christian, dost thou not perceive that the heart of God is set upon thee, and that he is still minding thee with tender love, even when thou forgettest him? Is he not following thee with daily mercies, moving upon thy soul, providing for thy body, preserving both. And canst thou be taken up with the joys below, and forget thy Lord, who forgets not thee? **Base ingratitude!** When he speaks of his own kindness for us, hear what he says, “Zion said, the LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may for-

get, yet will I not forget thee: behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.”¹ But when he speaks of our regards to him, the case is otherwise.” “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.”²

10. Should not our interest in heaven, and our relation to it, continually keep our hearts upon it? There our Father keeps his court. We call him “Our Father;” unworthy children! that can be so taken up in their play, as to be mindless of such a Father. There also is Christ our head, our husband, our life; and shall we not look towards him, as often as we can, till we come to see him face to face? There are multitudes of our elder brethren; and there are our friends, whose society in the flesh we so much delighted in, and whose departure hence we so much lamented; and is this no attractive to thy thoughts? If they were within thy reach on earth, thou wouldst go and visit them, and why not oftener visit them in spirit, and rejoice beforehand, to think of meeting them there? “Socrates rejoiced that he should die, because he believed he should see Homer, Hesiod, and other eminent persons. How much more do I rejoice, said a pious old minister, who

¹ Isa. xlix. 14—16.—² Jer. ii. 32.

am sure to see Christ my Saviour, the eternal Son of God, besides so many wise, holy, and renowned patriarchs, prophets, apostles, &c."

Moreover, our house, our home is above. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Why do we then look no oftener towards it. If you were but banished into a strange land, how frequently would your thoughts be at home? And why is it not thus with us in respect of heaven? We are heirs, and that is our inheritance; even *an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us.* We are here in distress, and want, and there lies our substance; even "a better and an enduring substance:" yea, the very hope of our souls is there, all our hope of happiness; this *hope is laid up for us in heaven.* Why, beloved Christians, have we so much interest, and so few thoughts there? Men commonly overvalue their own things, and mind them too much. O that we could mind our own inheritance, and value it half as much as it deserves!

11. Once more consider, there is nothing but heaven worth setting our hearts upon. If God have them not, who shall? Hast thou found

out something that will serve thee instead of rest? hast thou found on *earth* an eternal happiness? Ah, poor sinner, look not for that here which is not on earth: lest thou learn thy experience with the loss of thy soul. If Satan should take thee up to the mountain of temptation, and shew thee all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; he could shew thee nothing that is worthy to be preferred before thy rest. So far as duty and necessity require it, we must be content to mind the things below; but who is he that contains himself within the compass of these limits? Christian, see the emptiness of all these things, and the preciousness of the things above. If thy thoughts should, like the laborious bee, go over the world from flower to flower, from creature to creature, they would bring no honey or sweetness home, save what was gathered from their relations to eternity.

Now, reader, are these considerations weighty or not? Have I proved it thy duty, to keep thy heart on things above, or have I not? If thou say not, I am confident thou contradictest thy own conscience. If thou acknowledge thyself convinced of the duty; that very tongue shall condemn thee, if thou wilfully neglect such a confessed duty. Be thoroughly willing, and the work is more than half done. I have

now a few plain directions to give thee, for thy help in this great work; but, alas! it is in vain to mention them, except thou be willing to put them in practice.

CHAPTER XII.

Directions how to lead a heavenly Life upon Earth.

I MUST here charge thee to avoid carefully, some dangerous hinderances; and then faithfully to practise, such duties as will especially assist thee in attaining to a heavenly life.—
I. The hinderances to be avoided with all possible care, are—living in any known sin,—an earthly mind,—the company of the ungodly,—a notional religion,—a proud and lofty spirit,—a slothful spirit,—and resting in mere preparatives for this heavenly life, without any acquaintance with the thing itself.

1. Living in any known sin, is a grand impediment to a heavenly conversation. What havock will this make in thy soul! O, the joys that this hath destroyed! The ruin it hath made amongst men's graces! The soul-strengthening duties it hath hindered! Reader, art thou a wilful neglecter of known duties,

either public, private, or secret? Art thou a slave to thine appetite, or to any other commanding sense? Art thou a proud seeker of thine own esteem? Art thou a peevish or passionate person, ready to take fire at every supposed slight? Art thou a deceiver of others in thy dealings, or one that will be rich, right or wrong? If this be thy case, these beams in thine eyes, will be a cloud between thee and thy God. When thou dost but attempt to study eternity, and gather comforts from the life to come, thy sin will presently look thee in the face. How will this damp thy joys, and make the thoughts of that day and state become thy trouble, and not thy delight! Every wilful sin will be to thy comforts, as water to the fire; it will utterly indispose and disable thee, that thou canst no more ascend in divine meditation, than a bird can fly when its wings are clipped. **SIN CUTS THE VERY SINEWS OF THIS HEAVENLY LIFE.** O man! what a life dost thou lose! what delights dost thou sell for a vile lust! "Watch, therefore;" especially resolve to keep from the occasions of sin, and out of the way of temptations. What need have we daily to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!"

2. An earthly mind, is another hinderance carefully to be avoided. God and mammon,

earth and heaven, cannot both have thy heart. When the heavenly believer is rejoicing in God, and in hope of glory to come; perhaps thou art rejoicing in thy worldly prosperity, and in the hope of thy thriving here: when he is comforting his soul in the views of Christ, of angels and saints, whom he shall live with for ever; then thou art comforting thyself with thy wealth, in looking over thy bills, and bonds, thy goods, thy cattle, or thy buildings, and in thinking of the favour of the great; of larger provision for thy children, of the advancement of thy family. If Christ pronounced him a fool, that said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease." Tell me, what difference between this fool's expressions and thy affections? Remember thou hast to do with the Searcher of hearts. Thou thyself knowest how seldom, and cold, and cursory thy thoughts have been of the joys above, ever since thou didst trade eagerly for the world. O the folly of many that seem to be religious! They thrust themselves into a multitude of employments, till they are so loaded with labours, and clogged with cares, that their souls are as unfit to converse with God, as a man is to walk with a mountain on his back. O Christian! avoid this devouring gulf of an earthly mind: if once thou come to this, that *thou wilt*

*be rich, thou fallest into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.*¹ Ever remember, “that the friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.”² “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”³ This is plain dealing, and happy he that faithfully receives it!

3. Beware of the company of the ungodly. Not that I would dissuade thee from necessary converse, or from doing them any office of love; especially, not from endeavouring the good of their souls, as long as thou hast opportunity or hope: nor would I have thee to conclude them to be dogs and swine, in order to evade the duty of reproof. But it is the unnecessary society of ungodly men, and familiarity with unprofitable companions, that I dissuade thee from. Not only the openly profane, the swearer, the drunkard, and the enemies of godliness, will prove hurtful companions; but too frequent society with persons merely civil and moral, whose conversation is empty and unedifying, may much divert thy thoughts from heaven. Our backwardness is such, that we

1 1 Tim. vi. 9.—2 James iv. 4.—3 1 John ii. 15.

need the most constant and powerful helps. A stone is as fit to rise and fly in the air, as our hearts are naturally to move toward heaven. O, think of this in the choice of thy company! What will it advantage thee in a divine life, to hear how the market goes, or what the weather is, or is likely to be, or what news is stirring? Yet this is the discourse of earthly men. Nay, if thou hadst been warming thy heart in the contemplation of the joys above, would not this discourse benumb thy affections, and quickly freeze thy heart again? I appeal to the judgment of any man that hath tried it, and maketh observations on the frame of his spirit. Men cannot well talk of one thing and mind another, especially things of such different natures. You, young men, who are most liable to this temptation, think seriously of what I say; can you have your hearts in heaven, among your roaring companions, in an ale-house or tavern? or, when you work in your shops, with those whose common language is oaths, filthiness, or foolish talking, or jesting? Nay, let me tell you, if you choose such company, and find delight in it, you have no title to heaven; and in that state shall never come there. If your treasure was there, your heart could not be on things so distant. In a word, our company will be a part of our happiness in

heaven, and it is a singular part of our furtherance to it, or hinderance from it.

4. Avoid frequent disputes about lesser truths, and a religion that lies only in opinions. They, are usually little acquainted with a heavenly life, who are violent disputers about the circumstantials of religion. He, whose religion lies in his opinions, will be frequently and zealously speaking his opinions; but he is a rare and precious Christian, who is skilful to improve well-known truths. Therefore, you who aspire after a heavenly life, spend not much of your thoughts, your time, your zeal, or your speech, upon disputes that little concern your souls; but when hypocrites are feeding on husks, do you feed on the joys above. I wish you to read, and study; but still, I would have the chief truths to be chiefly studied, and none to cast out your thoughts of eternity. The least controverted points are usually most weighty, and of most frequent use to our souls. Study well such scripture precepts as these; "him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes: and the servant of the Lord must not strive." "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the

doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness; from such withdraw thyself." Pity it is that Christians should spend so much time in vain conversation, and useless disputes, and not a serious word of heaven among them. Oh! that we were furnished with skill and resolution, to turn the stream of men's common discourse to more sublime and precious things! And when men begin to talk of things unprofitable, that we could tell how to put in a word for heaven. Oh! the good that we might both do and receive by this course! Had it not been to deter us from unprofitable conversation, would Christ have said? "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."⁴

5. Take heed of a proud and lofty spirit.—There is such an antipathy between this sin and God, that thou wilt never get thy heart near him, as long as this prevaleth in it. If it cast our first parents out of paradise, and separated between the Lord and us, it will certainly keep our hearts from God. Intercourse

⁴ Matt. xii. 36.

with God will keep men low, and that lowliness will promote their intercourse. When a man is much with God, and taken up in the study of His glorious attributes, he abhors himself in dust and ashes; and that self-abhorrence is his best preparative to obtain admittance to God again. The delight of God is in *him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at his word*;⁵ and the delight of such a soul is in God; and where there is mutual delight, there will be freest admittance, heartiest welcome, and most frequent converse. But God is so far from dwelling in the soul that is proud, that he will not admit it to any near access. “The proud he knoweth afar off.”⁶ “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”⁷ Art thou a man of worth in thine own eyes? art thou delighted when thou hearest of thy esteem with men, and dejected when they slight thee? Dost thou love those that honour thee, and think meanly of them that do not. Are thy passions kindled, if thy word, or will be crossed? Dost thou look strange at the godly poor? Art thou ready to judge humility to be sordid baseness, and knowest not how to submit to humble confession; when thou hast sinned against God, or injured thy brother? Are thy boastings restrained

5 Isa. lxvi. 2.—6 Psalm cxxxviii. 6.—7 1 Pet. v. 5.

more by artifice than humility? Dost thou desire to have men's eyes upon thee, and to hear them say, *This is he?* Art thou unacquainted with the deceitfulness, and wickedness of thy heart? Art thou more ready to defend thy innocence, than to confess thy fault? Canst thou hardly bear a reproof, or digest plain dealing? If these symptoms be undeniably in thy heart, thou art a proud person. A proud man makes himself his god, and sets up himself as his idol; how then can his affections be set on God? Invention and memory, may possibly furnish his tongue with humble and heavenly expressions, but in his spirit, there is no more of heaven than there is of humility. O Christian! if thou wouldst live continually in the presence of thy Lord, *learn of him to be meek and lowly, and thou shalt find rest unto thy soul.* God dwells with "a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."⁸

6. A slothful spirit, is another impediment to this heavenly life: and I verily think, there is nothing hinders it more than this, in men of a good understanding. If it were only the exercise of the body, the moving of the lips, the bending of the knee, men would live a

⁸ Isa. lvii. 15.

heavenly life; but to separate our thoughts and affections from the world, to draw forth all our graces, and increase each in its proper object, and hold them to the work till it prospers in our hands, this, this is the difficulty. Reader, canst thou get that earthly heart to heaven, and bring that backward mind to God, while thou liest still and takest thine ease? If lying down at the foot of the hill, and looking toward the top, and wishing we were there, would serve the turn, then we should have many travellers for heaven: but “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.”⁹ There must be violence used to get these first-fruits, as well as to get the full possession. Thou knowest, that a heart, seldom thinking of heaven, can fetch but little comfort thence; and yet dost thou not lose thy opportunities, and lie below, when thou shouldst walk above and live with God? Dost thou not commend the sweetness of a heavenly life, and judge those the best Christians that use it, and yet seldom try it thyself? As the sluggard that stretches himself on his bed, and cries, O that this were working! So, dost not thou, talk, and trifle, and live at ease, and say, O that I could get my heart to heaven?

⁹ Matt. xi. 12.

How many read books, and hear sermons, expecting to hear of some easier way, than they find in Scripture? Or they ask for directions for a heavenly life; but if we shew them their work, and tell them, they cannot have these delights on easier terms, then they leave us, as the young man left Christ, sorrowful.

If thou art convinced, reader, that this work is necessary to thy comfort, set upon it resolutely. Let not such an incomparable treasure lie before thee, with thy hand in thy bosom; nor thy life be a continual vexation, only because thou wilt not exert thyself. Sit not still with a disconsolate spirit, while comforts are before thine eyes. I know, so far as thou art spiritual, thou needest not all this striving and violence; but in part thou art carnal, and as long as it is so, there is need of labour. Judge, therefore, whether a heavenly life, or thy carnal ease, be better; and, as a wise man, make thy choice accordingly. Yet let me add for thy encouragement, thou needest not employ thy thoughts more than thou now dost; it is only to fix them upon better and more pleasant objects. Employ but as many serious thoughts every day, upon the excellent glory of the life to come, as thou now dost upon worldly affairs, yea, on vanities and impertinencies, and thy heart will soon be

at heaven. On the whole, it is *the field of the slothful, that is all grown over with thorns and nettles*. “The slothful man saith, there is a lion in the way. As the door turneth upon its hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom, it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.” Apply this to thy spiritual work, and study well the meaning of it.

7. Contentment with the mere preparatives to this heavenly life, while we are strangers to the life itself, is also a secret and dangerous hinderance;—when we take up with the mere study of heavenly things, and the notions of them, or the talking with one another about them; as if this were enough to make us heavenly. None are in more danger of this snare than those that are employed in leading the devotions of others, especially preachers of the gospel.—O, how easily may such be deceived! As he that sits at home, may draw exact maps of countries, and yet never see them, nor travel toward them; so you may describe to others the joys of heaven, and yet never come near it in your own hearts. A blind man, by learning, may dispute of light and colours; so may you set forth to others that heavenly light, which never enlightened your own souls. What heavenly passages had Balaam in his

prophecies, yet how little of it in his spirit? Nay, we are under a more subtle temptation, than any other men, to draw us from the heavenly life. Preaching of heaven more resembles a heavenly life, than talking of the world does: and the resemblance may deceive us.

II. Having thus shewed thee, what hinderances will resist thee in the work, I expect that thou resolve against them, consider them seriously, and avoid them faithfully, or else thy labour will be in vain. And here I expect thy promise, as thou valuest the delights of these foretastes of heaven, to make conscience of performing the following duties; the reading of which, without their constant practice, will not bring heaven into thy heart. Particularly,—be convinced that heaven is the only treasure and happiness;—labour to know that it is thy own;—and how near it is;—endeavour to raise thy affections nearer to it in every duty;—to the same purpose, improve every object and event;—be much in the angelical work of praise;—possess thy soul with believing thoughts of the infinite love of God;—carefully observe and cherish the motions of the Spirit of God;—nor even neglect the due care of thy bodily health.

1. Be convinced that heaven is the only treasure and happiness, and labour to know what a treasure and happiness it is. If thou do not believe it to be the chief good, thou wilt never set thy heart upon it; and this conviction must sink into thy affections; for if it be only a notion, it will have little efficacy. If Eve once supposes she sees more worth in the forbidden fruit, than in the love and enjoyment of God, no wonder if the forbidden fruit have her heart. If thy judgment prefers the delights of the flesh, before the delights of the presence of God, it is impossible thy heart should be in heaven. As it is ignorance of the emptiness of things below, that makes men so overvalue them; so it is ignorance of the high delights above, which is the cause that men so little mind them. If thou see a purse of gold, and believe it to be but counters, it will not entice thy affections to it. It is not the real excellence of a thing itself, but its known excellence, that excites desire.

2. Labour also to know that heaven is thy own happiness. We may confess heaven to be the best condition, though we despair of enjoying it; and we may desire and seek it, if we see the attainment but probable; but we can never delightfully rejoice in it, till we are

in some measure persuaded of our title to it, What comfort is it to a man that is naked, to see the rich attire of others? If your houses, your goods, your children, were not your own, you would less delight in them. O Christian! rest not, therefore, till thou canst call *this rest* thy own. Bring thy heart to the bar of trial; but mistake not the Scripture's description of a saint, that thou neither acquit nor condemn thyself upon mistakes. For, as groundless hopes are the greatest cause of most men's damnation; so groundless doubts tend to, and are a great cause of, the saints' perplexity and distress. Therefore lay thy foundation for trial safely, and proceed in the work deliberately and resolutely. O! if men did truly know, that God is their own Father, and Christ their own Redeemer, and that those are their own everlasting habitations, and that there they must abide and be happy for ever; how could they but be transported with the fore-thoughts thereof?

They sin against their own comforts, as well as against the grace of the gospel; who plead for their unbelief, and cherish distrustful thoughts of God, and injurious thoughts of their Redeemer; who represent the covenant, as if it were of works, and not of grace; and Christ, as if he were willing they should

die in their unbelief; notwithstanding he hath invited them so often, and so affectionately, and suffered the agonies that they should suffer. Wretches that we are! to be keeping up jealousies of our Lord, when we should be rejoicing in his love. As if any man could choose Christ, before Christ hath chosen him; or any man were more willing to be happy, than Christ is to make him happy. Away with these injurious, if not blasphemous thoughts! If ever thou hast harboured such thoughts in thy breast, cast them from thee, and beware how thou ever entertainest them more.

3. Labour to apprehend how near thy rest is. What we think near at hand, we are more sensible of, than that which we behold at a distance. When judgments or mercies are afar off, we talk of them with little concern; but when they draw close to us, we tremble at, or rejoice in them. This makes men think on heaven so insensibly, because they conceit it at a great distance; they look on it, as twenty, thirty, or forty years off. If thou verily believed thou shouldst die to-morrow, how seriously wouldst thou think to-night? When Samuel had told Saul, "To-morrow thou shalt be with me;" this struck him to the heart.

4. Endeavour in every duty to raise thy affections nearer to heaven. God's end in the appointment of means was, that they should be so many steps to advance us to our rest, and by which, in subordination to Christ, we might daily ascend in our affections. Let this be thy end in using them, and doubtless they will be successful. How have you been rejoiced by a few lines from a friend, when you could not see him face to face? and may not our spirits rejoice in reading those lines, which contain our legacy and charter for heaven? With what gladness and triumph may we read the expressions of divine love, and hear of our celestial country, though we have not yet the happiness to behold it? Come, then, renounce formality, custom, and applause, and kneel down in secret prayer, with hope to get thy heart nearer to God, before thou risest up. When thou openest the Bible, or other book, hope to meet with some passage of divine truth, and such blessing of the Spirit with it, as will give thee a fuller taste of heaven. When thou art going to the house of God, say, "I hope to meet with somewhat from God, to raise my affections, before I return; I hope the Spirit will sweeten my heart with celestial delights; I hope Christ will let me hear his instructing

and reviving voice." Certainly God would not fail us in our duties, if we did not fail ourselves.

5. Improve every object, and every event, to remind thy soul of its approaching rest. If thou prosper in the world, let it make thee more sensible of thy perpetual prosperity. If thou art weary with labour, let it make the thoughts of thy eternal rest more sweet. If things go cross, let thy desires be more earnest for that rest, where sorrows and sufferings cease for ever

6. Be much in the angelical work of praise. The more heavenly the employment, the more it will make thy spirit heavenly. Praising God, is the work of angels and saints in heaven, and will be our own everlasting work. Little do we know how we wrong ourselves, by allowing the praises of God, so narrow a room as we usually do. Reader, I entreat thee, let praises have large room in thy duties. To this end, study the excellencies and goodness of the Lord, as frequently as thy own wants and unworthiness; the mercies thou hast received, and those which are promised, as often as the sins thou hast committed. *Praise is comely for the upright. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God.* "Praise ye the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praises

unto his name, for it is pleasant. Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." Had not David a most heavenly spirit, who was so much in this heavenly work? Doth it not sometimes raise our hearts, when we only read the song of Moses, and the psalms of David? How much more would it raise and refresh us, to be skilful and frequent in the work ourselves? O, the loss to many of the saints, who drench their spirits in continual sadness, and waste their days in complaints and groans, and so make themselves both in body and mind, unfit for this sweet and heavenly work! Instead of being employed in the praises of God; they are questioning their worthiness, and studying their miseries, and so rob God of his glory, and themselves of their consolation.

7. Ever keep thy soul possessed with believing thoughts of the infinite love of God. It is the death of our heavenly life, to have hard thoughts of God, to conceive of him as one, that would as willingly condemn, as save us. When our ignorance, and unbelief, have drawn a deformed picture of God in our imaginations, then we complain that we cannot love him, nor delight in him. This is the case of many thousand Christians: alas, that we

should thus blaspheme God, and blast our own joys! Scripture assures us that "God is love;"¹ that he hath "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."² O, that we could always think of God, as we do of a friend: as one that unfeignedly loves us, even more than we do ourselves; whose very heart is set upon us, to do us good, and hath therefore provided for us an everlasting dwelling with himself; it would not then be so hard to have our hearts with him! Where we love most heartily, we think most sweetly, and most freely. I fear many Christians, think higher of the love of a hearty friend, than of the love of God; and what wonder then, if they love their friends better than God, and trust them more confidently, and had rather live with them, than with God?

8. Carefully observe, and cherish, the motions of the SPIRIT OF GOD. If ever thy soul get above this earth, and get acquainted with this heavenly life, the Spirit of God must be to thee, the very living principle, by which thou must move and ascend. O then, grieve not thy guide, quench not thy life! You little think how much the life of all your graces, and the happiness of your souls,

1 1 John iv. 16.—2 Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

depend upon your ready, and cordial obedience to the Spirit. When the Spirit urges thee to secret prayer; or forbids thee thy known transgressions; or points out to thee the way in which thou shouldst go; and thou wilt not regard, no wonder if heaven and thy soul be strange. If thou wilt not follow the Spirit, while he would draw thee to Christ and thy duty; how should he lead thee to heaven, and bring thy heart into the presence of God? What supernatural help, what bold access, shall the soul find in its approaches to the Almighty, that constantly obeys the Spirit! And how backward, how dull, how ashamed, will he be, in these addresses, who hath often broken away from the Spirit that would have guided him!—Christian reader, dost thou not feel sometimes, a strong impression to retire from the world, and draw near to God? Do not disobey, but take the offer, and hoist up thy sails while this blessed gale may be had. The more we resist the Spirit, the deeper will be our wound; and the more we obey, the speedier will be our pace.

9. I advise thee, as a farther help to this heavenly life, not to neglect the due care of thy bodily health. Thy body is an useful servant, if thou give it its due, and no more;

but it is a devouring tyrant, if thou suffer it to have what it unreasonably desires. When we consider how few use their bodies aright, we cannot wonder if they be much hindered in their converse with heaven. Most men are slaves to their appetite, and can scarce deny any thing to the flesh, and are therefore willingly carried by it to their sports, or profits, or vain companions, when they should raise their minds to God. As you love your souls, "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof;"³ but remember, "to be carnally minded, is death; because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then, they that are in the flesh, cannot please God. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh; for if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."⁴ There are a few, who much hinder their heavenly joy, by denying the body its necessaries, and so making it unable to serve them: if such wronged their flesh only, it would be no great matter; but they wrong their souls also; as he that spoils the house, injures the inhabitant.

³ Rom. xiii. 14.—⁴ Rom. viii. 6, 8, 12, 13.

CHAPTER XIII.

*On Heavenly Contemplation, or Meditation
on Divine Things.*

ONCE more, I entreat thee, Christian reader, that thou faithfully practise the duty of heavenly contemplation. If by this means thou be not made more serviceable in thy place, if thou find not an increase of all thy graces, if thy soul enjoy not more communion with God, and thy life be not fuller of comfort; then count me as a deceiver.

Many who make conscience of other duties, neglect this, though it be that duty by which all others are improved, and by which the soul digesteth truths for its nourishment and comfort. Christ, and heaven, have various excellencies, and therefore God hath formed the soul with different powers, for apprehending those excellencies. What the better had we been for odoriferous flowers, if we had no smell? or what good would language or music have done us, if we could not hear? Or what pleasure should we have found in meats and drinks, without the sense of taste? So, what good could all the glory of heaven have done us, or what pleasure should we have had in

the perfections of God himself, if we had been without the affections of love and joy? and what strength and sweetness canst thou possibly receive, by thy meditations on eternity, while thou dost not exercise those affections of the soul, by which thou must be sensible of this sweetness and strength? It is a mistake of Christians, to think that meditation is only the work of the understanding and memory; when every school-boy can do this, or persons that hate the things which they think on. So that in this blessed work, you see there is more to be done, than barely to remember and think of heaven. As the affections of sinners are set on the world, are turned to idols, and fallen from God, as well as their understanding; so must their affections as well as their understandings, be reduced to God. See David's description of the blessed man,—his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.⁵

The chief end of this duty is, to have acquaintance and fellowship with God. It is inexpressible horror to a dying man, to have strange thoughts of God and heaven; and I am persuaded the neglect of this duty, so commonly makes death even to godly men

⁵ Psalm i. 2.

unwelcome. I would persuade thee therefore christian reader, to make it a standing duty, as thou dost prayer, reading the Scriptures, and other stated solemnities. Stated time is a hedge to duty, and defends it against many temptations to omission; but some have not their time at command, and therefore cannot set their hours; such persons should be watchful to take opportunities as they occur, and especially join meditation and prayer, as much as they can, with the labours of their callings.—I have found that the fittest time for myself, for this exercise, is the evening. I the rather mention this, because it was the experience of a better and wiser man; for it is expressly said, “Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the evening.” The Lord’s day is very seasonable for this exercise. Take notice of this, you that have time on the Lord’s day for idleness, and vain discourse; were you but acquainted with this duty of contemplation, you would need no other pastime; you would think the longest day short enough. Christians, let heaven have more share in your sabbaths. Use your sabbaths as steps to glory, till you have passed them all, and are there arrived. Especially you that are poor, and cannot take time in the week as you desire, see that you

well improve this day. When God hath more abundantly warmed thy spirit, with fire from above, then thou mayest soar with greater freedom : a little labour will set thy heart a going at such a time as this. Observe the motions of the Spirit, and how the SPIRIT OF CHRIST doth move thy spirit. *Without CHRIST we can do nothing ;* and therefore let us be doing while he is doing ; and be sure not to be out of the way, nor asleep when he comes. When the Spirit finds thy heart, like Peter, in prison, and in irons, and smites thee, and says, “ Arise up quickly, and follow me ; ” be sure thou then arise and follow, and thou shalt find thy chains fall off, and all doors will open before thee.

A peculiar season for this duty is, when thou art in a suffering, distressed, or tempted state. When should our thoughts converse more above, than when they have nothing but grief below ? What should we think on, but our Father’s house, when we have not even the husks of the world to feed upon ? Surely God sends thy afflictions to this very purpose. Happy art thou, poor man, if thou make this use of thy poverty ! and thou that art sick, if thou so improve thy sickness ! Reader, if thou knewest what a cordial to

thy griefs, the serious views of glory are, thou wouldst less fear these troubles, and more use that preserving, reviving remedy. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, (saith David,) thy comforts delight my soul." "I reckon, (saith Paul,) that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal."

The fittest place for heavenly contemplation, is some private retirement; our spirits need every help. In private prayer, Christ directs us to *enter into our closet, and shut the door,*⁶ so should we do, in this meditation. How often did Christ himself retire to some mountain, or wilderness, or other solitary place! He so much used a solitary garden, that even Judas, when he came to betray him, knew where to find him; and though he took his disciples thither with him, yet he was withdrawn from them for more secret devotions:⁷

⁶ Matt. vi. 6.—⁷ John xviii. 1, 2. Luke xxii. 39, 41.

and though his meditation be not directly named, but only his praying, yet it is very clearly implied. So that Christ had his accustomed place, he had a place that was solitary, whither he retired, and so should we, only there is a wide difference in the object: Christ meditates on the sufferings that our sins had deserved; but we are to meditate on the glory he hath purchased; that the love of the Father, and the joy of the Spirit, may enter our thoughts, and revive our affections, and overflow our souls.

The success of the work much depends on the frame of thy heart. When man's heart had nothing in it to grieve the Spirit, it was then the delightful habitation of his Maker; there was no shyness till the heart grew sinful; and was the soul reduced to its former innocence, God would quickly return to his former habitation; yea, so far as it is renewed by the Spirit, and purged from its lusts, and beautified with his image, the Lord will yet acknowledge it as his own; Christ will manifest himself unto it, and the Spirit will take it for his temple and residence. Therefore, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." More particularly:

Get thy heart as clear from the world as thou canst: wholly lay by the thoughts of thy

business, troubles, and enjoyments; get it empty, that it may be the more capable of being filled with God. Seeing thy enjoyment of God, in this contemplation, much depends on the capacity and disposition of thy heart, seek him with all thy soul. Thrust not Christ into the stable and the manger, as if thou hadst better guests for the chief rooms; say to all thy worldly business and thoughts, as Christ to his disciples, "Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder."⁸

Be sure to set upon this work, with the greatest solemnity of heart and mind. There is no trifling in holy things. *God will be sanctified in them that come nigh him.* Labour, therefore, to have the deepest apprehensions of the presence of God, and his incomprehensible greatness: think, with what reverence thou shouldst approach him, who made the worlds by the word of his mouth, who upholds the earth as in the palm of his hand, who keeps the sun, moon and stars in their courses, and who sets bounds to the raging sea. Labour also to apprehend the greatness of the work which thou attemptest, and to be deeply sensible both of its importance and excellence. If thou wast pleading for thy life at the bar of an earthly judge,

⁸ Matt. xxvi. 36.

thou wouldst be serious; consider then, with what a spirit thou shouldst meet the Lord, and with what seriousness and awe thou shouldst converse with him. Consider also the blessed issue of the work, if it succeed; it will be thy admission into the presence of God, the beginning of thy eternal glory, on earth; and make thee live and die joyfully.

In this heavenly work, although the Holy Spirit be the principal cause; yet on our part, *consideration* is the great instrument by which it is carried on. Great is the power which consideration hath, for moving the affections, and impressing things on the heart. The most delightful object does not entertain where it is not seen; but consideration presents to our view those things which were as absent, and brings them to the eye of the soul. Consideration reasons the case with a man's own heart. As the prodigal had many and strong reasons to plead with himself, why he should return to his father's house.¹ Consideration exalts reason to its just authority; it helps to deliver it from its captivity to the senses. When reason is silent, it is usually subject; for when it is asleep, the senses domineer. Consideration exalts the objects of faith, and comparatively disgraces the objects of sense. The most in-

¹ Luke xv. 18.

considerate men are most sensual: it is easy, and too common, to sin against knowledge; but against sober, strong, persevering consideration, men seldom offend.

This heavenly work is also promoted by the exercise of the affections, particularly love, desire, hope, courage or boldness, and joy.— But a principal thing is, to exercise our faith in the truth of our everlasting rest; by which I mean, both the truth of the promises, and of our own personal interest in them, and title to them. If we did really and firmly believe, that there is such a glory, and that within a few days our eyes shall behold it, what astonishing apprehensions of that life would it produce! what love, what longings, would it excite within us! O how it would actuate every affection! Never expect to have love and joy move, when faith stands still, which must lead the way. Therefore daily exercise faith, and set before it the freeness of the promise, God's urging all to accept it, Christ's gracious disposition, all the evidences of the love of Christ, his faithfulness to his engagements, and the evidences of his love in ourselves; lay all these together, and think, whether they do not testify the good-will of the Lord concerning our salvation, and may not properly be pleaded against our unbelief.

1. Love is an affection to be excited in heavenly contemplation. Here, Christian, is a soul-reviving part of thy work. Let thy faith take hold of thy heart, and shew it thy eternal habitation, and the glory of thy Father's house, even the mansions Christ is preparing, and the honours of his kingdom; let thy faith lead thy heart into the presence of God, and say to it, "Behold the Ancient of days, the Lord Jehovah, whose name is I AM: this is He, who made the worlds; who upholds the earth, who rules the nations, who disposes of all events; who causes the sun to run its race, and the stars to know their courses. This is He, who formed thee in the womb, gave thee this soul, shewed thee the light, and ranked thee with the chief of his earthly creatures; who endued thee with thy understanding, and maintains thy life and all its comforts. O, here is an object worthy thy love! Here shouldst thou pour out thy soul in love! This is the Lord, who hath blessed thee with his benefits, and made thy cup overflow! This is He, whom angels and the heavenly host for ever magnify!" Thus do thou expatiate on the praises of God, and open his excellencies to thine heart, till the holy fire of love begins to kindle in thy breast.

Lead thy heart on, and shew it the Son of the living God, whose name is Wonderful,

Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace; shew it the King of saints on the throne of his glory; the First, and the Last: who is, and was, and is to come; who liveth and was dead, and behold he lives for evermore; who hath made thy peace by the blood of his cross, and hath prepared thee, with himself, a habitation of peace. His office is the great peace-maker; his kingdom is the kingdom of peace; his gospel is the tidings of peace; his voice to thee now, is the voice of peace: draw near and behold him. He that bid Thomas come near and see the print of the nails, and put his finger into his wounds; He calls to thee; "Come near, and view the Lord thy Saviour, and be not faithless, but believing: peace be unto thee, fear not, it is I." His hands were pierced, his feet, his side, were pierced for thee. This is He, that reversed the sentence of thy damnation, bore the curse which thou shouldst have borne, restored thee to the blessing thou hadst forfeited, and purchased the advancement which thou must inherit for ever. Dost thou not remember, when he found thee lying in thy blood, and took pity on thee, and dressed thy wounds, and brought thee home, and said unto thee, live? If thou knowest Him not by the face, the voice, the hands, thou mayest know him by the heart; that

soul-pitying heart is his; it can be none but his. This is he, who laid down his life for thee, and now makes continual intercession for thee. Is not here enough for thy love to feed on? Doth not thy throbbing heart stop to ease itself, and, like Joseph, seek for a place to weep in? But go on, the field of love is large; it will be thy eternal work to behold and love.

How often hath thy Lord found thee, like Hagar, sitting and weeping, and giving up thy soul for lost, and he opened to thee a well of consolation, and also opened thine eyes to see it! How often, as in the case of the prophet's servant, crying out, "Alas! what shall we do, for an host doth encompass us?" and he hath opened thine eyes to see, more for thee than against thee? How often like Jonah, peevish and weary, and he hath mildly said; "Dost thou well to be angry," or murmur against me? How often hath he set thee on watching and praying, repenting and believing, and when he hath returned, hath found thee asleep, and yet hath covered thy neglect with a mantle of love, and gently pleaded for thee,—*the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak!* Can thy heart be cold, when thou thinkest of this? Can it contain, when thou rememberest such boundless compassion? Thus, reader, hold forth the goodness of Christ to thy heart; plead thus

with thy soul, till with David thou canst say, "My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned:" and with Peter, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee."

2. If love be hot, desire will not be cold. Think with thyself, "What have I seen? O, the incomprehensible glory! O, the transcendent beauty! O blessed souls, that now enjoy it! What a difference between my state and theirs! They have none of my cares and fears; they weep not in secret; they languish not in sorrow. O happy, happy souls! What feeble thoughts have I of God! what cold affections towards him! how little of that life, that love, that joy, in which they continually live! Now and then a spark falls upon my heart, and while I gaze upon it, my cold heart quenches it; but they have their light in His light, and drink continually at the spring of joys. How long, Lord! how long wilt thou suffer this soul to pant and groan, which waits, and longs to be with thee!" Thus, Christian, let thy thoughts aspire, till thou canst say as David, "I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord."

3. Another affection to be exercised in heavenly contemplation is hope.* This helps to support the soul under sufferings, animates it to

* "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost." Rom. xv. 13.—*Ed.*

the greatest difficulties, gives it firmness in the most shaking trials, enlivens it in duties, and is a spring that sets all the wheels a-going. Who would believe, or strive for heaven, if it were not for the hope that he hath to obtain it? If your hope dies, your duties die, your endeavours die, your joys die, and your souls die. Therefore, Christian reader, forget not to give one lift to thy hope. Reason thus with thy heart: "Why should I not confidently hope, when my soul is in the hands of so compassionate a Saviour, and when the kingdom is at the disposal of so bountiful a God? Hath he not sworn, that he delights not in the death of him that dieth, but rather that he should repent and live? Did he not remind me of my danger, when I never feared it, because he would have me escape it? and of my happiness, when I had no thoughts of it, because he would have me enjoy it? How often hath he drawn me to Christ, when I have drawn backward? How hath his Spirit incessantly solicited my heart? and would he have done all this, if he had been willing that I should perish? Should I not hope, if an honest man had promised me something in his power? and shall I not hope when I have the covenant of God? It is true, the glory is out of sight; we have not beheld the mansions of the

saints; but is not the promise of God, more certain than our sight? "We are saved by hope; but hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? but if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."¹ I will say, "The Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in him: the Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."² By the blood of His covenant, God will send forth his prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water; therefore will I turn to the strong hold as a prisoner of hope."³

4. Courage or boldness is another affection, to be exercised in heavenly contemplation. It leadeth to resolution, and concludeth in action. Go on and think, "Will God indeed dwell with men? and is there such a glory within reach? Why then do I not lay hold upon it? Why do not I break through all resistance? what should stop me, or intimidate me? *If God be for me, who can be against me?* Do I set upon this work in my own strength, or rather in the strength of Christ my Lord? *and cannot I do all things, through him that strengthens me?*"⁴ Why then doth my flesh urge me with

¹ Rom. viii. 24, 25.—² Lam. iii. 24—26.—³ Zech. ix. 11, 12.

⁴ Phil. iv. 13.

the difficulties of the work? Is any thing too hard for Omnipotence? If they were the nearest friends I have in the world, (if they may be called friends, that would draw me to damnation;) should I not forsake them? Will their friendship be any comfort to my condemned soul, or countervail the loss of God? If they would entice me with preferment, even with the kingdoms of the world, I will not regard them. O blessed rest! O glorious state! Who would not watch, and strive, and fight, in order to obtain thee?

5. Another affection to be exercised in heavenly contemplation, is joy: love, desire, hope, and courage, all tend to raise our joy. And have we not both command and example, for *rejoicing* in hope of the glory of God?⁵ Are God's infallible promises no ground of joy? Is it no delight for the heir of a kingdom, to think of what he must soon possess?

Here then Christian, take thy heart once more, and shew it the kingdom of Christ, and the glory of it; and say to it, "It is the Father's good pleasure to give thee this kingdom.⁶ This crown is thine, because thou art Christ's, and Christ is thine." Enter the gates of the holy city; walk through the streets of the new Jerusalem. Hath it not the glory of God, and

5 Rom. v. 2. xii. 12.—6 Luke xii. 32.

is not her light like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal? See the twelve foundations of her walls, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb! And the building of the walls of it are of jasper; and the city is pure gold like unto clear glass, and the foundations are garnished with all manner of precious stones! and the twelve gates are twelve pearls, every several gate is of one pearl; and the street of the city is of pure gold, as it were transparent glass! There is no temple in it; for the Lord God Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple of it! It hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof; and the nations of them which are saved, shall walk in the light of it! These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel and his own Son, to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.⁷ Say now to all this, "This is thy rest, O my soul! and this must be the place of thy everlasting habitation." Let all the sons of Sion rejoice, let the daughters of Jerusalem be glad; for great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness.

Let me here observe, that there is no necessity to exercise these affections, either in this order, or all at one time. Ejaculatory prayer may very properly be intermixed with meditation, as a part of the duty. How often do we find David, in the same psalm, sometimes pleading with his soul, and sometimes with God? The apostle bids us speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs; and no doubt we may also speak to God in them. As God is the highest object of our thoughts, so our viewing him, and pleading with him, more elevates the soul, and excites the affections, than any other part of meditation. But do not imagine, it will be as well to take up with prayer alone, and lay aside meditation; for they are distinct duties. We need both, and therefore shall wrong ourselves, by neglecting either.*

* The Editor would earnestly recommend the reader to *examine* how much meditation, and the great duty of prayer, are enjoined in the Holy Scriptures.

CHAPTER XIV.

Heavenly Contemplation assisted by sensible Objects, and guarded against a treacherous Heart.—The work concluded.

THE most difficult part of heavenly contemplation is, to maintain a lively sense of heavenly things upon our hearts: it is easier, merely to think of heaven a whole day, than to be lively and affectionate in those thoughts, a quarter of an hour. It will be a good work, if we can make friends of enemies;—if our senses, which have so often been the means of drawing us from God, may be made instruments for raising us to Him. Why doth the Holy Spirit describe the glory of the new Jerusalem, in expressions that are even grateful to the flesh? Is it that we might think heaven to be made of gold and pearl? or that saints and angels eat and drink? No, but to help us to conceive of them as we are able, and to use these borrowed phrases as a glass, in which we must see the things themselves imperfectly represented, till we come to an immediate and perfect sight.

For the helping of thy affection, in heavenly contemplation, think on the joys above, as boldly as Scripture hath expressed them. Both

love and joy are promoted by familiar acquaintance. Are we not lost, and have nothing to fix our thoughts upon, when we attempt to think of God and glory, without the Scripture manner of representing them? We set them so far from us, that our thoughts are strange, and we are ready to say, "What is above us, is nothing to us." To regard them only as above our conception, will beget but little love. Therefore, PUT CHRIST NO FURTHER FROM THEE, THAN HE HATH PUT HIMSELF. Think of Christ as in our own glorified nature; think of glorified saints, as men made perfect; suppose thyself a companion with John, in his survey of the new Jerusalem, and viewing the thrones, the majesty, the heavenly hosts, the shining splendour which he saw.—If thou hadst really seen these things, in what a rapture wouldst thou have been! and the more seriously thou puttest this supposition to thyself, the more will thy meditation elevate thy heart. Do not draw them in pictures; but get the liveliest picture of them in thy mind, that thou possibly canst, by contemplating the Scripture account of them. Oh! how it will excite thy affections to think of the state of blessedness, in the way the Spirit hath, in condescending language, expressed it.

Our senses may also be subservient to this heavenly work, by comparing the objects of

sense with the objects of faith. As for instance—

Compare the joys above, with the comforts thou hast here received. Hath not the Bible been to thee as a stream, flowing with comforts? Think then, if the promise is so sweet, what will the performance be! If the testament of our Lord, and our charter for the kingdom, be so comfortable, what will be our possession of the kingdom itself!" Think further, "What delights have I also found in the word preached! when I have sat under a heart-searching ministry, how hath my heart been warmed! How often have I gone to the congregation troubled in spirit, and returned joyful! how often have I gone doubting, and God hath sent me home persuaded of his love in Christ! Think also, "What joy is it, to have access and acceptance in prayer; that I may always go to God, and open my case, and unbosom my soul to him, as to my most faithful FRIEND! but it will be a more unspeakable joy, when all my necessities and miseries will be removed, and when God himself will be the portion of my soul.

Compare the glorious change thou shalt have at last, with the gracious change which the Spirit hath here wrought on thy heart.

There is not the smallest sincere grace in thee, but is of greater worth than the riches of the Indies; nor a hearty desire and groan after Christ, but is more to be valued than the kingdoms of the world. A renewed nature is the very image of God; Christ dwelling in us; and the Spirit of God abiding in us. It ennobles man above all nobility; fits him to understand his Maker's pleasure, do his will, and receive his glory. If a spark of life, be of so much worth; how glorious then is the source of this life!

Once more, compare the joys which thou shalt have above, with those foretastes of it which the Spirit hath given thee here. Hath not God sometimes revealed himself extraordinarily to thy soul, and hast thou not been ready to say, "O that it might be thus with me continually!" Or if thou hast not yet felt these sweet foretastes, (for every believer hath not felt them) then make use of such delights as thou hast felt, in order the better to discern what thou shalt hereafter feel.

II. I am now to shew, how heavenly contemplation may be preserved from a wandering heart. The heart will prove the greatest hinderance in this heavenly employment; either,—by backwardness to it;—or, by trifling in it;—or, by frequent excursions to other

subjects;—or, by abruptly ending the work before it is well begun. These dangerous evils must be faithfully resisted.

1. Thou wilt find thy heart as backward to this, I think, as to any work in religion. O what excuses will it make! What evasions will it find out! What delays and demurs, when it is ever so much convinced! Either it will question, whether it be a duty or not; or, if it be so to others, whether to thyself. It will tell thee, “This is a work for ministers, or for persons that have more leisure than thou hast.” If thou be a minister, it will tell thee of other business, or set thee upon some other duty; for it had rather go to any duty, than communion with God. Perhaps it will tell thee, “Other duties are urgent, and therefore this must give place to them, because thou hast no time for both. Public business is more important; to preach for the saving of souls, must be preferred before these private contemplations.” As if thou hadst not time to care for thy own salvation, for looking after that of others; or thy charity to others were so great, that it obliges thee to neglect thy own eternal welfare. Or, as if there were any better way, to fit us to be useful to others, than making this proof of our doctrine ourselves. Certainly, heaven is the best

fire to light our candle at, and the best book for a preacher to study; and if we would be persuaded to study that more, the church would be provided with more heavenly lights; and when our studies are divine, and our spirits divine, our preaching will also be divine, and we may be called divines indeed.—Or, if thy heart have nothing to say against the work, it will trifle away the time in delays, and promise this day, and the next, but still keep off from the business: or, it will give thee a flat denial, and oppose its own unwillingness to thy reason. All this I speak of the heart so far as it is still carnal; for I know so far as it is spiritual, it will judge this the sweetest work in the world. Then faithfully deal thus with thy heart: persuade it to the work, take no denial, use violence with it. Call in the Spirit of Christ to thine assistance, who will not deny his help; say to him, “O send down thy Spirit, to enforce thy commands, and compel my thoughts to obey thy will!” Thus thou shalt see thy heart will submit, its resistance be overcome, and its backwardness be turned into cheerful compliance.

2. Thy heart will also be likely to betray thee by trifling. This doing of duty as if we did it not, ruins many; yet think not, since thy heart is so trifling, it is better to let it

alone ; for, by this means, thou wilt certainly banish all spiritual obedience ; because the heart will resist, so far as it is carnal. But rather consider well the corruption of thy nature ; and that its sinful indisposition will not supersede the commands of God, nor one sin excuse for another ; and that God has appointed means to excite our affections. This self-considering duty of heavenly meditation, is an excellent means both to excite and increase love. Therefore stay not from the duty till thou feelest thy love constrain thee ; any more than thou wouldst stay from the fire till thou feelest thyself warm ; but engage in the work till love is excited, and then love will constrain thee to further duty.

3. Thy heart will also be making excursions to other objects. It will be turning aside, like a careless servant, to talk with every one that passeth by. When there should be nothing in thy mind but heaven, it will be thinking of thy calling, or thy afflictions, or of every bird, or tree, or place thou seest. The cure is here the same as before ; use watchfulness, and violence : say to thy heart, —“ Did I come hither to think of my worldly business, or news, or of any thing but heaven ? Canst thou not watch one hour ? Is this thy love to thy friend ? Dost thou love Christ

and the place of thy eternal, blessed abode, no more than this?" If the ravening fowls of wandering thoughts, devour the meditations intended for heaven, they devour the life and joy of thy thoughts; therefore drive them away from thy sacrifice, and strictly keep thy heart to the work.

4. Abruptly ending thy meditation, before it is well begun, is another way in which thy heart will deceive thee; thou mayest easily perceive this in other duties. In secret prayer, is not thy heart urging thee to cut it short, and frequently making a motion to have done? But charge it not to do so great a work by halves, say to it,—“Thou camest hither in hope to speak with God, and wilt thou go, before thou hast seen him? Thou camest to spy out the land of promise; go not back without one cluster of grapes, to shew thy brethren for their encouragement. Let them see that thou hast tasted of the wine, by the gladness of thy heart; that thou hast been anointed with the oil, by the cheerfulness of thy countenance; and hast fed of the milk and honey, by the mildness of thy disposition, and the sweetness of thy conversation.” This heavenly fire would melt thy heart, and refine and spiritualize it; but it must have time to operate.

CONCLUSION.

THUS, reader, I have given thee my best advice, for maintaining a heavenly conversation. Be acquainted with this heavenly life, and thou wilt, in some degree, be acquainted with God; thy joys will be spiritual, prevalent, and lasting, according to the nature of their blessed object; and thou wilt have comfort in life and death. When thou hast neither wealth, nor health, nor the pleasures of this world, yet wilt thou have comfort: thy graces will be active and victorious, and the joy of the Lord will be thy strength. Men's threatenings will be little terror to thee; the honours of this world no strong enticement; temptations will be more harmless, as having lost their strength; and afflictions less grievous, as having lost their sting; and every mercy will be better known and relished. It is now, under God, in thy own choice, whether thou wilt live this blessed life or not. Very shortly thou wilt see thy glass run out, and say to thyself, "My life is done! there is nothing now but heaven or hell before me!" Didst thou know what a dreadful thing it is, to have a doubt of heaven when a man is dying, it would arouse thee.

Some there be that say, "It is not worth so much time and trouble, to think of the greatness of the joys above, so that we can make sure they are ours; we know they are great." But as these men obey not the command of God, which requires them to have *their conversation in heaven*, and to *set their affections on things above*, so they wilfully make their own lives miserable, by refusing the delights which God hath set before them: and this is not all; but see what abundance of other mischiefs follow the neglect of these heavenly delights. This neglect will damp, if not destroy, their love to God;—will make it unpleasant to them to think of God, or engage in his service;—it tends to pervert their judgments concerning the ways and ordinances of God; it makes them sensual and voluptuous;—it leaves them under the power of every affliction and temptation, and is a preparative to total apostacy. Had I only proposed a course of melancholy, and fear, and sorrow, you might have objected. But you must have heavenly delights, or none that are lasting. God is willing you should daily walk with him, and fetch in consolations from the everlasting fountain; if you are unwilling, you must bear the loss.

As for you, whose hearts God hath weaned

from all things here below, I know you would fain be more acquainted with your Saviour : it is your grief, that your hearts are not nearer to him, and that they do not more feelingly love him, and delight in him. O try this life of meditation. Let the world see by your heavenly lives, that religion is something more than opinions, or a task of outward duties. If ever a Christian is like himself, and answerable to his principles and profession, it is when he is most serious and lively in his duty. As Moses, before he died, went up into mount Nebo, to take a survey of the land of Canaan ; so may the Christian ascend this mount of contemplation, and by faith survey his rest. And, as Daniel in his captivity, daily opened his window toward Jerusalem, though far out of sight, when he went to God in his devotions ; so may the believing soul, in this captivity of the flesh, look towards " Jerusalem which is above."

THE END.

