

against Christ, wrongeth his own soul," and is in love with death ; whereas he that honoureth him by believing in his name, and is strong in the faith, giving glory to God, shall be safe amidst all the troubles and trials of this world, in every period and stage of life, and shall at last be received into the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, where happiness for ever dwells, and the voice of violence and wrong is never heard.

---

BELIEVERS A MYSTERY, WITH A DESCRIPTION OF THEIR TRAVELS FROM THE WILDERNESS OF THIS WORLD, TO THE HEAVENLY CANAAN, LEANING UPON CHRIST.\*

SONG viii. 5,

*Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved ?*

WE have been solemnising our souls' espousals to Jesus Christ, and our consent to the gospel-call, saying in effect to us, "Wilt thou go with this man ?" Leave thy father's house, and thine own people, and cleave to the King of Zion. We have before angels and men answered, We will go with him, for he is our Beloved. Here we have an account of the Christian life, which must be our life, if we will deal honestly with him ; it is a "coming up out of the wilderness, leaning on our Beloved." These are the words of the daughters of Jerusalem, containing,

1. An inquiry about a party, whom they took particular notice of, namely, the church of believers, the spouse of Christ ; "Who is this ?" It intimates a kind of surprise, Who's that ! The wilderness uses not to afford such a sight as this. It imports an admiration as of some hidden thing, a mystery ; Who is this ? This is a strange kind of personage whom we see.

2. A character of the party inquired about. It is a woman, one of the weak sex, as the church of believers is represented in scripture. She is not one of the dwellers in the wilderness. She appears not to have built her house there. She is but a traveller through it, and her head is awayward from it ; and she is set for another country. That is she whom we mean, who is coming up from the wilderness. I make no question but by the wilderness here is meant

\* The substance of several sermons preached at Etrick, June 18, 1721, and subsequent Sabbaths.

the world, as Cant. iii. 6; and iv. 8; with a plain eye to the Israelites coming through the wilderness to Canaan; the last of which, as it was typical of heaven, so the former is of the world.

But for the further understanding of these words, it is necessary to take notice of a custom among the Jews at their marriages, to which there is here a manifest allusion, viz., The bridegroom used to take his bride, and carry her out of the city into the fields, and there they had their nuptial-songs; and afterward he brought her back again, leaning on him, into the city, to his father's house, and there the marriage was solemnized. Now we may be sure, however, that these fields were not a wilderness or moorlands, no fit place for a bridegroom and bride's walk together. This, then, increases the wonder, What a bride is this that is coming up out of the wilderness with her Bridegroom, leaning on him? Others use to be entertained more softly and delicately; what a bride and Bridegroom are these! However, here is represented the Christian life, the life of the church of believers espoused to Christ. In which observe two things.

1st, Her exercise; she is travelling upon her road away with her espoused husband, namely, Christ. The place she is going from is the wilderness-world; the place she is going to appears, from what is said, to be her Bridegroom's Father's house. Her way is upward, her motion an ascending, as the word imports; and here should rather be read "going up," than "coming up," as Judg. xx. 21, since the decency of the parable requires it, she being rather going from the place where the daughters of Jerusalem were, than to the place where they were.

2dly, Her posture, her travelling posture; "leaning on her Beloved." This is what in New Testament language is called the life of faith; for that is the spiritual leaning of the soul, and imports a fiducial persuasion. It bears, (1.) Her having her Bridegroom's company through the wilderness. He leaves her not there alone; he bids her go nowhere but where he himself will go with her. (2.) Her having his help through the wilderness. She leans on him, as a weak woman on a journey leans upon her husband.

Three doctrines offer themselves from the words.

Doct. I. True believers, espoused to Christ, turning their back on the world, and walking heavenward with him, are a mystery, a strange sight in the world. Who is this!

Doct. II. The life of believers, as espoused to Christ, is a going up from the wilderness of this world, with him, to his Father's house in the heavenly Canaan.

DOCT. III. The way to get up from the wilderness-world to the heavenly Canaan, is to go all along leaning on Jesus Christ by faith.

I shall illustrate and apply the first two of these doctrines distinctly, and consider the third in a word of direction in the application of the second.

DOCT. I. True believers, espoused to Christ, turning their back on the world, and walking heavenward with him, are a mystery, a strange sight in the world. Who is this !

In discoursing this subject I shall,

I. Premise some things for right understanding the doctrine.

II. Shew in what respects believers are a mystery, a strange sight in the world.

III. Give the reasons of the point.

IV. Apply.

I. I shall premise some things for right understanding the doctrine.

1. Sin turned this world into an enemy's country in respect of heaven, and so into a wilderness. It was originally the seat of the friend of God, the confederate of heaven, innocent Adam ; and then it was a pleasant land. But sin entering, it changed masters, so that the devil is become the god of this world, 2 Cor. iv. 4, and it a wilderness because the primitive communication betwixt heaven and it is stopped, and a new one settled betwixt hell and this world.

2. All men by their first birth are natives of this world ; their father's house is in it, the people of it are the people that are theirs, Psalm xlv. 10. And home is home, be it never so homely ; they love the wilderness, they desire not to change, they know no better country, and they seek none better. They are pleased with the place, the company, and the manner of living ; for they are all natural to them.

3. The Lord from eternity having set his love upon some of the natives, in due time comes in the gospel into the wilderness-world, and making love to them, gains their consent, and is espoused to them in the everlasting marriage-covenant, according to Hos. ii. 19, " I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies." Isa. xlv. 5, " One shall say, I am the Lord's." Thus he becomes theirs, and they his, and they are engaged to follow him whithersoever he goes. Not only are they obliged by their contract of espousals to go with him, but their hearts are so set upon him, that they cannot think of parting with him again, or staying behind him.

4. Though the espousals and the feasts of espousals are held in the wilderness, yet the place set for the consummating of the marriage is Christ's Father's house in Canaan above, to which he begins immediately to carry his bride. She must no longer be a residenter in the world, a dweller in the wilderness, but must lift her heart and affections off her own people, and her father's house, and be going away homeward to Christ's Father's house, that the marriage may be consummated.

5. This her going away up from the wilderness with her espoused Husband, is a going away in heart and affections; it is the soul's motion heavenwards in this life, the last step of which is made at death. It is a gracious frame of heart shining forth in a holy, tender, and heavenly walk. Every step in the way of holiness, in mortification, vivification, and contempt of the world, is a step homeward to Christ's Father's house.

6. *Lastly.* Christ's bride at her waygoing, and ongoing with him thus, is a mystery, a strange sight in the world. Her own country-people gaze at her, to see her undertaking such a strange journey, turning her back on the beloved world, and setting out for a strange country. Sometimes believers fall out of the exercise of grace, become untender in their walk, and grow so like the world, that they do not appear to be going up out of the wilderness, but rather pitching their tents there. But when they are in the exercise of grace, holy and heavenly in their walk, then do the spectators make the question, "Who is this?" Like the Jewish rulers, who "seeing the boldness of Peter and John, and perceiving that they were ignorant and unlearned men, marvelled, and took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus;" Acts iv. 13.

II. I shall show in what respects believers are a mystery, a strange sight in the world; the power of godliness appearing in their walk at this rate, so that it is said of them, "Who is this?"

1. There is something very amiable about them, as we are told of the primitive Christians; Acts ii. 46, 47, that "they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." There is a conscience within worldly men, as well as corruption; and what their corruptions will condemn, their conscience will approve as lovely; 2 Cor. iv. 2. Men's corruptions may get the management of their tongue, hands, and their whole external behaviour, and may set the man to run down piety, and the party in whom it appears; yet in the meantime conscience within their breasts will be applauding and admiring the godly man, as one who has something very lovely

about him, as Balaam did in the case of the Israelites ; Numb. xxiii. 9, 10.

2. There is something very awful about them to beholders. Paul stands at the bar and reasons, and Felix sitting on the bench trembles ; Acts xxiv. 25. John Baptist lies in his grave beheaded at Herod's command, and yet there he is a terror to Herod ; Matth. xiv. 1, 2. The remains of God's image on man in point of dominion, has an awe and majesty with it, that affects the brutes ; Gen. ix. 2. How much more has the restored image of God in righteousness and holiness shining forth in a Christian's life, a majesty with it, procuring an internal reverence to them from beholders ! They are to them like men of another world, and every view they take of such writes death to them ; Heb. xi. 7.

3. There is something very mysterious about them ; Zech. iii. 8. They are like foreigners in a country, apt to become a gazing-stock, a wonder, about which the natives cannot satisfy themselves. A believer marching heavenward, away from this wilderness-world, is,

(1) A mystery to the men of the world, whether professors or profane. They cannot comprehend them, for they are God's "hidden ones ;" Psalm lxxxiii. 3, not hid from their bodily eyes ; ver. 4, but from the eyes of their minds. What a mystery is that man to them, who sets his feet and treads on that, which they set their hearts on and adore ? who values, pursues eagerly, and by no means can be brought to part with, that which they can see no beauty in ? whose principles, aims, and actions are diametrically opposite to those of theirs ? They are to them like men of another mould and make, which they cannot understand. Nay, they are,

(2.) A mystery to themselves, ay, so great many times, that they know not what to make of themselves, what class to rank themselves in, whether of saints or sinners ; Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24. A true Christian is indeed a bundle of mysteries ; he on earth, and his head in heaven, yet really and truly united ! John xv. 5 ; crucified with Christ, yet living ; living, yet not he, but Christ living in him, Gal. ii. 20 ; not loitering, but labouring, yet not he, but "the grace of God with him ;" 1 Cor. xv. 10. He is a man of two leading contrary principles, having a will and not a will to one and the same thing ; he sins, and yet it is not he ; Rom. vii. 17. He has many spots and stains on him, yet is all fair ; Cant. iv. 7 ; "black, yet comely, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon ;" chap. i. 5 ; wanting many things, yet complete ; Col. ii. 10. What wonder that such a one should be in way of admiration inquired about, "Who is this ?"

III. I shall give the reasons of the point, That true believers are a mystery, a strange sight in the world.

1. Because they are so unlike the world, they are like speckled birds among the rest, 1 Pet. iv. 4. They are cast into the new mould of regeneration, and are come forth nonconformists to the world, Rom. xii. 2. They have got another spirit, than the spirit which all their people and their father's house are acted by, which casts their whole conversation into quite another shape than theirs, Num. xiv. 24. So the unlikeness betwixt them makes them a strange sight.

2. Because they are so unlike themselves in former times. Saul among the prophets was a strange sight, 1 Sam. x. 11. But the grace of God makes a more wonderful change in a man from what he was before, as appears in Saul among the apostles, 1 Tim. i. 12, 13. What an observable change was there, that he which persecuted the saints in times past, now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed! Gal. i. 23. Grace makes lambs of lions, casts out the dumb devil, that they who cared not for praying, preaching, &c. but all these things were a burden to them, they cannot for the world live without them. It makes a new heart, a new life, a new man, all things new, 2 Cor. v. 17.

3. Because they are very rare in the world; they are but here and there one for a marvel, Jer. iii. 14. The multitude in the world prefer the wilderness to Zion, and sit still in their native land, and will not go away with Christ. They have the gospel-call, they are courted to match with Christ; but they think gospel-invitations but idle tales, and they have beloveds of their own in the wilderness, which they will not part with for him. Some say with the mouth they will take him, and subscribe with the hand at solemn ordinances; but it is not a match, for their hearts were never truly for it; so they sit still too, and go not up with him out of the wilderness, but their carcasses fall there. So that they who are going up out of the wilderness, being so rare, are a strange sight.

USE I. of information. It informs us, that,

1. Serious souls need not think it strange, if they become a wonder to many, Psalm lxxi. 7. They are not meet to go up with Christ from the wilderness, that are not content to become a world's wonder for him. They must be fools for Christ that will be wise; Mark viii. *ult.*, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of 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." Worldly men wonder at seriousness now, what makes the saints so nice in points of truth and holiness; but that wonder will not last long, the world will soon see they had good reason for it all.

2. The world is no idle spectator of those who have given themselves to Christ, and profess to follow him. They take notice of them, and have their questions about them. Communicants, take heed to yourselves; many eyes are on you, as to your after-walk; God's eye is on you; the world's eyes will be upon you, they will take notice whether ye turn your back on the world, the ways and manners of it, or even sit still with themselves as before.

3. Those who shall still walk after the course of the world, continue sons of earth, not making away heavenward in the tenor of their life and conversation, are not espoused to Christ; though they have given him the hand, they have not given him the heart. The sincerity of your covenanting with God is now to be proved by your after-walk. If God be your Father, be setting homeward to his house. If Christ be your espoused husband, make away with him through the wilderness, and stay not behind. The friendship of the world is enmity with God.

4. *Lastly.* This world must be little worth, wherein, among such multitudes, there are so few such travellers, that they are a strange sight. There are many sad sights to be seen in the world, even after communions, but few of this sort of persons turning their backs on the world, and resolutely walking heavenwards. Take heed, Christians and communicants, that one of these three questions be not put concerning you, instead of this in the text. (1.) Who is this standing still in the wilderness? like the door on the hinges, oft moving, but never going forward, as proud, passionate, carnal, and sensual, as before? Isa. v. 6. (2.) Who is this going back from the wilderness to Egypt, to the flesh-pots there? back again to their profane and licentious courses? better ye had never known the way of righteousness. (3.) Who is this sticking in some mire, fallen into some pit in the wilderness; some gross and scandalous abomination? Many such trophy gets Satan set up.

USE II. Of exhortation. O Christians, communicants, walk so as the world may bear witness, that ye are going up out of the wilderness, leaning on your beloved; that your faces and hearts are heavenward; that ye have set off from them, and are no more theirs.

This would be much to the honour of Christ and religion, Acts iv. 13. It would be a great kindness to the world lying in wickedness, as an apt mean to bring others away with you, Zech. viii. *ult.* It would be the safety and comfort of your own souls, Cant. viii. 4.

Ye will walk so, if ye be habitually heavenly in the frame of your heart, like Enoch walking with God. Also, if in your conversation ye manifest a contempt of the world: *Germana illa bestia non curat aurum*, was Luther's character from his enemies. Likewise, if ye

be just in your dealings in the world to a niceness, counting it always safer to lose a pound, than unjustly gain a small penny. And further, if ye be clothed with humility and with humanity, meek, ruling your own spirit, doing good to all, even to those that wrong you; and are patient under trouble, and living by faith.

Doctr. II. The life of believers as espoused to Christ, is a going up from the wilderness of this world, with him, to his Father's house in the heavenly Canaan.

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall,

I. Take notice of some things supposed in it.

II. Unfold the believer's life, as a going up from the wilderness of this world, typified by the Israelites going up from the wilderness to Canaan.

III. Make application.

I. I shall take notice of some things supposed in this doctrine. It supposes, that,

1. As soon as a soul is espoused to Christ, it is loosed from the world. Its taking of him is a letting this world go, Matth. xiii. 44. The unbeliever hugs and embraces this world as his portion, and pursues it as the main thing; but when he closeth with Christ he saith, "Thou art my portion," and the esteem of the world sinks, Phil. iii. 8. Those that are espoused to Christ, are,

(1.) A loosed people. The bands with which the world held them are loosed; they gripe not it, nor it them, at the rate they formerly grasped one the other, Gal. vi. 14. While the sinner was without Christ, the profits and pleasures of the world were strong bands, which they could not get shaken off; but in the day of the power of converting grace, these give way, as tow does when touched with the fire. Then Christ says, "Loose him and let him go;" all is nothing in comparison of Christ.

(2.) A separated people. Though before they made one body with the world lying in wickedness, and were possessed with the same spirit of the world; yet in the day of their espousals to Christ, they are fairly separated from them, 2 Cor. vi. 17, even as a married woman ceases to be any more a member of her father's family, but becomes a member of her husband's, Psalm xlv. 10.

(3.) A new people. They are no more men of the world, though in it, Psalm xvii. 14, but heavenly men, 1 Cor. xv. 48. They have another spirit, Numb. xiv. 24, a new principle, ends, motives, and manner of life.

2. The soul espoused to Christ, being loosed from the world, is set in motion heavenwards, away from the world, Psalm lxxiv. 5—7. That soul has begun a new journey, is set off in the Christian race,



that it may obtain the crown. Those that are in heaven have come to a fixed point of happiness; those in hell have come to a fixed point in misery; as to those that are in the wilderness of this world some of them are sitting still as in Sodom, till the fire of God fall on them and consume them; others, even true believers, are making away, as Lot out of Sodom, and as the Israelites out of the wilderness into Canaan.

3. The believer's journeying heavenwards is attended with many difficulties. It is an up-going, and that through a wilderness. They that mind for heaven must forego their own ease, and lay their account with troubles and trials of many sorts. The way to destruction is broad and easy; if men will but sit still, they will be carried quickly down the stream into the ocean of an eternity of wo. But if one minds for heaven, he must force his way, through many difficulties, Matth. vii. 13, 14, and xi. 12.

4. The believer's passage to heaven is also a work of time. It is not a leaping out of the wilderness into Canaan, but a going up out of it by degrees. It cost Israel long forty years in the wilderness. And the believer is longer or shorter kept in the wilderness, as seems meet to his God. Some are not long set upon the way, when they are at their journey's end; others it costs many a weary look to be at home.

5. Christ is with the believer in the journey. It is a weary land they have to go through, but they are not alone in it, Cant. iv. 8. In the day the soul is espoused to Christ, he is united to him spiritually, and that union once made is never broken again. So that wherever it is the believer's lot to go, Christ is with him, if it were through fire and water, Isa. xliii. 2. He is never so far from him, but that his faith may get hold of him, and he may lean on him.

6. *Lastly.* The end of this journey is a most comfortable one. Though the travelling be uneasy, the designed place of rest is most desirable, being Christ's Father's house, where the marriage is to be solemnized for ever, John xiv. 2. This is sufficient to bear up the heart of Christ's spouse through all the difficulties of the road, Heb. xi. 26, especially considering that Christ himself goes all along with her, Heb. xiii. 5.

II. I shall unfold the believer's life, as a going up from the wilderness of this world, typified by the Israelites going up from the wilderness to Canaan. And here I shall shew,

1. How they are brought unto the wilderness.
2. How the believer is set into it.
3. How he is going up from it.
4. The hardships and inconveniencies of the road.
5. The advantages and conveniencies of it.

*First*, I shall shew you how believers are brought unto the wilderness. The world is not a wilderness to them and in their esteem, till they be brought out of the Egyptian bondage of their natural state. Then, and not till then, they enter into their wilderness-state, And here one may remark these six things.

1. As the Israelites who came out of Egypt, went down into it in the loins of their fathers; so the elect of God were brought into their sinful and miserable state in the loins of our first father Adam, Rom. v. 12. And we are all born in that condition, and draw our first breath in that unhappy region.

2. The natural state of the elect is a state of bondage and slavery. Satan, as Pharaoh, is their prince there, and holds them fast at their drudgery, Eph. ii. 2, 3. They have many taskmasters there; as many reigning lusts as there are in their hearts, so many taskmasters are there holding them to their work.

3. As God, by the hand of Moses the lawgiver, and Aaron the high-priest, wrought the deliverance of the Israelites; so, by the law and the gospel, he carries on the deliverance of the elect out of their state of bondage. The law serves to awaken the sinner, and shew him his danger; the gospel discovers the remedy; and the Spirit of God makes both effectual.

4. There is no less opposition made by Satan to the sinner's deliverance from his spiritual bondage, than was by Pharaoh to the deliverance of the Israelites. He is loath to lose his subjects, loath to let his prisoners go. How often does the field seem to be won, and a fair appearance that the poor sinners shall be let go? and yet there are new attacks to be made before he will surrender.

5. Ordinarily, whenever the deliverance is set a-foot, the bondage becomes harder than ever before, Rom. vii. 9. Satan then musters up all his forces, and rages more than ever, that he may make the soul despair of a delivery. Now is the soul hard bestead, duties are bound on by the law laid to the conscience, under the pain of the curse, but no strength afforded; so the soul sees it must make brick while no straw is given. And by this means their corruptions are irritated, that they appear more vigorously than ever before, Rom. vii. 5.

6. *Lastly*. But at the set time, over the belly of all opposition, God brings his elect out of their spiritual bondage into the wilderness. There is a set time in the purpose of God for the delivery of every elect soul; and as at the appointed time precisely Israel was delivered, Exod. xii. 41, so are they, Jer. ii. 24. And no sooner do they comply with the gospel-call, and leave the spiritual Egypt, but as soon this world turns a wilderness unto them. And young con-

verts may lay their account with a hot pursuit from Satan to bring them back again, even as sure as the Israelites met with it from Pharaoh. But they may be assured that they shall get such a deliverance as the Israelites at the Red Sea, which shall make them sing.

*Secondly*, I shall shew how the believer is set into the wilderness. When once converting grace has made a fair separation betwixt the sinner and the world, presently he enters into a wilderness-state.

1. He cares not for the world as he was wont, Gal. vi. 14. Grace opening the eyes the world appears in its own colours, no more a fruitful field but a barren wilderness. The most pleasant spots in it appear lions' dens and mountains of leopards. Its best fruits appear as the apples of Sodom, fair to look at, but being handled fall to ashes, Psalm iv. 6, 7. He sees there is no rest for his heart in it, and therefore must look above and beyond it. The men of the world are no more his choice; their way and manner of life he can no more away with.

2. The world cares not for him as before, Gal. vi. 14. No sooner does a soul begin to look heavenward, but presently the world turns a strange world to him, John xv. 19. He must be content to dwell alone, and not to be reckoned among the nations. He bears the image which they hate, he is entered on a course opposite to theirs; and so the friendship breaks up. And he may lay his account with all the opposition they can make him with tongue and hand.

3. Then it becomes, by God's appointment, the place of trial for him, as the wilderness was to the Israelites, Deut. viii. 2. God could have taken his people a nearer way to Canaan than the way he led them; but for their trial he led them so long in the wilderness. So he could carry each believer straightway to heaven after their conversion; but he will have them pass their trials before they come there; so they must be content to take up their cross and follow him, and so long stand candidates for glory, while one trial is put to them after another; trials that will prove the reality and strength of their graces, the multiplicity of their corruptions and remaining vigour of them.

4. *Lastly*. It is no more his home or his rest; but the place of his pilgrimage, of his sojourning, the place he must travel through in his way home to his eternal rest, Heb. xi. 13. He must look on himself as upon a journey, one that is not to stay here, but must be going forward to the heavenly country.

*Thirdly*, I shall shew how the believer is going up from the wilderness; he is going up from it,

1. By the course of nature, which is swift as a post, a ship, and as an eagle's flight. It is but a little time, and believers will be at

their Journey's end. Every day sets them a good way nearer their eternal rest, Rom. xiii. 11. If the days be evil, they are but few, and will soon be over. It is true that by this way the wicked are going out from the world too, but they are not going up, but down into destruction.

2. In the habitual bent of his heart and affections. Believers' hearts are turned off the world, and set on things above. Their face is homeward, their heart is there before them; for Christ is there, their treasure is there. Hence they are said to be those who love Christ's appearing, 2 Tim. iv. 8; and look for him, Heb. ix. 28. So when the carnal man is glued to this world, and desires no better heaven than what is here, they are going away from it in affection and desire.

But it may be the case of some gracious souls, that they cannot say they are thus going up from the world, nay, it is a terror to them to think of going out of it. I answer, there is a twofold desire to be away from the world, and to be with Christ. (1.) There is an explicit desire, like a rose full spread. Such was that of Paul; Phil. i. 23, "I desire to depart, and to be with Christ." This is found in believers, when they are not only in the exercise of grace, but have a full assurance of their eternal salvation. This makes the soul go up with full sail out of the world. (2.) An implicit desire which is like a rose-bud, where the leaves are to be found, if it be opened, though in the meantime they are covered, not being yet so ripe as to spread. This is found in believers, if they be at all in the exercise of grace, although they be in the dark as to their state. It is found in the groaning believer, who is groaning under the remains of sin, and would fain be free from them, groaning under want of communion with God, and would fain have it, and that so as not to be interrupted any more, Rom. vii. 24. The Lord reads the language of these groans so, and there wants only a full assurance of eternal happiness to make it plain language to the soul itself. See 2 Cor. v. 4. And thus the believer is going up from the wilderness, though with the wind in his face.

3. In progressive sanctification; Prov. iv. 18. By faith the soul is set on the way to Immanuel's land; it knits him to Christ the personal way, it sets him to holiness of heart and life, the real way, or the walking in the way; Col. ii. 6. And the believer goes on while he goes forward in holiness, especially when he is growing, adding a cubit to his spiritual stature; 2 Pet. iii. *ult.* This going up appears,

(1.) In mortification, when the believer is dying to sin, getting his former lusts weakened; Rom. viii. 13. Mortification is the daily

task of a believer ; the weeds of corruption in the heart are never so plucked up, but they will be ready to sprout again. These Canaanites are left in the land, that the believer may never be idle, but watch their motions and bear them down.

(2.) In vivification, in living to righteousness, when the soul holds forward in the way of duty over the belly of all opposition, especially in a holy and heavenly frame, going on in them with vigour, whether it be doing-work or suffering-work ; Cant. iii. 6. The soul married to Christ is to be for him, according to the law of marriage, Hos. iii. 3. As we live by him, so we must live to him. This was Paul's practice ; Phil. i. 21, "To me to live is Christ." More particularly,

4. In obtaining victory over the world ; 1 John v. 4. The world is an enemy to all that are set to go up from it. And many times it prevails to retard their course ; they are in it travelling in a stony, yea and thorny way, where there are many things to take hold of them, and hold them still ; so that they are in hazard of being entangled in the wilderness.

In this respect a believer goes up from the wilderness. And 0 but the picture of a believer thus going up from the wilderness is a beautiful one ; Cant. iii. 6, "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?" I shall essay to draw it in a few particulars. A believer espoused to Christ, and thus going up from the wilderness-world, is,

1. One who is keeping off from mixing with the men of the world, the natives of the weary land. Converting grace plucks them out from among them, and sets them over to Christ's side ; and establishing grace keeps them from mixing again ; Psalm xii. 7. There is a generation of God's wrath in the world, and they are labouring to save themselves from them ; Acts ii. 40. They are deserters of their company, shunning unnecessary fellowship with them ; for they know, that "a companion of fools shall be destroyed ;" Prov. xiii. 20. And they consort with those who are followers of the Lamb, companions of those that fear God.

2. He is holding off from the ways of the world ; Psalm xvii. 4. In the wilderness-world there are many ways, all of them leading to and terminating in some part of the wilderness ; some to the world's wealth, honours, peace, &c. But there is one way that leads out of it, terminates in the heavenly Canaan. The throng of the world goes in these many ways ; but the believers, and they only, take the pilgrim's way, which does but lie through it, neither beginning nor ending in the country ; and the grass may grow on it

for the natives, and they never set a foot on it; Isa. xxxv. 8. The men of the world ply them to turn them aside, and take their way; and if they catch them napping, they readily get them off; but the traveller towards Zion says as Israel to the king of Edom, "We will go by the king's highway, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left;" Numb. xx. 17.

3. He has a low estimate of the world's wisdom, and holds off from it as from a false light that would lead the traveller into a quagmire; 1 Cor. iii. 18, 19. Carnal wisdom has often been the ruin of Christ's interests in the church, and in the private case of Christians; leading into a betraying of truth and purity; procuring outward peace, but wounding one's conscience, and dishonouring God. But they that are going up from the wilderness, will be no admirers of the world's judgment in the matter of truth and error, sin and duty; for the generality of men have ever been, and will be, in that case, blind men judging of colours. And it is a dangerous thing to be carried away with the stream; Eph. ii. 2. A man that has no heart to keep off a way, because it is a way that is in vogue in the world, and will always row with the stream, is not going up from the wilderness. The fear of the world's putting the fool's cap on one's head, makes many a carcass fall in the wilderness.

4. He is keeping up a holy contempt of the world's good things; Heb. xi. 24, 25. Its profits and pleasures are sinking in their value with him; he "counts them but loss and dung, that he may win Christ;" Phil. iii. 8. To a gracious soul going up from the wilderness, the best things the world can afford, are so lightly esteemed, that he will not think them worth pains to go off the King's highway for them; Numb. xx. 17, "We will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells;" while others allured with these baits, fall into one mire after another, and quit the travelling company, as Demas did Paul.

5. He is resolute to make his way through the world's ill things, to follow the way of God through good and bad report, Rev. xiv. 4. He is neither to be bribed nor boasted by the world out of the way of his duty; Cant. viii. 7, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." His feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and blow what weather it will, he must hold on till he be at his journey's end.

6. *Lastly.* His eyes are upon the other world; they are fixed on the prize, and running that they may obtain it, Heb. xi. 26. Their conversation is in heaven; they are habitually minding heavenly

things ; their affections are set not on things on the earth, but on the things that are above. But I proceed to consider,

*Fourthly*, The hardships and inconveniencies of the wilderness-road, which the believer must lay his account with, while he goes up from the wilderness.

1. It is a weary land which the traveller has to go through, while he is going up from the wilderness, Isa. xxxii. 2. David calls the whole of it, the house of his pilgrimage. However lightly the natives, the men of the earth, may live in it, there is never one born from above that is travelling through it, but it is a weary land to them. It was a weary time the Israelites had of it in the wilderness ; their patience soon began to wear out. And there is never a child of God, but sometime or other he has his fill of it, and being wearied, longs to be at home. The Son of God himself, we find, wearied here, John iv. 6.

2. It is a road that lies through a waste, affording no provision, Deut. xxxii. 10. When sin entered into the world, a withering curse followed on the back of sin, and turned the pleasant land into a waste, barren place. There was a blessing in everything in it before, but now everything is embittered in it. There is enough to raise the appetite of lusts, there are husks enough for them to feed on ; but there is nothing in it to fill the soul, that is the produce of the country ; and therefore the natives, though they are always feeding, they are never full. The Israelites would have starved in the wilderness, if they had not been furnished from another quarter ; for there was neither meat nor drink there for them.

3. It is an howling wilderness which they have to go through, Deut. xxxii. 10, because of the wild beasts that haunt there, Cant. iv. 8, devils, and wicked men influenced by the devil. Sometimes the traveller must hear them roaring, Psalm lxxiv. 4, threatening to devour and swallow them up, and to make the name of Israel no more to be remembered, as the Egyptian wild beast did, Exod. xv. 9, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil : my lust shall be satisfied upon them, I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them." Sometimes he is entertained with their yellings, Jer. ii. 15. Their blasphemies, reproaches against God and his cause, their contradicting of the truths of religion, what are they but yellings of the wilderness, as ungrateful to holy ears as the yellings of beasts in the night ? Sometimes he must find them tearing him, his name, reputation, substance, yea and his flesh sometimes, Psalm xxxv. 15, 16.

4. They must lay their account with scorching heats in it. Such was the wilderness to Israel, for which a cloud covered them by day. While they are upon the road through the wilderness, they are liable

to fiery heats of desertion from heaven ; to fiery heats of temptation from hell, Eph. vi. 16, fiery trials of persecution from men, 1 Pet. iv. 12, and fiery heats of contention and division, the fire coming from the altar, Rev. viii. 5. All which make travelling Zionward to be very hard ; and the more hard, the greater these heats are ; which puts the spouse of Christ to that prayer, Cant. i. 7, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon."

5. It is a sickly place through which their way lieth. Many a groan was in the wilderness while Israel was in it ; sometimes there were fiery serpents biting them, and sometimes a plague consuming them, so as many carcasses fell in the wilderness. No less sickly a place is this world to the spiritual travellers. It is a heavy disease that is on them there, even a whole body of death, Rom. vii. 24. It affects and indisposes the whole man. They are liable to frequent relapses ; and O the malignant influence it has on their journey, unfitting them for it, and at best causing them to go up but very slowly !

6. It is a difficult way through the wilderness. The road the travellers must go will try their patience, their strength, &c. They that must needs have an easy way through the wilderness, must take the way that leads down to the pit, not the way that leads up to Immanuel's land.

(1.) It is all upward, which scares most men at it, Psalm xxiv. 3, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord ? The way to heaven is up the hill, the way to hell down the hill.

(2.) It is a narrow way, Matth. vii. 14. Multitudes walk in the broad way, and there they get room enough, life-room, heart-room, conscience-room. But the King's highway has no such room in it, which obliges the travellers to take good heed to their feet, Eph. v. 15. And considering how rash we are naturally, how weak-headed, false-hearted, how narrow the road is, how loose the ground about it is, it is no great wonder that many of the travellers catch such falls, as make them go halting to the grave, Psalm li. 8.

(3.) It is a hard and rugged way ; and therefore they must have leg-hardness, as soldiers had to preserve their feet from stones and roughness in the way of their march ; Eph. vi. 15. There are many difficulties to go through, which will need resolution and undaunted courage.

(4.) It is a way wherein many snares are laid for them. In every lot in the world, and in the most innocent things, there are snares wherewith we may be caught. And sometimes men are busy making snares for us in the way wherein we walk.



7. It is a very solitary road, there is not much company to be got in it; Matth. vii. 14. Israel travelled alone through the wilderness, save that a mixed multitude joined with them, that they were much the worse of, and whose carcases fell in the wilderness. See how Micah complains for want of company on the road, "Wo is me? for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat; my soul desired the first ripe-fruit;" Micah vii. 1. In Elijah's days there were so very few upon the road, that he thought he had been alone upon it; he had so little help of the seven thousand, that he knew not of them; Rom. xi. 3, 4. At this rate the spiritual traveller has few.

(1.) To take a lift of his burden; Gal. vi. 2. Alas! we are in a strange world, where there are many to lay a load above the burden, but few to take a lift of it.

(2.) To consult with when he comes to a difficult step. There are many such steps that Christians will meet with in their way to Zion, especially when a mist rises in the wilderness. And it is no small mercy to have honest and tender men to advise with, and to have their sympathy and prayers. But of all these there is great scarcity in the wilderness.

8. *Lastly*, It is a road, wherein they must meet with armed enemies come forth to attack them, and ruin them. Pharaoh and his army pursued the Israelites in the wilderness; Exod. xiv. 3. Amalek fought them, chap. xvii. 8, both types of the devil and his agents. The Christian life is a fighting life; 2 Tim. iv. 7. All is not done when they are converted, they must fight their way through the wilderness to Canaan, and so fight as to overcome; Rev. iii. 21. The concluding of their peace with God in Christ, is proclaiming of war against the devil, the world, and the flesh; so they must put on their armour, if they would make their way through the wilderness.

*Fifthly*, I now come to show the advantages and conveniencies of the wilderness-road. The people of God, while in the wilderness-world, have as much allowed them from heaven as may balance the hardships of the wilderness.

1. The pillar of cloud to go before them in the wilderness; of which we have an account; Exod. xiii. 20, 21, 22, "And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way: and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night. He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people." It was a type of Christ. He leaves them not alone in

the wilderness-world. Our Lord Christ is upon the head of the travelling company, Cant. iv. 8; and will be so till he have them all home. And this is sufficient to compensate the solitariness of the way.

The pillar seems to have been a fiery cloud, Exod. xiv. 20; the cloud representing Christ's human nature, the fire his divine nature; and to have been but one pillar; Numb. ix. 15, 16; Christ one person in two distinct natures. A God veiled with flesh, is the believer's company in the wilderness at all times; and even the man Christ travelled the wilderness-road himself too.

It had a dark side to their enemies, but a light side to the Israelites, Exod. xiv. 20. Believers see a glory in Christ which the blind world sees nothing of, and therefore will not go up with him from the wilderness. The carnal world wonders at the believer's way-going from the wilderness; alas! they see not what he sees, the light side of the cloud goes before.

Now the cloudy pillar had a fourfold use to the Israelites in the wilderness, in a spiritual sense made good by Christ to his people in the wilderness-world.

(1.) They had the signal for marching or halting from it, Numb. ix. 17, &c. Their motions were directed by its motions. Thus the travellers from the wilderness-world are directed by Jesus Christ their Lord and Head, on whom the trust of bringing them safe to glory is devolved; Isa. lv. 4, "Behold, I have given him for—a leader and commander to the people." They must not stir till he give them the sign, though all the world, friends or foes, should cry, March; if they presume to do it, the cloud of glory will stay behind them, and they will find themselves entangled in the wilderness. They must not sit still when he gives them the sign to march, though all the world, friends or enemies, should cry, Halt; if they do, they will find the glory of the Lord will leave them, and their rest be blasted. Here lies their safety in the wilderness, in observing the word from heaven.

(2.) It led them in the way, Exod. xiii. 21. They would soon have missed their way in the pathless wilderness. So our Lord Christ leads his people in their way through the wilderness-world, Isa. lv. 4. In the wilderness there are many by-ways, many to lead the travellers off the way, besides a wandering disposition in their own nature. They will never get through safe, who take the guiding of themselves; but they who keep their eye on the cloud of glory before them, shall get through the most difficult steps of the wilderness-road, Prov. iii. 5, 6.

He leads his people through the wilderness, (1.) By his word,

which they must take good heed to, as that which determines the way, Isa. xxx. 21. By his word he chalks out the path through the wilderness, and whatever agrees not therewith is but a by-way, it is not the King's highway, Isa. viii. 20, "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (2.) By his example, which is the marks of his own feet upon the way, 1 Pet. ii. 21. These we should narrowly observe, that we may follow them; hence says our Lord himself; Matth. xi. 29, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." We are apt to follow example; whose example should be so dear to us as his, who is our Father, Master, Husband? &c. That we might know how to walk through the wilderness, God himself came down from heaven, and in our nature walked through it. (3.) By his providence, which, duly compared with the word, contributes much to clear the way; Psalm xxxii. 8, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye." Ye are to be then careful observers of providences, which are really waymarks in the wilderness, Psalm cvii. *ult.* (4.) By his Spirit, which renders all the rest effectual; John xvi. 13, "When he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." He illuminates and causes to shine, the word, Christ's example, and providences. He illuminates the traveller too, as well as the way; disposes, moves, and efficaciously leads the traveller on his way.

(3.) It was a shelter to them from the heat of the sun by day; Psalm cv. 39. And so Christ shelters his people from the scorching heats in the wilderness; Isa. xxii. 2, and iv. 6. Let the heat of desertion, temptation, contention with men, and persecution, be never so great; Christ looked to by faith will be a sufficient scone; Cant. i. 7. Many a time the gourds of created comforts are withered when the sun is hottest in the wilderness. Sons of men are found vanity and a lie. But Christ's shadow is ever broad and refreshing; Cant. ii. 3, and the traveller can never come amiss to it.

(4.) It was a light to them by night, Exod. xiii. 21. There is many a dark night in the wilderness; and it is sometimes the lot of the people of God to travel in the night, as well as it was that of Israel, Numb. ix. 21. But Christ is a light to them in the darkest hour of the night; hence David could say, Psalm xxiii. 4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Sometimes the sun shines fair, and then there is no debate about the way: at other times a mist and darkness sits down in the wilderness, and then many are put to a stand; then is a time of wandering, stumbling, falling over this and the other precipice in the wilderness.

Many are lying fallen, and others come up and fall over them; and all because of the darkness. What way can one get through in such a time? Why, let them keep their eye on Christ the pillar of fire, and they shall have light in the midst of darkness, Job xxix. 3.

2. They have provision allowed them from heaven in the waste wilderness. And that must balance the scarcity and want there. The King's country affords them provision for their journey. Israel in the wilderness were provided both with meat and drink; and so are they that are going up from the wilderness of this world. In the wilderness there is,

(1.) Manna for them to eat, even Jesus Christ, to be fed on spiritually, John vi. 48—51, the only bread that can satisfy a soul. When the Egyptian provision is spent, the soul can no longer feed on the husks of the world, then the manna falls, the soul tastes the sweetness of Christ, in his person, offices, and benefits. It falls down about their tent-doors in the word of the everlasting gospel, exhibiting Christ with all his benefits to the soul; and it is gathered and ate by the application of saving faith, believing Christ to be offered, and taking Christ to itself, believing that it shall have life and salvation by him. And the more close, confident, and assured this application is, and the less mixed with doubting, the more the soul is fed.

(2.) Water out of the rock for them to drink, Exod. xvii. 6. This Rock is Christ, 1 Cor. x. 4. The Israelites might have perished in the wilderness for want of water, had it not been brought out of the rock; so had sinners perished, but that the blood of Christ was shed for their life. Behold Christ smitten by the law, before he could be drink to our souls.—Costly provision for the travellers! this is their provision till they come to Canaan's land.

3. Sometimes they are allowed a song in the weary land, for their comfort and recreation by the way, Psalm cxix. 54, "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." We find Israel in the wilderness often complaining, groaning, and mourning; that is the ordinary in the wilderness-world; but seldom singing, that is reserved for the exercise in the promised land. Yet I find Israel singing in the wilderness three times.

(1.) At their entry into the wilderness, just after they came out from the Red Sea, Exod. xv. So young converts frequently have a parcel of pleasant days at their first setting off in the wilderness-journey, Hos. ii. 14. Religion is new to them; they are like men newly brought out of a dark dungeon, to whom the light has a double sweetness; and the Lord even so deals with them, as fathers with their children who are learning to go, holding out an apple to them, which they are not to expect when they are more confirmed; and

further, it is even to fit them for the hardships which they are afterwards to meet with.

(2.) When they were far on in the wilderness, and had been long in it, they sang upon the occasion of God's giving them a well without their complaining, or so much as asking for it, Numb. xxi. 17, "Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well, sing ye unto it." Many a heavy day had gone over their head between that and the last song they had had, (I reckon not their song at the idolatry of the golden calf, Exod. xxxii. 18, which ended in sorrow.) The fiery serpents had been among them a little before. Yet God made them sing again. Thus sometimes God surprises the travellers with mercy after many a heavy day, that they think they will never sing more, and their souls have forgotten joy; yet he causes them to take down their harps from the willows, and puts a new song in their mouth; while he causes the wells of salvation to spring up to them.

(3.) In their last station in the wilderness, when they were encamping by Jordan, before they passed it, Deut. xxxi. 22, and chap. xxxii. It was forty years betwixt this and their first song. Thus they may have a weary time of it through the wilderness, who yet, when they come to the Jordan of death, shall be made to sing there the sweetest song that ever they sang, like the swan singing sweetest when a-dying. The nearer the rivers come to the sea, they are the sooner met by the tide. Motions in nature are so much the swifter as they come nearer the centre. And it may be a very cloudy day in which the sun shall shine brightest at its setting, Zech. xiv. 6, 7.

4. The Lord is their banner in the wilderness, and so they may be sure of victory, they shall be conquerors in the war, Exod. xvii. 15. Though they must fight, yet Christ the true Joshua is upon their head; he sits in heaven, who has the balance of victory in his hand; and he is their friend, and the cause is his own. Nay, they shall be more than conquerors. Israel was armed with the spoils of the Egyptian army, and Sihon and Og's lands they got possession of. Though the believer's battle with the world, the devil, and his own corruptions be sore; yet the spoils thereby gained are sweet, Psalm lxxiv. 14. They produce sweet experience of the Lord's goodness, Rom. v. 3, 4. Jacob was a man whose life had more trials than any of the Patriarchs; but as true as it was, it had more signal experiences too.

5. There is healing in the wilderness for them, for the wounds got there. There are fiery flying serpents to bite the people there, and they cannot miss the bites of the old serpent now and then. But there is the brazen serpent to look to and be healed; the ordinance relative thereto, we have, Numb. xxi. 8, 9, "And the Lord said unto

Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole : and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole ; and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived." This wilderness-world is the haunt of the old serpent, his prevailing temptations are his bites, the guilt remaining stings and galls the conscience ; but Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross, and on the pole of the gospel, being looked to by faith, they are healed, Isa. xlv. 22. So Isa. xxxiii. *ult.*, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick : the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." And how often soever they be bitten, still the look of faith will be a healing look.

6. *Lastly.* We must not forget the tabernacle in the wilderness, which was the comfort of the godly Israelites there. There they had their stated meetings, and when anything more than ordinary ailed them in the wilderness, they used to draw towards the tabernacle. The tabernacle of gospel-ordinances is the great comfort of the travellers towards Zion. I shall only observe, that,

(1.) It was the place of meeting, namely, with God. The cloud of glory rested on it, and thence God spake. Gospel-ordinances are the place of meeting betwixt the Lord and his people in this wilderness-world, Prov. viii. 34, 35, and therefore they are even the pleasiest things in the wilderness.

(2.) It was coarse without, but rich and fine within. There was the golden candlestick, the shewbread table, incense-altar, ark, &c. All which believers have in Christ enjoyed in the ordinances.

(3.) *Lastly.* It was a moveable and slender thing. The tabernacle of gospel-ordinances is so. But wherever the Israelites went in the wilderness, they took the tabernacle with them. And the travellers to Zion, go where they will, dare not leave their religion, or their duties behind them. The tabernacle was often removed in the wilderness ; but where it went, they went ; none have a tack of the gospel ; but wherever it goes, the travellers will go after it, cost what it will. Coarse fare and hard lodging with the gospel, will be by them preferred to the world's advantages without it. The tabernacle was suited to the wilderness, they had no temple there, that was reserved for the promised land of rest ; but in heaven they shall have it, Rev. iii. 12.

I proceed now to the practical improvement of this subject.

USE I. Of information. From what is said we may draw the following inferences.

1. The people of God need not be surprised, that they meet with many hardships and trials in the world, and that it is a strange

world to them, John xvi. *ult.* While they are in it, they are in a wilderness. How then can they expect other than a wilderness-life? That the desert is to be turned into a paradise, nobody expects; why then look we to see the world other than a wilderness, if we mind for heaven? These things are useful.

(1.) To keep believers from sitting down in it, as their dwelling-place, Cant. iv. 8; or resting-place. A smiling world hugs many to death in its embraces; and the ease many find in it so charms the carnal heart, that the promised land is forgot, Matth. xvii. 4.

(2.) To quicken their pace out of it, and so work together for good to them, Rom. viii. 28. As a boisterous wind blowing on the back of the traveller, makes him sometimes run, while otherwise he would walk; so afflictions and trials put the believer to his duty, when he would not otherwise apply to it, and wean his heart more from the world; Micah vii. 7, "Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."

(3.) To make heaven more desirable, 2 Cor. v. 4. The tossing they meet with on the sea of this world, makes them long for the shore, Job. vii. 2. And as rest is not so sweet to any as to the weary, nor meat as to the hungry; so heaven must be the more sweet in the enjoyment, that the believer has a weary life here.

2. They have good reason to bear all the hardships of their wilderness-lot patiently, and with Christian fortitude and cheerfulness. And that (1.) Because they will not last, they will be over ere long; they are going up from the wilderness. What inconveniencies are upon the road, the traveller matters not much, because he is not to stay with them. He may wonder indeed how people can dwell in a place to him so unpleasant; but it is but a light thing to him, because he is only a passenger. Indeed it is no wonder that the world's hardships be intolerable to them, who have no other portion but the things of the world; but they cannot be intolerable to the believer, who has a better portion, even one in heaven. (2.) Because the heavenly Canaan which the wilderness-road leads to, will make amends for all; "God shall then wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away," Rev. xxi. 4. Though the way be a rugged one, it leads to a paradise. Christ's espoused bride will forget all the wilderness-hardships, when she comes home to the marriage chamber in the Bridegroom's Father's house. (3.) Their lot is a wise mixture, take it at the worst. There are advantages allowed to balance the hardships, as ye have heard. There is no strait they can be in, in the wilderness, but there is help for it in the provision made for

them there. If the wilderness be a weary land, there are statutes that may be songs to them there, &c.

3. They are not Israelites indeed, nor espoused to Christ, who are not going up from this world as a wilderness, in heart and affection, in life and conversation. And such may lay their account, that their carcases will fall in the wilderness, and they shall not see Canaan's land. And such are,

(1.) Those whose hearts were never yet loosed from this world, and married to Christ, Matth. xiii. 44, 45. When man fell off from God, he fell to the creature, and his heart was wedded to it as the spring of his content and satisfaction. All the crosses in the world will not loose this knot; only efficacious grace discovering Christ in his surpassing glory to the sinner will do it.

(2.) Those who are walking according to the course of this world, Eph. ii. 2, framing their lives by worldly principles, being actuated by worldly motives, and acting for worldly ends as their chief design. Thus they are conformed to the world, which speaks them natives of the wilderness-world, not pilgrims in it. These, however their voice may be Jacob's, their hands are Esau's; though they pretend to be going heavenward, they are in the way to destruction.

The characters of them that walk are,

(1.) To do as the most do, not regarding how the best do; contrary to that plain injunction, Exod. xxiii. 2, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." Thus the world is like a dunghill, where one part corrupts another, men fearlessly venturing on those courses and ways on which they see many before them. This is the downright reverse of going up from the wilderness, being a going along with the world, from which the apostle dehorts, Rom. xii. 2, "Be not conformed to this world."

(2.) To make the world one's business, and religion the by-hand work at best; not remembering what our Lord says, Matth. vi. 24, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." This is the way of the world, who look on their carnal interests as their chief interests, which therefore get the flower and strength of their affections. Whereas gracious souls go quite the contrary way, counting all things but loss, yea but dung that they may win Christ, Phil. iii. 8. And so our Lord directs us, Matth. vi. 33, to "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."

(3.) To step over conscience deliberately, to gratify lusts. Conscience among the men of the world is a very weak thing; and all its dictates, and the consideration of God's word as our rule, and



God's honour as concerned in men's actions, go very short way with them. Let the unjust man see gain within his reach, and the sensual man what may please his sensual lust; though God's command, honour, and conscience be between him and them, he can step over these, tread on them all, and gratify his lust, Hos. xii. 7, 8, and xiii. 6.

USE II. Of caution. While ye are in the wilderness, beware of wilderness sins and snares. And beware of,

1. Unbelief. That was a wilderness-sin of Israel's, Psalm lxxviii. 22, "They believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation." Yea, it was the sin that kept the whole generation that came out of Egypt, out of Canaan, Heb. iii. 18, 19. Many that seem to have been set fair on the way to the heavenly Canaan, come short of it this way. They believe not the record that God hath given concerning his Son, and so they never embrace Christ but perish. And the unbelief of saints while they are in the wilderness, does them much harm. It plucks away from their strength, and leaves them most unfit for their journey.

2. Murmuring, 1 Cor. x. 10. Many times God's anger was kindled against Israel for their murmurings in the wilderness. And it is incident to us in this wilderness-world, through the trials, crosses, and troubles that must be met with there. They had need of mortified affections that travel the wilderness-way, else they cannot in patience possess their souls. And when people have lost their patience, and their spirits are on the fret, everything ruffles them, and the hard way becomes harder.

3. Lusting, 1 Cor. x. 6. Let not the loose be given to your hearts, to fix on any thing which providence sees meet to withhold from you, so that ye must have it, and cannot be satisfied without it. Thus the Israelites lusted for flesh, and they got it with a vengeance, Numb. xi., Psalm lxxviii. 30, 31. And it is ordinary that what people pull off the tree of providence before it be ripe for them, sets their teeth on edge, and proves a snare to them. There is nothing better than a weaned heart to fit one for the wilderness-way.

4. Looking back to Egypt, Numb. xiv. 4. There is a root of apostacy in every one's heart, though broken in the sincere, yet reigning in others; hence it comes to pass, that many go far back, and lose what they have attained in religion, making themselves new work, with difficulty to recover what they threw away; and many fall away for good and all, and never recover. We had much need to take heed to the first rising of these evil motions in the heart; Psalm xlv. 10, "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house."

5. Fawning and flattering enemies, Numb. xxv. 17, 18. Pharaoh's

pursuit with his chariots and horses, Amalek's sword and bow, did not the mischief to Israel in the wilderness, that the daughters of Moab did, Numb. xxv. Balaam tried all his art to curse them, but could do them no harm by all his enchantments; but the Midianitish women ruined them with theirs, ver. 9. The church of God has often weathered out the storm of persecution, and came off victorious; while she has been ruined with the soft methods of the enemy. And many have stood out against the frowning world, that have been cast down with the smiling world. They have been drawn to destruction with silken cords of temptation, who could not be driven to it with iron rods.

6. *Lastly*. The mixed multitude, Exod. xii. 38. They were a black sight to Israel in the wilderness, a sad snare to them, Numb. xi. 4. They came in among them from a carnal principle of worldly interest, and were a snare to them, and their carcasses fell in the wilderness. When God brings his church out of the house of bondage, and gives her peace, a company of carnal men driving their own worldly interest, join them like a swarm of insects in a summer-day, (Exod. xii. 38, a great mixture, Heb.); and the more their number increases, the more mischief they do to her true interests, sacrificing them to their own. It is not a little owing to the influence of that mixed multitude both of ministers and professors, that religion and its interests are at so low an ebb this day; and therefore we have ground to expect a stroke, come from what quarter it will, that will make a dispersion among us, and lessen our numbers, Ezek. xx. 37, 38. In the meantime beware of those who have a name to live, and are dead; formal professors often hurt a Christian more than the profane.

USE III. Of exhortation. And,

*First*, Ye who profess to be espoused to Christ, evidence the reality of it by your going up from the wilderness-world with him in heart and affection, in the progress of sanctification, and contempt of the world, holding off from the ways of it. To press this, I offer the following motives.

Mor. 1. Without this ye cannot evidence your sincerity, 1 John ii. 15. If your treasure be in heaven, your heart will be there. If Christ be indeed your espoused Husband, ye will forsake your father's house for him, and follow him. But many give him the hand and not the heart; and therefore though called by his name, dwell at their father's house still.

2. Without this ye will bring a reproach on religion, which suffers extremely by those who profess Christ, and yet follow the way of the world, Rom. ii. 24. Alas! for the wounds thus given to reli-

gion by the worldly disposition of the professors of it, whose untemperance, and covetous practices, proclaim them sons of earth.

3. *Lastly*. Ye may be very useful for Christ in the world this way, by commending religion practically at this rate to the consciences of carnal men. "Who is this that goeth up from the wilderness, leaning upon her Beloved?" say the daughters of Jerusalem. What can have more influence upon them, than to see men dead to the world, heavenly in their disposition, walking as pilgrims on the earth? It is a noble testimony for God.

(1.) To the vanity of the world, while men in their practice tread on that which carnal men set their hearts upon. What avails it for a man to talk of the world's vanity, while he is still griping it as his life, cannot part with it at God's call, for God's honour and service; but, on the contrary, is dishonouring God, and wounding his own soul, to gain it? That is building with the one hand, and destroying with the other.

(2.) To the reality and excellency of religion, and heavenly things, 1 Pet. iv. 4; Cant. iii. 6. It speaks a power in religion that can carry men above these perishing things, and that they must be fed from some other quarter, that so little value the streams of earthly things.

*Secondly*, Strangers to Christ, be espoused to him, that ye may go up with him from this wilderness-world, to his Father's house in the heavenly Canaan, believe that Christ is offered in an everlasting marriage-covenant to you. Embrace ye and accept, and so *close* with him as your head and husband, for time and eternity. I offer the following motives to enforce this exhortation.

MOTIVE I. Jesus Christ is really and truly in suit of your souls. This is the gospel-offer; Hos. ii. 19, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies;" and nothing will hinder but the want of your consent; Matth. xxii. 4, "All things are ready; come unto the marriage." He has with his precious blood bought a bride to himself, and he comes in the gospel to gain her heart to himself. And he is come to you this day; O then slight not the offer.

2. If ye accept of Christ, he will carry you up from this wilderness-world to his Father's house, where the marriage will be solemnised for ever. He will leave none of his behind him. There may be a time betwixt the espousals and marriage; but in that time he is carrying them to the marriage-chamber.

3. There is no loosing of the heart from the world without engaging it to Jesus Christ, Matth. xiii. 45, 46. It is the discovery of the

one pearl that makes one give over seeking the many. The heart of man is like a child that will not let the knife go out of its hand, till something that pleases it better is put into it. Though the devil go out, if the house be empty, he will return again, Matth. xii. 44, 45.

4. *Lastly*, If ye are not espoused to Christ, ye will fall in the wilderness, and never see the heavenly Canaan, Heb. iv. 12. They will have no access to the marriage above, that are not espoused to Christ here below. Nor will they be transplanted into the paradise above, who are not first planted in the nursery of grace below.

*Thirdly*. I invite, and sound an alarm to you all, to go up from this wilderness world with Christ. Rise, ye that are espoused to him, and come away. Rise, ye dwellers in the wilderness. Take him as your head and husband, and go along with him towards the heavenly Canaan, leaving this world in heart and affection.

QUEST. How shall I get up from the wilderness world, how will I get through it to the heavenly Canaan, while the journey is so hard and difficult for a poor weak creature? ANSW. I give you your directions and advice in a third doctrine from the text.

DOCTRINE. The way to get up from the wilderness-world to the heavenly Canaan, is to go all along leaning on Jesus Christ by faith. The way to live well in this world, till we come to heaven, is to live by faith.

Here I shall briefly shew what it is to go leaning, or to live by faith; and that we are allowed to go thus.

I. I shall shew briefly what it is to go leaning, or to live by faith.

1. It supposes the soul's taking, receiving, and embracing Christ for its head and husband, John i. 12. In the gospel Jesus Christ is offered, presented, and exhibited to every one that hears it, as the Father's gift to them, Isa. ix. 6; John iv. 10. He says in effect, "Poor souls, ye can never of yourselves make your way up through the wilderness; but I freely give you a strong one to lean upon. Take him and welcome." Hereupon the soul takes its hold of Christ for that end, the soul believes the gospel offer or promise as made to itself, saying in effect, "Then he is mine by the free offer made to me;" which implies the heart's consent to take him, and so the espousals are made, 1 John v. 11. It bears a going,

2. Cleaving to him, Acts xi. 23. Faith joins the soul to the Lord, so as to be one with him; and so holds the gripe, and will not quit it. The believer hangs by Christ, by the word of the gospel; and as the weak woman dares not lean to her own strength, but cleaves to her husband on the journey, so does the believer to Christ.

3. A going on under a sense of weakness, 2 Cor. iii. 5. There are two causes of one's going leaning upon another. One is love, the other weakness; both concur here. The believer loves Christ as his Lord and Husband, and therefore will lean on him; he is sensible of utter weakness and inability to make the journey in his own strength, and therefore must lean on him. Faith is a self-emptying grace, and therefore is chosen to be the mean of communication on our part betwixt the Lord and us, Rom. iv. 16.

4. A going on, laying our weight on the Lord Jesus for the whole of the journey, Psalm lv. 22. When the believer sets out with Christ, he says to him, "All thy wants be on me." "So be it," says the believing soul, and so rolls itself upon him for all. Hence faith is called a staying, Isa. l. 10, as an old man stays himself upon his staff; a believing on Christ, as a chief corner-stone, i. e. laying the weight on him, as the foundation, 1 Pet. ii. 6.

5. *Lastly.* A going on, with a persuasion that we shall be borne up and borne through by him, 2 Tim. i. 12. This is the plain import of leaning on Christ; for none will ever lean on that for help, concerning which they have no manner of persuasion that they shall be helped by it. Thus faith is called trusting in God, relying on him, both which bear this persuasion. And they that would remove this from the nature of faith, would destroy it, and leave us a mere wavering opinion in its stead.

But as one may lean trembling, so faith may be accompanied with doubting. But as trembling belongs not to the nature of leaning, but is opposite to it; so doubting belongs not to the nature of faith, but is opposite to it. And the more trembling the less leaning, so the more doubting the less faith.

This going up from the wilderness, leaning, is walking in Christ Jesus as we have received him, Col. ii. 6, which is the only true holiness competent to fallen man.

II. I shall shew, that we are allowed to go thus leaning. Consider, that,

1. The Father has appointed the Mediator for this very end, that so he may bring many sons to glory, Psalm lxxxix. 19, "I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people." The first man, with all his children in his loins, set off alone through the world, on his own stock; and fell, being unable to make the journey. Wherefore now the strength for all the heirs of glory is lodged in Christ, and they are allowed to live and lean on him; 1 Cor. i. 30, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 2 Tim. ii. 1, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

2. We are called and commanded to lean on him ; Psalm lv. 22, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." Prov. iii. 5, 6, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not into thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Psalm xxxvii. 5, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." Isa. xxvi. 3, 4, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." It is the great duty called for in the Old and New Testament. We honour the Father and the Son, by doing this through the Spirit.

3. To pretend to go another way, is an abomination to the Lord, Prov. iii. 9. We know no holiness of Adam's fallen children, but what is a walking in Jesus Christ. Men may call the obedience given to the law otherwise, holiness; but a holy God will never own it as such, when it savours not of union with his Son.

Use. Then if ye would go up from the wilderness of this world to the heavenly Canaan, go leaning on Jesus Christ.

1. Go leaning on him for light to know your duty, Prov. iii. 5. Ye are in the wilderness; let him be eyes to you there; look to him, as the Israelites did to the motions of the cloud, for your direction. He is the great Prophet and Teacher; close your own eyes that ye may be guided by his word and Spirit.

2. Go leaning on him for strength to perform your duty, Phil. iv. 13. It will not be your weak hands that will work the work, nor your feeble knees that will perform the journey. The strength must come from him who is the Head. And ye must go on borrowed legs.

3. *Lastly*. Go leaning on him for acceptance, and the happy issue of your journey, Eph. i. 6. It is through him alone that any step in the Lord's way can be accepted, and by him alone we can be brought into the eternal rest.

In all this ye are to believe the word of promise, and on the credit of it to set about your duty, renouncing yourselves, and believing and applying the sufficiency treasured up in Christ.

Great is your need of leaning; ye have great work to do, a great journey to go, much weakness hangs about you, much opposition ye must encounter; yet forward ye must be out of the wilderness to the heavenly Canaan, else ye perish.