

A FUNERAL SERMON

PREACHED AT HACKNEY, JULY 11TH, 1714,

ON OCCASION OF THE MUCH-LAMENTED

DEATH OF THE REVEREND MATTHEW HENRY,

LATE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL THERE.

BY W. TONG.

JOHN xiii. 36. latter part.

Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.

THESE words are the answer our Lord and Saviour gave to a hasty question proposed by the apostle Peter, *Lord, whither goest thou?* The occasion of that question was a dark saying that our Saviour dropt, ver. 33. *Little children, yet a little while I am with you: ye shall seek me; and, as I said to the Jews, Whither I go ye cannot come, so now I say to you.*

This affectionate disciple was so struck with that expression, that he seems not so much to mind what our Saviour added, that *they should love one another as he had loved them all*; but, as one whose heart was full, and could hold no longer, he breaks in abruptly upon his Master with this inquiry, *Lord, whither goest thou?*

Our Saviour thought fit to give a gentle check to the forward temper of his disciple, by answering as in the text, *Whither I go thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards.* Yet this did but raise his zeal the higher, and produced that warm expostulation, *Lord, why cannot I follow thee? I will lay down my life for thy sake.* Our blessed Lord, who knew Peter better than he knew himself, saw so much spiritual pride and self-sufficiency in that resolution, that he thought fit to take him down, and tell him of his approaching scandalous fall, v. 38.

In the temper and language of this disciple there was a remarkable mixture of good and evil, grace and corruption, much love to Christ, and too much confidence in himself; and in the reply that Christ

makes to him in the words of the text, there is a wise mixture of reproof and encouragement suited to Peter's case.

1. Our Saviour checks the apostle's curiosity and self-confidence, *Whither I go thou canst not follow me now.* I am going to the cross, and thence to the crown and kingdom; but though thou hast been so long in my family, heard my doctrine, seen my miracles, and conversed so freely with me, thou canst not yet follow me; thy work is not yet done, thy soul is not yet ready, thou art not fully prepared for death and heaven.

2. He encourages the hope of his disciple, and his honest zeal; "*But thou shalt follow me afterwards.* Thou canst not follow me now, and therefore thou must be content to be left behind in this evil world; but my grace shall be working in thee and by thee, and thou shalt in due time be made ready to follow me both to the cross and to the kingdom. Thou shalt not be lost, though thou be left behind; *thou shalt follow me afterwards.*"

I cannot but observe something in the countenance of this great assembly, that tells me it is expected I should take some particular notice, as others of my brethren have done before, of the surprising, lamented, long to be lamented, death of the late excellent pastor of this church.

And indeed it is upon that account that I have fixed my thoughts upon this text, these words of Christ to Peter, *Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.* I believe I am not the only person here who feels in himself a secret regret, that so dear, so faithful, so every way desirable, a friend has got the start of me, is gone to heaven before me, and left me behind him in this valley of sin and tears; but when my

heart is musing upon this unexpected parting, and wishing I had been so happy as to have gone to heaven with him, he seems to me to look back upon me, and bid me, for a while, farewell, in these words of the text, *Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.*

I hope I shall not be thought to presume too far, in accommodating these words of our blessed Lord to any mere man. I intend not hereby to compare the servant to his Lord, so as to set him upon a level with him, either in the excellency of his person, or the nature of his death; in both these respects I know and believe our Saviour *was alone, and of the people there was none with him.* Nor do I intend to compare myself to this blessed disciple, unless it be in those things in which he was least like himself. But certainly, conformity to Christ is every Christian's duty and honour; and where we see this conformity wrought up to a very eminent degree, our love to Christ will oblige us to esteem such persons the excellent of the earth, precious both in life and death; and we hope we may, without offending God, wish that we might have our lot with them living and dying.

That man must be worse than Balaam, who does not desire to die the death of the righteous, and that his latter end may be like his, Numb. xxiii. 10. Good men will be ready to carry their desires further, not only to die like the righteous, but, if it were the will of God, to die with them; especially with those of them, to whom their souls have been long united by the sweet and sacred bonds of an intimate and religious friendship: having been *lovely and pleasant in their lives*, they would have thought it a favourable providence, if in death they had not been divided, 2 Sam. i. 23.

When Christ told his disciples that his beloved friend Lazarus was dead, Thomas was so affected with it, that he made a sudden motion to the rest of the disciples, *Let us also go, that we may die with him*, John xi. 16. You will find that affectionate proposal so excellently opened and applied by the late Reverend Mr. How, in his funeral sermon for Dr. Bates, that I cannot but recommend it earnestly to your review on this occasion. I have not the least doubt but that extraordinary person was able to speak the words of Thomas from his very heart at that time, though with a due subjection to the Father of spirits. I am confirmed in this persuasion, by what I myself had the opportunity to observe for some years together, of those steadfast hopes and holy desires with which he waited for his great change. And I very well remember what I have heard from an eminent, wealthy, and religious citizen, (alderman Rodbert,) in whose house that venerable person Mr. Richard Fairclough died, that when Mr. How visited him on his death-bed, and they discoursed together in a very affectionate man-

ner upon the glory of heaven, Mr. How familiarly said to him, "To this glory you are hastening; but why will you not take me along with you?" And then answered himself, "But we must, with good old Simeon, have leave to die from him who is the Lord of life."

I could mention some other such instances, which, how much soever they may be derided by men of defiled consciences and earthly minds, plainly show there is something in the temper of a serious, godly person, that suggests such desires and wishes as these, when he sees his dear companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ going to heaven before him, What do I do loitering and lingering here? why could I not have gone along with them?

What I shall offer to your thoughts upon this affecting and important subject, will be under these two general heads:

I. To consider, what it is that makes it so desirable to go along with our godly friends into the other world. And,

II. What reason we have to be quiet and patient in continuing here a while longer, even when our best friends are gone before us.

I. What is it that makes it so desirable to go along with our faithful godly friends into another world?

If a man would give his affectionate thoughts their full scope, many things might be mentioned to this purpose; but I shall confine myself to these three:

1. Had we gone along with such deceased friends we should now have been delivered with them from the evils of this world, which they have left.

2. We should have been now put into possession with them of the blessedness of that world to which they are gone.

3. The sorrow of parting by this means would have been prevented.

1. Could we have gone along with our godly deceased friends, we should now have been delivered, as they are, from the many evils of this world, which they have left.

The present world is an evil world, God frequently tells us so in his word, the faithful servants of God find it so, and even the men of this world themselves, when they come to leave it, confess it is so, though they would not believe it before,

It is so evil a world, that our blessed Lord was resolved he would deliver his people out of it at any rate; and, rather than fail, he would give his life, he would give himself, to accomplish the great design; and God the Father approved of the resolution, as worthy of the wisdom and grace of Christ, and exactly correspondent to his own mind and will: *Who gave himself for us, that he might deliver us from the present evil world,* (or out of this present evil

world,) according to the will of God and our Father, Gal. i. 4.

The evils of this present world are innumerable, but the chief of them may be reduced to these three heads; sin, affliction, and the danger we are in of miscarrying for ever.

(1.) Sin: this indeed is the greatest evil, and the procuring cause of all the rest; and it is no small burthen to those whose hearts are tender and upright with God.

They are grieved to see so much sin committed in the world, their righteous souls are vexed at the filthy conversation of those among whom they live; the bare-faced atheism and infidelity of some, the gross and scandalous profaneness and immoralities of others, are a trouble and a terror to them. To see the glorious gracious God so much dishonoured and provoked, to see precious souls in such numbers so desperately destroying themselves, good men have much ado to bear the beholding of it with their eyes, it makes them weary of the world; they think themselves unhappy thus to dwell in *Mesech*, and to sojourn in the tents of *Kedar*, Ps. cxx. 5.

They are grieved yet more to see so much sin in their own families, among their near relations; and how few are there who have not this cause of sorrow, less or more! The daughters of Heth were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah, so great, that Rebekah declared, *she was weary of her life because of them*, Gen. xxvii. 46.

They are most of all grieved to feel so much sin still remaining and working in their own souls, they have known the evil of it, it has been to them more bitter than death, and yet they are not free from it; it makes them loathe themselves, to think there should be still so much in them of that abominable thing that the soul of God hates, and that they should by in-dwelling sin, be so often hindered in that which is good, and drawn into that which is evil; they sigh and groan for a full deliverance, and a sinless immortality, where they shall never say or do a foolish thing any more, never entertain a foolish sinful thought or desire any more.

Now, in the multitude of those thoughts which they have about their good friends deceased, this presents itself readily to them. They have now ceased from sin. While they were with us, they had their complaints as well as we, they often bewailed the deceitfulness of their own hearts, their unbelief, formality, deadness, and distractions in holy duties; but now all is well with them, all their complaints over; sin is abolished, it has no place, no being, with them: and if we might have had leave to have gone along with them, our complaints of this kind had been over too, and all had been right and well in our souls; but, alas! we are left behind in a sinful world, and which is worse, are ourselves daily sinning in it.

(2) Affliction: this is another kind of evil with which the world abounds; sin has filled it full of sorrow; men are every where *walking contrary to God*, and God is justly *walking contrary to them*. *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, especially where men hold the truth in unrighteousness*, Rom. i. 18. Not only revealed by his word, but by his providence.

The best of Christians not being here free from sin, cannot expect to be free from affliction; they suffer from the hands of men, because they are better than others, and often suffer from the hands of God, because they are not so good as they should be; they are God's children, they are of his family, and he will correct them; judgment usually begins at the house of God, and their spirits being tender, and broken, and impressed with an awe of God, afflictions go nearer their hearts, and make a deeper wound in them than in other men.

Now as for these, our godly friends who are departed, all these calamities are overpast, they are entered into peace, the wrath of their enemies cannot reach them now, and their heavenly Father will never frown upon them any more; he receives their departing souls with this most sweet and gracious welcome, *In a little wrath I hid myself from thee for a moment, but with everlasting loving-kindness will I now have mercy on thee*, Isa. liv. 8.

And if we could have gone along with them to heaven, our troubles would have been over too, and all tears wiped away from our eyes by the tender hand of our Lord Jesus Christ; but we still remain in an evil world, and seem to be reserved for yet greater trials. Since so many that stood in the gap are removed, we can conclude no other, but that they are taken away from the evil to come; that they are safely housed before the storm comes; they are gone to a good home, and gone home in a good time; *henceforth, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord*; and it had been happy for us, if it had been the will of God, that we had died with them; especially considering,

(3.) The danger that we are yet in of miscarrying for ever. And this is not the least of the evils we groan under in this world, *fightings without, and fears within*: dangerous temptations are daily assailing our souls, and these occasion sad misgivings of heart, lest we should one day fall by our spiritual enemies.

The serious Christian has his hopes, and though they are often but weak and wavering, he would not be without them for a thousand worlds; but he has his fears too, and not without cause; the concern is vastly great, the battle is not yet over, he has not yet reached the mark, nor won the prize; a disappointment would be fatal and irrecoverable. The heart is deceitful; many have flattered themselves to their

own ruin; and the humble Christian thinks with himself, What if I should do so too? The very possibility of being deceived in a matter of endless consequence, is enough to shake the firmest mind, and to make it tremble.

The case of a Christian in his journey to eternity, is like that of a man that is to go over a narrow and long bridge, that lies upon high and rugged rocks, from whence there is a mighty precipice to the deep waters; though the bridge be strong, and his hold sure, yet he cannot forbear looking down to the rocks and river so far below him, and he is ready to shiver and tremble when he thinks, If I should fall, what a dreadful fall would this be! Though the Christian has the strong bridge of the covenant to go over, yet he cannot avoid meditating terror, when he thinks what it is to fall into the bottomless pit, and lake that burns with fire and brimstone; he is upon a sure foundation, he has sure hold of Christ, or rather Christ has sure hold of his soul, and yet he trembles when he looks down and thinks, If I should fall, what a desperate fall would that be!

Now, those holy ones who are got safe over the narrow bridge of death, have nothing more to fear; they are safe landed, the risk is run and over; the matter is fixed, they are in heaven already. They are where they would be, and where sometimes they were afraid they should never have come; but those fears have now no room in their souls; the battle is won, the victory gained, the day is their own, and they are safe for ever.

And if we had gone along with them, our dangers and fears had been over too; but we have not attained, we are not already perfect; we know not what deep, what dark and dangerous, steps we have yet to take, how often our feet may slide; we know our blessed Saviour is able to keep us from falling, and we hope he will do so, but *hope deferred maketh the heart sick*; and when such a one as Paul was at so much pains to keep under *his body, and bring it to subjection, lest while he preached to others he himself should be a cast-away*, (1 Cor. ix. 27.) we cannot think ourselves above all fear: we are admonished to fear, *lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it*, Heb. iv. 1. It was from this text that your deceased minister preached the Lord's day before he died; and I doubt not but it was with a serious concern upon his own soul, that he might not come short of the promised rest; but now all the care is over, he enjoys that everlasting rest that he so unweariedly pursued and pressed after; but we are left to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling*. This is one consideration that renders it desirable to have gone to heaven with our godly acquaintances, that we might with them have been fully delivered from all the evils of this present world.

2. We should have now possessed with them the

blessedness of that world which they are gone to. How great that blessedness is, none among the living can tell; we understand but as children, and speak but as children, when we think and speak of the glories of heaven. Though we have now the evidence of our adoption, and know that we are the children of God, yet we know not what we shall be; but this we are sure, to be dissolved and to be with Christ, is far better than to be in the most prosperous condition in this world. Permit me here to give a few short hints.

(1.) In heaven the principles and habits of grace in the soul are all perfected. Those who are arrived safely there, know as they are known; their apprehensions are clear, distinct, and as adequate to their objects, as a created mind can admit of, in its highest improvement and most enlarged capacity; their love to God is now without any coldness or inconstancy, it is most pure, and perfectly refined from all sinister and selfish ends and interests. Their delight in God is now full, the top-stone is now brought forth to crown the building, and grace is ripened into glory.

(2.) The operations of these perfected graces are perfect too; their knowledge, love, and delight in God, are in continual exercise without any interruption; they are in more easy and pleasant exercise, without any opposition; they are in the most lively and vigorous exercise, without any weakness or weariness; they worship God day and night, and their work is their felicity, their rest and reward.

(3.) The blessed objects of their graces are now near to them, viewed by them, and fully enjoyed; they are made like to the angels of God, and with them by a spiritual sight they see God face to face; they behold him in his glory; that which Moses desired, but was not then able to bear, they enjoy with infinite pleasure; *God shows them his glory*. Exod. xxxiii. 18. They look with steadfast pleasure and wonder upon the Lord Jesus Christ; they walk with him in white in the heavenly paradise; and what soul can imagine the delightful conversation they have with him in those most pleasant walks; with what mutual joy and satisfaction their Redeemer and they record the wonderful steps of that rich grace, that found them in such depths of misery, and raised them to such a height of glory? They have the fullest, sweetest, and most satisfying sense, relish, and assurance of the free, unchangeable, peculiar, distinguishing love of God to them; God rejoiceth over them, and rests in his love towards them, and they rejoice and rest in him and his favour for ever.

I am persuaded none will blame me, if I here insert some passages, which your deceased minister has gathered up out of a sermon preached by his excellent father, on the death of Mr. William Laurence. Addressing himself to the widow and father-

children, he uses the words of Christ in Luke ii. 28. *Weep not for me, &c.* and thus enlarges on them: "It is said of Abel, that being dead, he speaketh; if our deceased friend and brother is dead, could he be heard speaking, this is what I would say, My dear wife and children, my dear brothers and sisters, my dear neighbours and friends, weep not for me, for you have something to do with your tears. And having described evils he was freed from, he proceeds thus:

Consider the happiness I am entered into. Could you know where I am? I am at home in my dear wife's house, in the mansion prepared for me here. I am where I would be, where I have long often desired to be; no longer on the stormy sea, but in a safe and quiet harbour: my working time is done, and I am resting; my sowing time is over, and I am reaping; my joy is as the joy of the vest.

Would you know how it is with me? I am made perfect in holiness, grace is swallowed up in glory, the top-stone of the building is brought forth. Could you know what I am doing? I see God, I see him as he is, not as through a glass darkly, face to face, and the sight is transforming, it makes me like him. I am in the sweet enjoyment of my blessed Redeemer, my Head, and Husband, whom my soul loved, and for whose sake I am willing to part with all. I am here bathing myself in the spring-head of heavenly pleasures and joys unutterable: I am here keeping a perpetual sabbath; at that is, judge by your short sabbaths: I am here singing hallelujahs incessantly to him that sits upon the throne, and rest not day and night from praising him.

Would you know what company I have? Blessed company, better than the best on earth: here are holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. I am set down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, with blessed Paul and Peter, and James and John, and all the saints; and here I meet with many of my old acquaintances that I have fasted and prayed with, who have got before me hither.

"And, lastly, Will you consider how long this is to continue? It is a garland that never withers, a crown of glory that fades not away; after millions of millions of ages it will be as fresh as it is now: and therefore weep not for me."

I have taken only so much as relates to the blessedness of heaven; and it is described in such sweet, lively, and unaffected strains, so suitable to the excellent, heavenly spirit of him that spoke it, I am sure it deserves to be often read over, and seriously considered by us all.

3. If we had gone with our godly friends to heaven, the sorrow of parting had been prevented; and need not tell some of you, that is no little sorrow;

the experience of those who have lost such relations and friends will speak for me, and speak much more emphatically than I can. It is hard parting with a faithful minister, who *naturally cares* for the spiritual state of his people. It is hard parting with a tender, faithful, affectionate yoke-fellow, who has been for many years helping you forward in the way to heaven; with an affectionate parent, who was as compassionate to the souls of his children, as careful of their bodies and outward welfare. To part with such, is like cutting off a right hand: when such a one leaves us, he takes part of our very life and soul along with him, and we feel ourselves only to survive. Such a parting, such a loss, imbitters every thing in the world to the sorrowful survivors. Nothing is now to them what it was before; life itself is less valuable; house, family, food, raiment, rest, conversation, none of these things are what they used to be. There is a kind of blast and death upon every thing, an emptiness in every thing, when we can no longer enjoy the endeared friend who made every thing else pleasant to us. To souls united, not only in the bonds of nature, but of grace too, a separation, though it be but for a time, is hard to be borne. Now all this trouble and sorrow had been prevented, if we could have gone to heaven with them.

Such considerations as these represent it to us as a desirable thing, if it had been the will of God, that we had died with our excellent departed friends, and gone to heaven in company with them.

I now proceed,

II. To consider what reason we have to be quiet and patient in continuing here a while longer, even when our best friends are gone before us.

To men of carnal minds, who have their portion in this world, this will appear very needless; they are willing enough to stay here, whoever goes before, and would rather be left alone upon the earth, than leave a world they love so well, to enter upon a state their hearts are wholly strangers to. When they hear that death is to the righteous a deliverance, and that Christ gave himself to procure for his people such a deliverance, the secret language of their souls is, "God deliver me from such a deliverance."

But as for those who have laid up their treasure in heaven, and whose hearts are there, they find it more difficult to be content to live, than willing to die, and especially when they see one intimate faithful Christian friend after another, go before them.

But yet, even these, if they would recollect themselves, and consider every thing with a calm, composed, and dispassionate mind, may see sufficient reason to acquiesce in the will of God, who has ordered it so, that when others are taken they should still be left in a sinful calamitous world: and that they may be enabled in holy patience to possess

their own souls, I would suggest a few things to them.

1. Consider, that in dying work, every one must expect to be alone; though you should die in the same place, and at the same time, with your best friends, yet both they and you must be alone in dying. It is a work by itself, and every one must die for himself, and enter into eternity as much alone, as if none else had died besides him. Departing souls cannot help, cannot comfort or counsel, one another in the article of death; it does not appear that they can have any communion with each other in dying. While they lived, they could converse together about death and eternity, and comfort and encourage each other about those awful concerns; but though they should enter together into the valley of the shadow of death, they must expect to part there, and lose the sight and society of each other there, and each of them must have to do alone with God, the Father of their spirits, in that important moment of dying. And why then should any be impatient, because they are left behind their godly friends, since there must have been a parting in death, though they should have died in the same moment? But,

2. You would do well to inquire, whether you are yet so thoroughly prepared for death and heaven as those who are gone before you. If you are not, you have not only reason to be patient, but to be thankful to God that he has given you a little more time. Dying work is hard work; it requires not only an habitual but an actual preparation; and there needs a great deal to actual meetness for death and heaven: it is not a passionate wish for death, or weariness of life, that makes the soul ready for another world. You sometimes think you would be glad to be gone, but are you as ready as you are willing?

Are you sure there is not yet something wanting in you, which you cannot so well die without? Is there no breach between God and your souls, that you have not so seriously considered, and endeavoured that it might be made up by a particular application to the blood of Christ? If there be, you cannot imagine how difficult that very thing might have rendered your dying work to you.

You seem to be very much weaned from the world since your best friends are gone out of it; but is this weanedness as great in reality as it is in your present opinion? For all your haste to be gone, if the world and you were just now to part, it may be you would find your hearts cleave faster to it, and come with more difficulty from it, than you imagine.

It may be your house is not yet set in order; something is omitted, that both in prudence and in conscience ought to be done; and if that defect be not supplied, it may prove a great distraction to your dying thoughts.

Perhaps there is some latent corruption in you, yet sufficiently lamented and subdued. This was the very case of Peter; his self-confidence must have been discovered to him, and repented of, and moribund before he was fit to die; perhaps it may be so with some others, who in a warm and affectionate frame may seem to themselves very willing to be gone.

Now if any of these things be your case, you have cause to bless God, that he has been so tender to you and indulgent to you; he has given you more time, that you may be better prepared to encounter your last and great enemy, and to make the steps and concerns of your souls more sure and clear, before you go to that place where there is no further work to be done for eternity.

You are ready to think God has been more kind to your deceased friends than he has been to you; but if you better consider the matter, you may have cause to be very thankful to him, that he had more regard to the real wants of your souls, than to the hasty wishes. Jonah was impatient to live when his gourd was withered, he *wished for death*, and said, *it is better for me to die than to live*; (*ch. iv. 8, 9.*) but he was not so ready to die; that was no good frame to be found in at death; he must be more calm and cool, and better reconciled to the will of God; and therefore God condescends to reason the case with him in a most kind and compassionate manner, to bring him to himself; God would not let him die in that peevish humour; and doubtless Jonah was made sensible before he died, that his God had dealt tenderly with him, in giving of him time to receive a better frame of soul than that which he was in when he so passionately wished for death.

3. But though you are ever so well prepared for death and heaven, yet if God has any more work for you to do in the world, it becomes you to stay with patience till you have done it.

You are Christians, and you have been often told that Christians *do not live to themselves nor die to themselves, but whether they live they live to the Lord or whether they die they die to the Lord*: and this you have been very seriously and very seasonably put in mind of, but a few days ago, on this very occasion. It is not for you peremptorily to choose either life or death, but to refer it to him who is the Lord of life, to appoint that for you which may be most for his own glory. You are serving your heavenly Father and your blessed Redeemer, to whom you owe all you are, and have, and can do, and you are serving your generation according to the will of God; and you should be well pleased with it, both for the work's sake, and for his sake who has called you to it.

If others have done their work before you, it will fit they should go to heaven before you; it will be time enough for you to rest, when your work is done.

ould you leave any part of it undone? This very c is well stated and determined by the apostle 11. in Phil. i. 21, &c. *To me to live is Christ, and 'ie is gain: but if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit my labour; yet what I should choose I know not: I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to de- t and be with Christ, which is far better: neverthe- to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

t becomes you as the servants of the Lord, rem- ed by him, to be willing that your rest and hap- ess should be deferred for a while, if in the mean- e you may bring more glory to God and your our, and do more service to his interest in the ld; and if you are doing his will on earth, while ers are beholding his face in heaven, you must k yourselves well employed, for his glory should dearer to you than any interests of your own.

ou are servants to your Creator and Redeemer, l you must stay till you have leave to die. He o called you to your work, expects you should de by it with obedient patience till he also call a from it, and in due time he will call, and then a may give a cheerful answer, knowing that he l have a desire to the work of his own hands, Job . 15.

It is not for want of love to his disciples, that rist keeps them in this world sometimes longer n they could wish; he has a desire to them, and the work of his hands in them, but yet he will not ve them (like your season birds) all to take wing d fly away together; for what then would become his cause and interest in the world? In the same yer where he declares it to be his will that all se the Father had given him, should be with him erever he is, to behold his glory, yet he also de- es it is not his desire they should all leave the rld now, or all at one time: *I pray not that thou uldst take them out of the world, but that thou uldst keep them from the evil*, John xvii. 15.

t. You complain that some of your best friends ve got the start of you, and reached heaven before u; but pray consider, is it not well for you, if y left you in the way to heaven, following after as u are able? All travellers are not of the same ed, some have more strength, more activity, and e better furnished for their journey, and meet with ver hinderances, and so move faster, and get sooner their journey's end; but it is some comfort to se who cannot keep pace with them, that those o are gone before can tell their friends at home, at they have left them upon the road, in the right y, and making what haste they could after.

You find it is some exercise of your patience, to e that those who did not set out for heaven before u, but some of them perhaps after you, have quite gone you, and have got home before you, but if cy can carry this good report of you to heaven, at you are in the ready road thither, that you are

not loitering, that you are not gone the wrong way, but that they left you in the King of heaven's high road, making the best speed you can, walking in the same spirit, in the same path of the just; this will cause joy in heaven, and may afford you comfort in the land of your pilgrimage. Are you moving God- ward and heavenward? It is well, thank God, and take courage; remember how great a support this was to the blessed Paul, even while he was bemoan- ing himself that he had not yet attained to sinless perfection; *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehend- ed of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before, I press forward toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*, Phil. iii. 12, 13.

5. Though you are left behind for a little while, yet if you keep close to God, and maintain communion with him through Christ, you may have even a heaven here upon earth: communion with God will make life comfortable, at the same time that it makes heaven so desirable. You think it long till you be joined to the general assembly and church of the first-born in heaven, and till you begin your ever- lasting sabbath. Come, sirs, thank God through Jesus Christ, that you have a nail in his house here, and a place in the assemblies of his saints, and such comfortable sabbaths and sacrament days; that God thus vouchsafes to come down to you, before he thinks fit to take you up to himself.

The presence of God is the highest happiness of heaven itself; *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* Ps. lxxiii. 25. If you have the presence of God with you on earth, though it be not in so immediate a manner, and in so high a degree, yet it ought to be greatly valued by you, and should not only keep you quiet, but cause you to rejoice: you cannot have the presence of deceased friends any longer with you, and that makes you weary of the world, but you may have the presence of God even here, and is not that infinitely more? Good old Jacob left this with his children as a sufficient support to them, *Behold I die, but God shall be with you*, Gen. xlviii. 21. Is the gracious presence of God nothing to you? Is it not a great thing that the tabernacle of the Lord should be with men, and that he should dwell with you here on earth?

You say this is something, but it is not heaven: it is true, but it is the next door to heaven. Where- ever we meet with God, we may say of that place, *This is no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven*, Gen. xxviii. 17. Have you communion with God in secret and solemn acts of worship? Why then you are got within the borders, and even in the suburbs, of heaven. You are in the very gates of the

city; and their God is preparing your souls, and making them ready for his more immediate glorious presence. Here is no room for discontent, but abundant cause for holy love and thankfulness.

6. You lament it that you are not yet in heaven; but know this for your comfort, that if you be in Christ Jesus, you shall as sure be there in a little time as if you were there already. I speak here of the objective certainty, the certainty of the event; not of the subjective certainty, the assured persuasion of your souls concerning it. In this respect, you may be in doubt, and apprehensive of the danger of missing your way, and being lost for ever, as I have already observed; but if you be in Christ, there is no condemnation to you, Rom. viii. 1. Your state is safe, and your end shall be peace. You are kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation. Your spiritual life is hid with Christ in God; it shall not be lost. Your salvation is nearer than when you first believed, Rom. xiii. 11. It will not be long but you will overtake your friends who are gone before; you will come up to them at your Father's house; though death has separated you for a while, yet that same death shall bring you together again; when they died, then you parted for a while, and when you die you shall meet them again. The great boat that carried them over Jordan, to the land of promise, will, in a little time, come back again and fetch you, and bring you together. This Christ assured Peter of, *Thou shalt follow me afterwards.*

The same grace that has brought them to glory is ready for you, and sufficient for you. If your hearts be right with God, you and they are built on the same foundation; you have embarked in the same vessel; you have the same skilful pilot to steer you; and after you have been tossed to and fro on a tempestuous world a while longer, you also shall come safe to the desired haven. They once had their fears, as you now have; *but the foundation of the Lord stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows who are his*, 2 Tim. ii. 19. The same evidence you have of the sincerity of your faith and holiness, the same you have of your eternal happiness; for it is unalterably settled between the Father and the Son, that of all that are given to Christ, none should be lost, but all forthcoming at the last day; that every one that believeth in Christ should have everlasting life, John vi. 39, 40. You are in the hands of Christ; all his saints are in his hand; and none shall be able to pluck you out of that safe and powerful hand.

7. And lastly, When you are once got safe to heaven, you will have as long a term in your happiness as those who are gone thither before you. Yours is everlasting, and theirs can be no longer. If the blessedness of the saints in heaven were only for a limited season, though ever so long, you would

have some excuse for envying those who are gone before; for they would enjoy more of heaven than you; their lease would be longer than yours, because it commenced before yours. But in eternity there is not properly a longer or shorter term; *one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* When you have been a thousand years in heaven, your happiness is as much beginning, and as far from ending, as it was at the first moment of your entrance there.

The apostle observes, (1 Thess. iv. 17.) that the different circumstances of dying before Christ's second coming, or remaining alive at that day, would make no material difference in their happiness, because *they shall all be for ever with the Lord.* This being for ever with the Lord makes up all; it swallows up all lesser distinctions of the time and manner of going to heaven: this will effectually silence all emulous complaints, and perfectly unite the sons of God in holy love and joy; *they shall all be for ever with the Lord.*

I have now considered both what it is that prompts us to wish we had died with our holy acquaintance who are gone before us; and what reason we have patiently to wait here, till our great Lord shall give us a kind dismission.

It remains that we should bring these things home to ourselves by a close and serious application. I can but give you a few hints, and must leave you to enlarge upon them yourselves, depending upon the help of God's Holy Spirit to make all effectual.

1. Instead of repining that our best and most beloved friends are gone before us, let us set ourselves to improve their life and death for the establishment of our souls in the belief of an unseen eternal world, and of the blessedness of the saints in that world. If you say, Who does not believe this? I am sure I may say, Who is there that does not need to pray, *Lord, help my unbelief?* We are dull of understanding, and slow to believe the invisible realities of the other world. A strict observation of wise and good men is a great establishment to our faith. Let us remember their holy conversation, their zeal, their diligence, their self-denial, their fervent desires after God and Christ, and the delightful hopes they had of the glory to be revealed; how they fetched their comforts from heaven by faith and hope, when this world frowned most upon them. What shall we think? Were they deceived? Is all this come to nothing? Was their faith a mere fancy, and their lively hope only a pleasant dream? It can never be: there is a life beyond this; they knew it to be so; they had tasted of the powers of the world to come, not in a superficial manner, but by deep and satisfying experience; they had heavenly affections, excellent designs, and delightful expectations, all which centred in a world of everlasting rest with God. Are all these perished with

their dead bodies? No, surely: who that believes a God, can think he would suffer the wisest, the most holy, and every way the best men in the world, thus to flatter themselves; and that only the foolish, vicious, unthinking part of mankind should happen to be in the right? It can never be. Verily, there is a reward for the righteous, and his expectation shall not be cut off.

2. Let the death of our godly friends teach us to think of heaven more frequently, and with greater affection and delight. Indeed, when we consider heaven as the glorious throne of God, and the seat of the blessed angels, we should for that reason raise our thoughts and our hearts thither; but no man hath seen God at any time; we have little acquaintance with the holy angels; but we have seen and known many of the blessed saints who are now in heaven; we had familiar acquaintance with some of them, our souls were knit to them. Now though we should chiefly value heaven for the sake of the Divine Presence that shines most gloriously there, yet we may ascend in our thoughts to God by the scale of the creatures; and what we saw in good men of God, of Christ, and heaven, while they lived with us here, should make us to love God, and Christ, and heaven more, and meditate more upon them, since so many who bore the image of the heavenly are now gone thither.

It has been often observed, that when Esther was taken into the court of Ahasuerus, *Mordecai took a walk every day before that gate, ch. ii. 11.* We should follow our friends in our thoughts and desires, to that blessed state into which they are entered.

Nature teaches us to love the place of our fathers' sepulchres; we look with affection upon the very graves of our friends, and take pleasure even in their dust. Should we not then much more frequently and affectionately meditate upon the glorious world to which their precious souls are gone? By this means, we not only show our affection to them, but we maintain some kind of communion still with them.

3. Instead of passionately wishing that we had died with our friends who are gone to heaven, let us be followers of them, as they were of Christ: if we ever expect to come to them in heaven, we must be such as they were upon earth. Natural conscience and natural affection may put us upon wishing we had gone with our pious acquaintance into the other world, because we believe they are happy. This amounts to no more than Balaam's wish; but we must be found walking in the path of the just, if ever we arrive at their happiness; and whenever we think of them with affections of love and sorrow, we should presently charge ourselves not to be slothful, but followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises, Heb. vi. 12.

Let us consider with ourselves, we have heartily

wished that we had died with those excellent ones; but if God had taken us at our word, and death had found us out of Christ, out of the covenant, out of the way of good men, it would have separated us from them; though we had died with them, our souls and theirs would have taken a quite contrary way; we should have lost their company not only in dying, but after death, and never have met them again, till we had met at the judgment seat of Christ, they on the right hand, and we on the left; and if indeed we loved them so well, let us think with ourselves what a woful meeting that would be to us! The very sight of them would add to our confusion and misery.

4. Since we must not yet enjoy their company in heaven, let us converse more with their surviving labours here on earth: these are like the mantle that Elijah dropt when he left this world, and Elisha so carefully preserved and used. Some of the servants of Christ who are gone, live still in their excellent works; and by these, being dead, they continue to speak to us. This is the case now before us: your laborious, faithful pastor has left behind him most excellent remains, such as shall never die. I am persuaded, as long as the Bible continues in England, those admirable expositions of his upon it will be prized by all serious Christians. In them you have his clear head, his warm heart; his life, his soul appears to be in them: prize them more, read them more than ever you have done; and while you are seriously perusing those excellent books, besides many others published by him, you will seem to yourselves to have Mr. Henry still with you. It is in vain for us to pretend that we had a great value for the lives of such as he, if we neglect their labours, in which so much of their life was spent.

5. Since it is the will of God that we should be still alive when our best friends are gone, let us endeavour to fill up their places as well as we can here on earth. Their death is a public loss, and leaves a wide breach in our fence: let us all, according to the duty of our several places, stand in the gap, and endeavour to turn away the anger of God from the land. Are so many of our humble, praying, wrestling Israels gone? Let those who remain pray more, and pray better. Are so many diligent ministers gone? Let those who remain be more than ever *instant in season, out of season*, and look up to him who has the residue of the Spirit, to pour it forth afresh, that the church and nation may be as little losers as possible. If we do not so, the churches of Christ will have *sorrow upon sorrow*; sorrow for the loss of those who are gone, and sorrow for the sloth of those who are left behind.

6. And lastly, Let us live in the well-grounded hope of following our godly friends to heaven, and meeting them there, and being together for ever

with the Lord; lay the ground-work of such hope sure and strong, for the superstructure is to reach as high as heaven; and when you have done this, then rejoice in hope. I know nothing that can better support your spirits under the loss of such excellent ones, than a lively hope of a speedy meeting again in a better world; the time of separation is but short, yet a little while and you shall see them again; you parted in sorrow, you shall meet in joy. Perhaps you had not the opportunity of seeing some of them die, of closing their eyes, and bidding them farewell: but that shall not hinder your joyful meeting; and how will you then welcome each other into a world of bliss, and wonder to see how much you are all changed for the better, since your last parting! How will you congratulate each other in the favour of your blessed Lord, who has washed your souls so clean, and made them so glad! But I must stop my thoughts here, that are ready to run out beyond bounds. Comfort yourselves and one another with these things.

I know I speak to many this day who need such comforts. Here is a great congregation, bereaved of a most faithful, wise, laborious minister; here is a disconsolate family, bereaved of one of the most exemplary and useful relations that I ever knew any family blessed with. How is a great blow given to us all! The death of Mr. Henry is an universal loss! It is and will be universally lamented.

Expect not, sirs, that I should enter upon the particulars of his excellent character; very much has been said of him already in a little compass, by that worthy aged minister who first preached to you on this mournful occasion.

I hope this will be more fully done in an account of his exemplary life: that constant diary he kept, will furnish out proper and excellent materials, besides what may be added from the observation of others.

But that which chiefly restrains me now is, that it is needless to do it in this place; for though you have not enjoyed him much above two years, yet in that time you *have known his doctrine, his manner of life, his purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, and patience*, 2 Tim. iii. 10.

And who has not known him? His works praise him in the gates, and will do so; his great and good works from the pulpit, from the press, his immense labours, his incredible diligence in preaching, in expounding, in writing, his care of all the churches: he, like *Demetrius*, had a good report of all men, and of the truth itself; and we also bear witness, and ye know that our witness is true, 3 John 12.

He had in him that happy mixture of excellent gifts and graces that seldom meet in the same person, and they made him very amiable to all who knew him.

In him you had the happy mixture of great

strength of judgment and fervour of spirit. Some are very zealous, but not so judicious; others judicious but not so zealous: he was both a burning and a shining light.

In him you had a true greatness of soul, mixed with exemplary modesty and humility; nothing in him appeared sordid and abject, nothing vain and supercilious.

In him you had a most agreeable cheerfulness, with a due temperament of solidity and seriousness.

In him you might observe a strict regard to the dictates of his own conscience, joined with a most candid tenderness to those who differed from him.

In his preaching you had a very just and close way of thinking, with the most plain, proper, natural, and easy expression, and a great regard to the honour of Christ and free grace, joined with a constant endeavour to beat down sin, and give the power and practice of godliness.

It was this happy conjunction of excellent gifts and graces, that made him live so much desired, and die so much lamented.

I am a witness of that tender and conscientious concern with which he left his old and dear friends at Chester, and of that comfort and satisfaction he had in his acceptance and usefulness in this part of the vineyard. I am persuaded, these last two years of his life and labours have been a great blessing to many souls in and about the city of London.

My own interest in his acquaintance and friendship for the space of above twenty-eight years, is a thing of too private a nature to mention upon so solemn an occasion; but it must never be forgotten by me. I own it as a precious talent put into my hand, and to be accounted for. He was a most cordial, prudent, faithful, unalterable friend: and if a passionate affection does not deceive me, I think verily I shall less value this life and world, since he is gone from it.

The death of this faithful servant of Christ at this time is a very dark and threatening providence: God calls us to more than common sorrow by it; he expects we should lay it to heart; and, all the circumstances of it considered, both those of a private and public nature, we should lay it nearer to our hearts than ordinary. We should not suffer it to pass over us lightly; we should feel our loss, and fear the displeasure of our God, and tremble because of the ark of God.

But yet we must not abandon ourselves to inconsolable grief, nor quarrel with God, nor despair of his mercy to us.

As for the broken family, I am persuaded there are great mercies in store for them: the fatherless children are left with God, and he will keep them alive; and let the widow trust in him. Though God in this sad providence seems to have spoken against them, I believe he will earnestly and affectionately remember them still.

I know no family in which the entail of the covenant from one generation to another has more evidently appeared. I know no family more enriched with a large stock of treasure of prayers by religious predecessors on both sides. And a family that is rich in prayer, is rich in the promises too, while the present branches of it adhere to the covenant, and live up to their education; and we rejoice to see that it is thus with them, and daily pray for their growth and establishment in wisdom and grace.

And for this afflicted broken congregation, though they ought to be sensible what they have lost, a skillful guide, and a faithful helper of their souls; one who, they hoped, would have been the happy instrument of great good, not only to themselves, but to their families; one that was wonderfully fitted to feed the lambs of the flock, and took great delight in that part of his work.

Yet let them not distrust the care of the great shepherd and Bishop of their souls. This place and people have been signally owned and favoured of God, from one time to another. In the mount it has been seen that God has provided; and we hope will have the same care and concern for you still. And the great respect you always had for your faithful ministers while they were with you, and the true Christian generosity with which you have treated their families when they have been gone, gives us good encouragement that the presence of God shall be the glory in the midst of you; and that you all yet have a pastor according to his own heart, who shall carry on the same work, feed you with the same sincere milk of the word, and be a great blessing to you, and the rising generation among you. And though the church of God in general feels its loss, and laments it greatly, that this your

minister was taken away before he had finished the great undertaking, his noble, delightful task, the Exposition of the Bible; yet we have all cause to bless God, who spared him so long, and helped him to carry it on so far.

It is the observation of a worthy minister, on the death of a person of great note in all the churches, who had a heart enlarged for God, and bent upon doing more eminent service, that "no one ever finished all the great designs he had for the glory of God in this world, excepting the Lord Jesus Christ. He indeed could say, *It is finished.*" As for others, their good desires and purposes go beyond the limits of their time and life; but they have finished all that God designed to do by them: and he is able to carry on his own work by other hands, and thereby to make it evident that he is to his people *all in all*.

And I hope those who have attended long upon the ministry of good Mr. Henry, and taken down his expositions upon that part of the Bible that yet remains, whether in the public assembly or in his family, will carefully gather up those precious fragments, that none may be lost; and will communicate them to the world in the best way they can, that this great work may be finished, and be as much as possible his own performance.

To conclude: We must flee to this as our last resort; though ministers, the best of ministers, die, the gospel does not die with them. 1 Pet. i. 24, 25. *All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass; The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*