

ISRAEL'S
LAMENTATION

After the Lord.

AN
HUMBLE ADDRESS

TO THE
RIGHTEOUS GOD.

RIGHTEOUS art thou, O Lord, in all thy ways, and holy in all thy works, * must dust and ashes say when they speak to thee, or plead with thee. All our Israel have transgressed thy law, and despised thy gospel, therefore hast thou brought upon us a great evil, such as hath scarce ever been done under the whole heaven; † not three shepherds cut off in a month, ‡ but two thousands in one day, and this not for a day, or month, or year, but even twenty years already; neither is there any among us that knoweth how long this sad cloud may be upon us. || Thy will be done: thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve; but to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against thee; and shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? § Look down from heaven, and behold from the habita-

* Psalm cxlv. 17. Jer. xii. 1. † Dan. ix. 11, 12.

‡ Zech. xi. 8. || Psalm lxxiv. 9.

§ Ezra ix. 13. Dan. ix. 9. Gen. xviii. 25.

tion of thy holiness, and of thy glory.* Shall the needy always be forgotten? shall the expectation of the poor perish for ever? † Be not wrath very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people; though our iniquities testify against us, do thou this for thy name's sake; for behold, for thy sake we are killed all the day long. ‡ The Lord God of hosts, the Lord God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know, if it be rebellion, or transgression against the Lord. || Judge, O Lord, them that have walked in their integrity: recompense thy servants according to the cleanness of their hands in thine eye-sight, that have not wickedly departed from their God; or, by the grace of God have acknowledged their offence, and returned to thee, and who at last are following on to know the Lord, and pleading and hoping for a reviving and resurrection after these days or years of death. § Let thy dead men live, thy slain witnesses be called up, and ascend to heaven in a cloud; let there be a shaking, that these dry bones may come together: come, O wind, and breathe on them, that they may live. ¶ Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary, for the Lord's sake: in midst of judgment remember mercy, and at last revive thy work: give us the opening of the mouth: set thy light on a candlestick; hold the stars in thy right hand: let thy people's eyes see their teachers: give us help from trouble, for vain is the

* Isa. lxiii. 15.

† Psalm ix. 18.

‡ Isa. lxiv. 9. Jer. xiv. 7. Psalm xlv. 22.

|| Josh. xxii. 22.

§ Psalm xxvi. 1. Psalm xviii. 21, 24. Hos. v. 15. vi. 3.

¶ Isa. xxvi. 19. Rev. xi. 11, 12. Ezek. xxxvii. 6, 9.

help of man: purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.* Thou art Jehovah, and changest not, therefore the sons of Jacob are not all consumed.† Thou art the Creator of the ends of the earth, and therefore canst command deliverance for Jacob.‡ There is no searching of thine understanding, therefore thou canst devise ways for the banished to be restored.|| Thou art a faithful God, and wilt perform thy promises, and confirm the word of thy servants.§ But our God is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him.¶ The true and faithful witness saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus. **

* Dan. ix. 17. Hab. iii. 2. Ezek. iii. 27. Matt. v. 15. Rev. ii. 1. Isa. xxx. 20. Psalm lx. 11. Mal. iii. 3.

† Mal. iii. 6.

‡ Psalm xlii. 8. xliv. 4.

|| 2 Sam. xiv. 14.

§ 1 Cor. x. 13. Isa. xliv. 26.

¶ Isa. xxx. 18.

** Rev. xxii. 20.

TO ALL

THE MOURNERS IN ZION,

THAT WAIT FOR

THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL,

Grace, mercy, and peace.

THE sharp rebukes which divine displeasure hath laid us under these many years, have caused various thoughts of heart. Whilst profane men have shot their arrows, bitter words, it is becoming God's children to have many solemn searchings of heart, and serious inquiries after the reason of the Lord's controversy with the daughter of Zion; word and rod call us to consider our ways,* and God's people have called on themselves and one another saying, "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord."† Doubtless the occasion is given by us, we turned away from God before he turned his back upon us. Judgment is begun at the house of God;‡ and he expects repentance should begin there, that pacification may be first begun there. God saith, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities;"§ and well he may, for the provocation of his sons and daughters goes nearest his heart,§ as being against greater light, and love, means, mercies, obligations, and expectations than that of others. Surely it is high time for us to awake out of sleep.¶ The charge is drawn up, the indictment is read, scourges have been laid on, and of such a nature as have

* Hag i. 5.

|| Amos. iii. 2.

† Lam. iii. 40.

§ Deut. xxxii. 19.

‡ 1 Pet. iv. 17.

¶ Rom. xiii. 11.

come nearest the hearts of the godly. Loss of gospel privileges, is a greater affliction than loss of money, goods, houses, liberties, relations, even of life itself. God hath said, "Woe, also unto them when I depart from them."* He doth not use to depart till he be slighted, or thrust away. This hath been a long, dark and gloomy day, a day of rebuke and blasphemy, a day of scattering and treading down in the valley of vision. Ministers and their flocks rent asunder; solemn assemblies sorrowfully broken up; sad and silent sabbaths; by some profaned; ignorance increasing, conversion work suspended, sinners hardened, young beginners in religion discouraged, atheism abounding, persecution revived, and thousands of precious souls wandering about as sheep that have no shepherd: many public places being ill supplied, and guilt brought upon the nation, pressing us down towards destruction, yea such sins as leave a people remediless, mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, misusing his prophets, till the wrath of God arise against us, till there be no remedy, or no healing.† This brought Israel into captivity out of their own land. This also hath brought on the final scattering of that forlorn nation to this day, killing the Lord Jesus, as well as their own prophets, persecuting the apostles, and forbidding them to speak to the gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always, in consequence of which wrath is come upon them to the uttermost;‡ and surely this lies nearest the hearts of real saints, next to God's glory and their own souls, that poor sinners should ruin themselves and destroy the nation. It is dreadful indeed to see debauchery in the land abounding, and the basest of men vent personal malice against God's dearest children for no other fault than worshipping God, and praying for their persecutors.

Men write voluminous treatises of invectives against us, charging us with schisms, sedition, faction, and rebellion, which God knows, our souls hate, and we durst appeal to our worst adversaries in their sober intervals that they cannot but know the contrary; and after all these long-lasting and heavy-pressing evils have come upon us, one harvest is passed, and many summers and winters ended, and we are not saved. || "As for us,

* Hos. ix. 12.

† 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16.

† 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.

|| Jer. viii. 20.

our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that cannot save us: * we looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of health, and behold trouble." † And we may discern God's anger in the wrath of men. But after all this, shall we sit still, and be stupid under the awful hand of God? Surely our work is not to complain of men, much less oppose them; but to look into our own hearts and lives by self-examination, and to practise humiliation, and reformation; for these vapours that darken the heavens, arise from our polluted hearts and lives, these arrows are winged with our own feathers, our destruction is of ourselves; ‡ it may be said to ever individual, thy way and thy doings have procured these things for thee, this is thy wickedness; because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart, even to thy soul. || Salvian complained of old, that by our sins the enemies were strong; this is the Achan in the camp, the Jonah in the ship, the worm at the gourd. If sin abide still in us, we cannot be safe; it is in vain to expect deliverance till the cause of the provocation on our part be discarded and purged away. It is true, God is the inflicting cause, wicked men the instruments, but our own selves are the deserving and procuring cause of all our woes. The protestants in queen Mary's days, lamented that their unprofitableness and contempt of the gospel, under king Edward sixth, brought on them their bloody days of persecution; and if we do not mourn, and reform, we may conclude that these are but the beginnings of sorrow, as drops before the shower of blood; that after this prophesying in sackcloth, witenesses shall be slain, the number of martyrs accomplished, and Antichrist's sins filled up, by setting up the abomination of desolation, which God Almighty prevent!

These things considered, and often revolved in my thoughts, I cast about to ascertain what was the fittest course to be taken for preventing God's further removes, and to bring him back to our souls, and assemblies:—and I find that,

1. God purposely removes to make us follow him, as a wise nurse doth by a weak child. §

2. He stops and halts, as in suspense what to do, that he

* Lam. iv. 17.

|| Jer. iv. 18.

† Jer. viii. 15.

§ Hos. v. 15.

‡ Hos. xiii. 9.

may both alarm us, and afford us leisure to consider what course to take.*

3. He makes a gracious promise, that if we do follow on to know the Lord, his going forth shall be prepared as the morning.† And

4. He complaineth that there is none that calleth on his name, that stirreth up himself to take hold on God,‡ that is, to keep him from departing, or to fetch him back.

Considering the premises, I was desirous in my poor measure, to promote God's work in the souls of his people, and engage all that have any interest in God, to improve it at this day, for the preventing of his total removal, and detaining of God with us; not as the inhabitants of Tyre, when Alexander besieged it; and one of their diviners told them, it was revealed to him in a dream, that Apollo their god, was shortly to depart from them, on which they took the image of Apollo, and bound it with a chain of gold to a post, thinking thereby to detain him. No, no, we cannot force God against his will to tarry; but we are in obedience to God's command, in discharging of our duty, and in performance of the condition of his promise, to lament after the Lord, with prayers, tears, confessions, and reformation, pleading with God through the intercession of his Son, for his return and residence with us. While wicked Gadarenes are by words and works bidding the blessed Jesus depart out of our coasts, it becomes us solemnly to invite him, to open the doors of our hearts to him, and give him free welcome, saying, "Lord abide with us;" and thus he may be constrained to tarry with us.¶ And though in this dreadful tempest, with which the ship of the church is sorely tossed, so that it is covered with waves, our Lord be asleep,§ yet faith and prayer will awaken him; and though we cannot peremptorily say, he will save our persons, or privileges, or his church in England, yet we may with some confidence say, he will certainly save Zion, and build his church some where in the world; he will save our own souls, and it may be, we shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger; it may be, that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.¶¶

* Hosca xi. 3.

† Hosca vi. 3.

‡ Isa. lxiv. 7.

¶ Luke xxiv. 29.

§ Matt. viii. 24, 25.

¶ Zeph. ii. 3. Amos v. 15.

Who knoweth if he will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him? * Even a heathen king took this course, and upon no other assurance, than *Who can tell?* there is hope in Israel concerning this thing; † only it becomes us to wait God's leisure, and with patience, yea, with fortitude pass through the fiery trial before us; wherein Papists will far exceed Protestants in rage. However Mr. Greenham said, "He that will suffer by Papists, must learn to suffer by Protestants; and he that hath well passed the pikes in camp fight, may hope to pass safe through the fire-ordeal." Integrity and uprightness will preserve us, seconded by a divine support in sharpest trials. "The God of all grace, who hath called you unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. ‡

May it please the Lord to own these weak, though seasonable labours, for quickening the spirits of his people to lament after the Lord; it may be, he will return to the many thousands of his people in these nations; and after we have been digging *ezek* and *sitnah*, || he may cause us unanimously to dig *rehoboth*, § that the Lord may make room for us, and make us fruitful in the land. O for such a day! There is a day coming wherein nothing shall hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain; wherein the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, &c. ¶ wherein his people shall see eye to eye, and serve him with one consent, or shoulder, when he will turn to his people a pure language, and when they shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid. ** It becomes God's people to make a catalogue of these and such like promises, and spread them before the Lord; for he is a faithful God, and will perform his promise, which saith, Jer. xxx. 17, "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord, because they called thee an out-cast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after:" and let all that love her say, Amen. "Then the angel of the Lord, answered and said, O Lord of hosts! how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem, and on the cities of Judah, against

* Joel ii. 14.

† Jonah iii. 7—9. Ezra x. 2.

‡ 1 Peter v. 10.

|| Strife and hatred, Gen. xxvi. 20—22.

§ Room.

¶ Isa. xi. 6—9.

** Zeph. iii. 9, 13.

which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years. And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me, with good words, and comfortable words." *

That this may be the issue of this dispensation, intercession, and lamentation, is the heart prayer of,

Thy soul's friend,

O. HEYWOOD.

Aug. 22. 1682.

* Zech. i. 12, 13.

ISRAEL'S LAMENTATION

After the Lord.

1 SAM. vii. 2.

——— *And all the house of Israel lamented after
the Lord.*

CHAP. I.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

THE whole series of the history of the times in which this scripture was written, may be thus briefly detailed : After the Judges mentioned in the preceding book, called by their name, God raised up Eli, who was both a judge and priest, and though he was a good man himself, yet his sons were profane, and oppressed the people, by requiring both boiled flesh and raw for roasting, and abusing the women that came to the door of the tabernacle ; so that their sin was very great and of bad consequence, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord. * Eli being informed of his sons' profligate course, too much indulged, or too mildly rebuked them ; “ Why,” said he, “ do you such things ?” † too

* 1 Sam. ii. 12—17.

† 1 Sam. ii. 23. Defects in this reproof.—*Polirit. in loc. Ser. 10.*

soft words for such hard and heinous acts : there wanted deeds, he being a magistrate ought to have punished or removed them, if not put them to death. Well, a man of God is sent to Eli,* whether Phinehas, or Elkanah, or an angel, I dispute not, to rebuke and threaten him and his house ; but he not reforming, God inspires and commissions young Samuel to give him a severe admonition, and warn him as immediately from the Lord.† The good old man falls under the admonition though given by a child, but now the disease was grown past his curing, his counsel did no good, and he could not correct them ; no doubt he acknowledged his fault, and since it would be no better, he puts the matter over into God's hands : " Let him do what seemeth him good."‡ God can by his grace curb and cure them, or by his power he can crush and confound them : let him use his pleasure, I give my children into his hands : let my Lord get to himself a name of glory by them or upon them, I freely submit. A speech becoming a man of God and religious priest. Well, God himself undertakes to deal with them : in the fourth chapter,|| the Israelites and Philistines join battle, four thousand Israelites are slain, the ark is sent for into the camp ; the law on the tables within it had been broken, yet the ark must be their palladium. They doted on the ark, but provoked the God of the ark : they repent not of their corrupt manners, or pollution of God's worship ; they neither used outward means by recruiting their army, which was a tempting of God, nor do they use proper religious means, to obtain reconciliation with God ; but fondly presume upon God's lenity and indulgence to them, because of the mere presence of the ark. The ark comes, Hophni and Phinehas carry it, Israel shout for joy, the Philis-

* 1 Sam. ii. 27. † 1 Sam. iii. 13. ‡ Ibid. || 1 Sam. iv. 2—4.

tines animate one another, imagining, if they now prevailed, they conquered the God of Israel, looking on the ark to be Israel's idol, or at least, that God's power was restricted to it, after the conceit of idolaters ; they fight, prevail, and kill thirty thousand Hebrews, with Hophni and Phinehas, take the ark as a prize, the tidings whereof broke Eli's heart, then his neck, brought pangs on Phinehas's wife, and though she was a mother, yet full of grief, (which she bequeathed to the world in the name of her surviving child, Ichabod) she expired.* Well, the Philistines now lead Israel's God in triumph, as they judge ; they bring it to Dagon their god in Ashdod, for a reproach to the true God :† but the triumphing of the wicked is short. Though Israel be a loser, yet Dagon and his worshippers are no gainers by the ark of God's presence : Dagon falls on his face, prostrate in homage thereto, beaten on his own dunghill ; being erected again, his head and hands were knocked off by another fall ;‡ so that now he had neither wit nor strength to help himself—the fair Venus or female part was gone, the fishy part only is left. But this was but a sport in comparison of what befell Dagon's worshippers, for God's hand was heavy on them all :|| as the Spartan boy carried the fox in his bosom till the animal tore his vitals, so did the inhabitants of Ashdod. The ark which brought life to those who venerated it, brought death upon despisers ; even as the Lord's supper is profitable to due partakers, but unworthy receivers find it to turn to their judgment here, and eternal misery hereafter. § Carnal hearts pretend a fond respect for ordinances, but find the Lord a jealous God upon their perverting his institutions or unsuitable carriage. Ashdod was soon weary of God's

* 1 Sam. iv. 9—21.

† 1 Sam. v. 1, 2.

‡ 1 Sam. v. 3, 4.

|| 1 Sam. v. 6.

§ 1 Cor. xi. 29.

ark; they hold a council of their lords; they post it away to Gath, which was their metropolis, thinking belike, that to be a better air, or under a more benign influence of the stars: but here also God's hand was upon them with a great destruction, they had painful and incurable emerods in their secret parts.* Being weary of the ark, they would shift it off to Ekron, but the Ekronites were wise by others' calamities:† and a consultation was held, the result of which was that they should carry back the ark into its place,‡ for all the five cities of the Philistines were sharply punished, the seven months it had been in their country. And they were weary of it; only they must consult the diviners how to send it back, and their advice was to send it with a trespass-offering,|| namely, five golden emerods and five golden mice, upon a new cart, drawn by two milch kine, that thus they might give glory to the God of Israel; and they signified that by the direction the cattle took, it might be known whether it was God's hand or a chance, and peradventure they might be healed. They did so: the kine went straight to Bethshemesh, a city of the Levites,§ they rejoiced to see it coming, but though they offered a burnt-offering to the Lord, yet looking into the ark, the Lord smote fifty thousand and threescore and ten men with death; and they lamented it, and cried out, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"¶ But alas, they lament not their sacrilege and injury to the ark, but the death of their people; imitating the Philistines, they howled for the punishment, not kindly mourning for their offences; ** they reflected not on their own miscarriages, but transferred the cause to God's holi-

* 1 Sam. v. 9.

† 1 Sam. v. 10.

‡ 1 Sam. vi. 2.

|| 1 Sam. vi. 4.

§ 1 Sam. vi. 12.

¶ 1 Sam. vi. 19, 20.

** Qui propter culpas non dolebant, sed propter pœnas ululabant.

ness ; and now they also would be glad to be rid of so chargeable guest, and send messengers to Kirjath-jearim, that the people there might fetch it to them, who came and brought it.

Query, Why did they not send it to Shiloh, where it was before ?

Answ. 1. That was far off, this near, and they were in haste to get delivered of a burden.

2. Divine providence removes its favour from Shiloh, for the impiety thereof, Jer. vii. 12. You see ordinances are not perpetually entailed on one place : the gospel is a flitting gospel ; God sometimes breaks up house, and is gone to another residence, Psal. lxxviii. 67, 68. Matt. xxi. 43.

Qu. Why were not they of Kirjath-jearim afraid of Bethshemesh's punishment ?

Answ. They probably knew that the plague was not for the ark's sake, but to punish irreverence and curiosity ; now they resolve to reform that, and take warning as David did, 1 Chron. xv. 13. It becomes persons that suffer in ordinances, not to find fault with God or them, but to charge it on themselves, and amend what is amiss ; men's own sins are the exciting cause of God's indignation, the imposing cause of troubles. That is a good scholar, who learns these two lessons under God's hand.

I shall not trouble you with enumerating the several places in which the ark rested amongst the Israelites before it was brought by David into Obed-edom's house, 2 Sam. vi. 10 ; nor attempt to explain what is meant by the sanctifying of Eleazar, or ordaining him to the sacred ministry ; what the keeping of the ark is, that nothing be taken away, or no unbecoming thing be done to it, or about it ; nor why Eleazar the son, and not Abinadab the father was employed about

it. Whether Abinadab was old and decrepid, or dead, or busy about some household affairs, or Eleazar was more holy, it is not material for us to inquire. But it may be asked, whether the ark was only twenty years there? I answer, the ark was there all the days of Saul, which was above forty years,* but this was the twentieth, till the time of Samuel's giving the exhortation recorded in the following verse; or before Israel much inquired after it, or were sensible of their loss: so deeply were the roots of impiety and idolatry fastened in them.

The text contains, first, the ark's recess; and secondly, Israel's repentance.

Relative to the ark's recess observe, that the place was Kirjath-jearim, and more particularly, Abinadab's house, ver. 1, 2; and that the time or duration of its recess was twenty years—a long time indeed.

Some inquiries may here be proposed:—

1. What is meant by the ark here?

Ans. It is needless to explain the word אָרֹן which signifieth a chest, or coffin for the inclosing of a corpse, Gen. i. 26, or coffer for the deposit of money, 2 Kings xii. 10; but this ark was the place appointed by God, where the tables of the law were laid up, therefore called the ark of the testimony; there God communed with Israel, hence called the ark of his presence, Exod. xxv. 22: here the people of Israel were to worship and inquire God's mind, and it guided their journeyings, Numb. x. 35, 36. And though the ark have many significations, yet good expositors think that what the ark of God was to the Israelites of old, that the gospel ordinances are to us; which are means of grace, tokens of God's presence, and institutions of worship.

* Acts xiii. 21.

2. What is meant by the ark's being in Abinadab's house in Kirjath-jearim?

Ans. It imports its privacy, and solitude, that is, comparatively speaking, few could, and still fewer would frequent it, which was not the case formerly at Shiloh.

(1.) Because this city was near the Philistines upon the borders of the land, and so the other tribes could not so commodiously resort to it for devotion, or they durst not, lest the Philistines should set upon them, if any numbers came together for that purpose, as indeed they did, verse 7. Never is the devil and his imps more enraged against religious people, than when they meet to worship God: for the Philistines had interdicted Israel to meet together, and now they suspect them of sedition and rebellion.

(2.) Because the ark being but in a private house, few could meet there at once to worship God, or hear the word: some, it is possible, cared not for it, and had other ways of their own hearts which they followed: others had a month's mind to it, but being aged or infirm, could not get thither, or continue comfortably before the Lord there, but were subject to many inconveniences: others also were afraid of the scoffs and reproaches of their adversaries, and few would be at the pains to go and attend on God in his appointments.

3. Had the people no public ordinances or instructions all this time?

Ans. It is likely that they had ordinary Levites and priests to offer sacrifices, and instruct the people, though in the time of several judges, there was sad work both in civil and spiritual affairs; sometimes there was no king or public magistrate in Israel, and then every man did that which was right in his own

eyes : * hence Micah gets a house of graven images, and a Levite to be his priest, Judg. xvii. 5—13. Certainly, there was sad ignorance and woful degeneracy into impiety and idolatry, as is apparent from many instances.

Expositors observe but two inspired individuals, in all the time of the judges, which was 450 years, Acts xiii. 20: the one was Deborah a prophetess, Judg. iv. 4, and that prophet mentioned Judg. vi. 8; excepting that angel that came up from Gilgal to Bochim, chap. ii. 1. So that Peter begins to number the prophets from Samuel, Acts iii. 24, and Paul mentions Samuel the prophet as not an ordinary person; he indeed broke forth like a glorious sun out of the night of darkness, both of sin and error; and till those days the word of the Lord was precious, 1 Sam. iii. 1, that is, it was rare, because there were few prophets to declare God's word to the people; rarely did the Lord reveal himself, and therefore was it the more precious and highly esteemed by all. But that passage saith further, there was no open vision, this seems to be an interpretation of my text: no vision diffused or spread abroad, common or multiplied, but shut up within a fence, pale, or walls—so the word signifies, no broken vision. † A loaf that is whole, nourisheth not; a book closed up instructs not; a fountain shut up waters not; the open preaching of the word distributes it abroad to all parts, and members of the mystical body: this is the multiplication of seeds, this is bread distributed, as in Christ's miracles, amongst thousands. But alas, there was none to break the bread of life to souls, till Samuel arose, and then the word of Samuel came to all Israel,

* Judg. xvii. 6. xviii. 1. xix. 1. xxi. 25.

† אין חוון נפרע, à פרע, i. e. copiose producere.

1 Sam. iv. 1. He now preached repentance to all, and an expedition was formed against the Philistines; however, for want of reformation it proved unsuccessful, but that evil was brought on them to promote their humiliation: possibly Samuel foretold this fall to them as a punishment of their sin.

And now Samuel renews his exhortation,* Providence producing an argument from their catastrophe, to enforce the duty of repentance; and though this lamenting after the Lord be mentioned before this sermon, yet it is probable it was the consequence thereupon, as their reformation also was, ver. 4, yea, it may be this is the same with their drawing water, and pouring it out before the Lord, ver. 6, which some understand of penitent tears.†

Take some general observations from the context thus explained:

1. God gives his people sensible tokens of his special presence; the visible ark, and an audible voice betoken spiritual, invisible grace.

2. God thinks good sometimes to withdraw himself, and hide these tokens of his presence from a professing people.

3. This withdrawing may be continued a long time, 2 Chron. xxix. 8; as in Babylon, Zech. i. 12; and in the latter days, Hos. iii. 4.

4. God takes particular notice of the duration of his church's affliction, in Egypt 400 years, so Rev. xi. 11.

5. People's privileges may be long removed before they be penitently sensible of their loss, long before their restoration.

6. When God's ordinances are but privately dispensed, it is a great loss to the body of a people, such as need them most, have them least of them.

* 1 Sam. vii. 3.

† Vid. Pol. Syn. in loc.

7. Continuance in sin postpones deliverance, and absence of the ark or ordinances is an occasion of continuing in sin. Men do withdraw their hearts from God, that is, sinful; God withdraws helps from them, that is, penal; men repent not ordinarily without helps; God denies helps, and is just therein.

8. Attendance on ordinances raiseth the envy of wicked men. This hath been the occasion of quarrel from the days of Cain and Abel, successively to this day,* Gen. iv. 5. Exod. ix. 1. Ezra iv. 12, 13. Gal. iv. 29. Esther iii. 8. Dan. iii. 12. vi. 13.

9. One stirring active instrument for God, may by God's blessing, promote repentance and reformation amongst a people. O what hurt may one sinner do! so what good may one useful man do when God stirs up his heart. Samuel sets things forwards and puts them into motion, so Ezra v. 1, 2. Hag. i. 12.

10. When God designs a reformation and restitution of his ordinances, he orders a harmonious concurrence of providences for that end. The accomplishment of God's threats affright and awaken. Samuel comes at the critical moment, and speaks words upon the wheel. God moves, and things go on apace, 2 Chron. xxix. 36. xxxi. 21.

These I pass briefly, and proceed to the main point in the last clause of the verse, *And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.*

They did not lament so much under their pressing burdens, and grievous oppressions by the Philistines, as after the Lord, that is, for the ark of the Lord and the Lord of the ark, for the recovery of God's gracious presence and the visible tokens thereof; they bitterly lamented the calamity of church and state, religion

* 1 Kings xviii.

and polity.* This, say interpreters, is a remarkable passage, because it informs us of the general conversion and repentance of a whole people; we have scarce the like in all the scripture, except Acts ii.

From the words then results this doctrine:—That when God's ark is long in obscurity, or ordinances are obstructed, it becomes God's Israel, or professing people, to lament after the Lord.

Serious lamenting after God is well becoming those whom God afflicts with the loss of privileges. The text presents to us,

1. The persons lamenting—God's peculiar people. These only love, and mind God's presence; when the lords and cities of the Philistines are weary of him and send him away, yea and the inhabitants of Bethshemesh, though a city of the Levites belonging to the church of God, through their ill management of matters send to get a release, yet God's Israel will look after their God.

2. Here is the object they lament after—not peace, plenty, or victory over enemies, but after the Lord. Jehovah is the object of their affections; it is he whom they love, and with whom they long for communion. Psal. lxiii. 1, 2, “O God,” saith David, “thou art my God, early will I seek thee, my soul thirsteth for thee to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.”

3. Here is the universality of the number—all Israel. The whole house of Israel come; they that had wofully degenerated, and had gone after their idols; what a wonderful act of God's power and sovereignty was this upon their spirits? by this he manifests that he is the true God, and that Samuel was his servant;

* *Lachrymis deplorârunt summam miseriam religionis et rei-publicæ.*

something similar observe in Elijah's prayer, preaching, sacrifice, and success, 1 Kings xviii. 21, 37, 39.

4. You have here the manner and nature of the people's repentance—they lamented after the Lord. Which is a very comprehensive word, and I shall explain it presently.

CHAP. II.

EXPLICATION OF THE PASSAGE UNDER CONSIDERATION.

IN discussing this subject I shall proceed in the following method:—

1. Shew how ordinances are obstructed, become obscured or tarnished.

2. What is implied in lamenting after the Lord.

3. How and why God's Israel thus lament.

4. Answer an objection, and then make application.

First, What is it for ordinances to be either obstructed, or in a state of obscurity, both of which circumstances may be a great affliction to God's people and oft occasion a lamentation.

1. For ordinances to be obstructed is a prevention of the liberty of dispensing them, and suppression of those who dispense them, by imprisonment, banishment, inhibition or suspension; as in Ahab's days, Jezebel cut off many prophets of the Lord, while the rest were hid by fifty in a cave, and fed with bread and water, 1 Kings xviii. 4; yea such scarcity was there at that day, that Elijah thought he was left alone, 1 Kings xix. 10, such as were left were latent,

and had indeed their lives preserved, but not liberty to proclaim the word, or to celebrate God's ordinances openly. It is true, truth seeks not corners; yet publishers of truth may be driven into corners. God's candles may be put under a bushel; the church's pleasant things may be taken away; sabbaths and solemn assemblies may be forgotten in Zion, and the ways of Zion mourn, Lam. i. 4. 7. The church complains, Psal. lxxiv. 9, "We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet." The church may flee into a wilderness of obscurity and persecution, her witnesses may be slain by a natural or civil death,* some time or other these prophecies have an accomplishment; Jeremiah and Ezekiel may both have their mouths stopped by their brethren, and God himself may be a little sanctuary to such as want the open sanctuary privileges, Ezek. xi. 15, 16. The gospel in its course may be stopped or obstructed, so that Paul puts believers on to pray for him, that the word of the Lord may have free course, 2 Thess. iii. 1; intimating that it had met with hindrance; by what? by men's rage, or the devil's subtlety, or both, 1 Thess. ii. 16, the Jews forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, and verse 18, Satan hindered us. Sometimes the devil stirs up men to obstruct the course of the gospel. The history of the church in all ages will offer its service to bear witness to this truth, that liberty of ordinances is sometimes infringed, and so the ark is withdrawn into some sequestered place; for where God hath a people they must and will worship him, and attend his institutions; if they cannot do it openly, they act more privately, as Christ's disciples frequently met in houses, in the night, the doors being shut, and that for fear of the Jews, John xx. 19. And it may be that word Isa.

* Rev. xii. 14. xi. 7.

viii. 16, refers to such a day, "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples."

2. The ark and ordinances may sometimes be in a state of obscurity, as well as obstructed; the institutions of religion may be tarnished or corrupted. This observation has a reference to the purity, as the former has to the liberty of God's appointments. The light may be dimmed, as well as diminished. Painted glass obscures the light: so human inventions corrupt God's pure worship. Jeroboam's golden calves spoiled the purity of ordinances; so that religious people, and priests fled to God's sincere worship at Jerusalem, 2 Chron. xi. 13, 16. This defilement of ordinances makes God's poor children cry out, "Death is in the pot." Our Saviour saith of the Scribes and Pharisees, "Thus have you made the commandments of God of none effect by your traditions, and therefore in vain did they worship God," Matt. xv. 6, 9. God's institutions are ours, but men may mar and spoil them with their fond additions or alterations. Ezek. vii. 20, "As for the beauty of his ornaments, he set it in Majesty, but they made the images of their abominations, and of their detestable things therein," though they called and accounted them delectable things, "therefore have I set it far from them." Men may be guilty of treasonable practices, by adulterating the king's coin,* or setting their own stamp thereon, or clipping it. There is a sad woe, both in the beginning, middle, and end of the Bible, against those that add to, or diminish from God's word or institutions.† It is a dangerous thing to think to mend what God hath thought good to enjoin. Anti-christ hath so corrupted God's worship, as well as truths, that they who love their souls or safety, are

* *Crimen læsæ majestatis.*

† Deut. iv. 2. Prov. xxx. 6. Rev. xxii. 13, 19.

called upon to come out of her, Rev. xviii. 4. God is a jealous God, and will not hold such guiltless as take his name in vain, that is, he will deal with them as guilty malefactors. Nay, God bids them rather go serve their idols, than pollute his holy name, Ezek. xx. 39. Some shepherds also are said to tread down with their feet the residue of the pastures, and foul the waters with their feet; so that God's flock is in danger of pining, Ezek. xxxiv. 18. God's children know how to avoid a sinful separation on one hand, and a communion that necessitates them to sin, on the other; there is danger in both extremes. Poor scrupulous, tender consciences are too apt to run into the former, and adventurous spirits are too apt to run into the latter, for by and base purposes; sometimes the latter happens as well as the former, when godly ministers and Christians must either sin, or suffer; and to a conscientious soul, the case is soon determined: and hence it comes to pass that their persons and ordinances with them, have been forced into a state of privacy and seclusion. The witnesses will rather choose to prophesy in sackcloth with purity,* according to God's will, than live in the greatest pomp and splendour, betraying the truths and appointments of God, by superstition or idolatry, to gratify flesh, or comply with the humours of men; they judge it safer to be banished from the altar, than bring strange fire to it; they think it safer to venture on men's displeasure, though the furnace be heated with seven-fold intenseness, than expose themselves to the dreadful vengeance of the great God, by sinning against him, and provoking the eyes of his glory. They resolve to cleave to the ark, though in Abinadab's house, and follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth,† rather than be dragged down to sin and hell

* Rev. xi. 3.

† Rev. xiv. 4.

with the dragon's tail :* though persecution attend the former, as in the Marian days, and preferment wait on the latter.

The second general thing to be explained in the text and doctrine, is, what is implied in this lamenting after the Lord? The word ינחו comes from נוח, *quiescere* : the same word with Noah, which signifies rest ; “ They rested after the Lord.” It is in Niphal, which increaseth its signification, and denotes these seven things :—

1. They inclined after the Lord. They had wandered away from the Lord, and never thought of him ; they had turned aside after vain things, but now they began to hearken to Samuel's preaching, and began to look about them, consider what they were doing, and had a month's mind, as we say, after God, and his ways and worship. A heart to inquire after the Lord, is a good thing : as it is said of the men of Shechem, their hearts inclined after Abimelech, or to follow him, Judg. ix. 3. It is well so : for when people stand still, and question themselves in this manner : what have we been doing? have we done well or ill? what course is best to be taken? and begin to have some inclinations after God more than formerly, this is the first step.

2. They had become settled, and established in reference to the Lord. They staggered formerly and were much in suspense, wavering like the apostle James's double-minded man,† not knowing which way to take, or like those referred to, 1 Kings xviii. 21 : Why halt ye between two opinions? one while leaning to Baal, another while to God, reeling like drunkards, halting like lame men whose legs are not equal, fluctuating to and fro with divers thoughts: but now this

* Rev xii. 4.

† James i. 18.

people is firm, well resolved, with purpose of heart determined to cleave to the Lord, Acts xi. 23. The trembling needle fixeth towards its centre; the tree has taken deep root; the will is bowed; the affections settled; the conscience clear; nothing shall obstruct their course; they have set down the staff, and say as Ruth to her mother-in-law, Ruth i. 16, 17, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go," &c. So these: though they had been hesitating and doubtful what to do, yet their steps have become sure and firm in their motion God-wards.*

3. They were congregated and assembled after the Lord: so some read it. They now begin to flock like doves to their windows; they troop after him. † Jer. iii. 17, "All nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord God;" yea, "Judah shall go with Israel," verse 18. See also Jer. l. 45. They had been broken, now they are united. Some went after commands and examples from one quarter, some after others from another; but now the great God makes an act of uniformity and unanimity, Zech. xiv. 9, "In that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one:" one sovereign commander, one way, one worship: that great God doth not only enjoin one thing, but doth join them in one bond and mind. O happy day! when the grace of God heals the breaches that are in men's spirits, and divisions in the church!

4. They groaned, complained, bemoaned themselves in their following the Lord, as a child followeth his departing father, and as Phaltiel followed his wife Michal, weeping behind her to Bahurim, 2 Sam. iii. 15, 16; or as Micah followed the Danites who took

* Jam in Dei obsequio gradum figunt stabilem et certum.

† Collecti sunt post Dominum.

away his idols, who, when he was crying after them, said, "What aileth thee?" to which he replied, "Ye have taken away my gods—and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee?" Judg. xviii. 23, 24; as if he had said, you could not have done me a worse turn: lay your hands on your hearts, ask yourselves, whether any loss can parallel this, of losing one's God? You need not be inquisitive for a reason of my solicitude and complaint, when all good is comprehended in this chief good, whether real or imaginary. Thus, this people lamented, laid to heart this great evil of God's departure, which no temporal good can compensate or countervail.

5. They called, cried, and lifted up their voice after the Lord, by earnest prayer and supplication. The word sometimes imports sighing: "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee," Psalm lxxix. 11. Sometimes it is rendered lifting up the voice, as Lam. ii. 18, not only their hearts cried unto the Lord, but tears ran down like a river day and night: verse 19, "Arise, cry out in the night, pour out thine heart like water, lift up thy hand towards him:" yea, Lam. iii. 8, she did both cry and shout, not that God is deaf, or busy, or pursuing enemies, or sleeping, and must be awaked, as Elijah ironically twits Baal's worshippers with their God,* but for our own sakes, to evidence the honesty and zeal of our hearts, and as a gracious disposition to which mercy is promised. Hence it was that when the children of Israel cried, their cry came up unto God, Exod. ii. 23. Crying is the accent of prayer: a crying prayer sounds loud in God's ear. The tender mother's bowels make her look back on her crying child. God loves to be called back by a fervent, affectionate prayer.

* 1 Kings xviii. 27

6. They betook themselves to the Lord, that is, by faith, by repentance, covenanting with God, returning from sin, and having recourse to God by a sincere reformation; without the last all the former were insignificant: but thus did the children of Israel, according to Samuel's command and supposition, in chap. vii. verse 3—If ye do return with all your heart to the Lord, then put away strange gods, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve him only; and they did so, verse 4. This was their best way of lamenting after the Lord. No coming after God with a lie in our right hand, or idols in our hearts; if we do, God will spurn us back into confusion, for nothing keeps persons at a distance from him, but sin: they that hold fast sin and pretend to follow God, do either run from him, or follow him with a sword in their hand to wound him; but such as cast away their abominations follow the Lord aright, and shall succeed in approaching him. This is the method prescribed by God himself: Jer. iv. 1, 2, "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me; and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of thy sight, then shalt thou not remove, and thou shalt swear the Lord liveth." Then, and never till then, are souls fit to join in covenant with God, when they are divorced from all besides.

7. They were acquiescing in, and fully satisfied with the Lord: this is the proper notion of this word.* Their hearts had abundant tranquillity and peace in the manner of God's worship, and much more in the object of their worship, and in the union of their hearts to God, and communion with him: no satisfaction like this. David saith, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul," Psalm cxvi. 7: no such rest, as God is, who is

* *Chald.* Quieti fuerunt post cultum Domini.

the soul's only centre and sabbath. Jer. xxxi. 25, "I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul:" as God rests in his love to his saints, so they are well satisfied with their choice of God, and look not out other ways, or beyond him for any contentments to their spirits. Thus then these pious souls, these lamenting penitents might say: Alas, we have been like wandering sheep that have gone astray, every one wandering in his own way, or as a bird wandering from its nest, or as prodigals from our father's house; but now, now at length by Samuel's prophecy we are thoroughly informed that God is the true God, that this prescribed worship is of his institution, and the means of communion with him. At our first hearing this man of God, we were touched, and began to incline towards him; at last, we came to a fixed resolution to follow the Lord in this his way, we were assembled together for this purpose, bemoaned our state in the loss of so dear a friend, cried after him, put away our idols and lusts, returned to the Lord by faith and repentance, and now we see it is not in vain, it is good, yea, very good for us thus to draw near to God; we find full content in him; we find the enjoyment of him a full recompence for all our pains in a mournful pursuit of him. We have found him, at last we have found him, and happiness in him; he is come whom we sought, we need not look for another, we care not for any other. We fear nothing, since we have found our God.

From hence we may discern the reason why the same word in Hebrew* signifies both to repent and to comfort, to mourn and to cease mourning, to lament and rejoice; for as true comfort belongs only to peni-

* נחם, doluit, pœnituit. נחם, *per antiphrasin*, dedoluit, dolore desiit, consolationem invenit.

tent souls, so sorrow is the porch and inlet to joy; none are exalted, but they that are first cast down; none bring forth the blessed babe of joy, but such as travail in the pangs of sorrow, John xvi. 21. The painter can with a touch of his pencil turn a mournful into a smiling face: thus saith David, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness."—Psalm xxx. 11.

Thirdly, Let us ascertain the reasons why it is so fit that God's Israel or professing people should thus lament after the Lord, when God's ark is in a state of obscurity or his ordinances obstructed. In confirmation of this point, I must demonstrate, that they must lament after the ark of the Lord; and especially after the Lord of the ark.

1. God's Israel or professing people, must lament after the ark, that is, the ordinances of the Lord, when in a state of obscurity, or obstructed.

(1.) Because the ark or ordinances of the Lord are a people's greatest glory, their beauty, strength, and honour. Wherein is Israel better than other nations, but by having ordinances of God among them; Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20, "He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel; he hath not dealt so with any nation;" as if he had said, this, this is that which exalts Israel above all other kingdoms, that they have the visible tokens of God's presence, which is a people's only glory; so saith the apostle, Rom. ix. 4, "To the Israelites pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises." This is Israel's heritage, their patrimony, and a rich one it is: hence when the ark was taken, Phinehas's wife breathed her last, with that doleful lamentation, "The

glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken," 1 Sam. iv. 21.

(2.) Because the obscuring, tarnishing, and obstructing of ordinances is a heavy judgment, worse than all other plagues, both absolutely considered in itself, and comparatively, if it be compared with other judgments. God threatens to do by Jerusalem, as he did by Shiloh, Jer. vii. 14; how that was the context shews. And Ezek. xxiv. 21, "I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength." Many other threats speak God's hot displeasure in this case, and the evil is greater, because it reacheth to the soul, which is the best part of man. Hence Amos viii. 11, 12, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send a famine in the land," (which surely is a dreadful judgment, worse than the sword, Lam. iv. 9. But what famine?) "Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord;" this, this is the sorest judgment; this judgment on the soul is the soul of judgments, when poor sinners are exposed inevitably to die and be tormented in hell without means or remedy. "Where no vision is the people perish," Prov. xxix. 18. Hos. iv. 6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

(3.) Because there is much advantage in the enjoyment of ordinances. Herein consists the kingdom of heaven; so the preaching of the gospel is frequently called; and this word is the word of the kingdom, and gospel of the kingdom, because it is an introduction or means to introduce persons into the kingdom of grace, and then of glory. That is a dreadful threatening, Matt. xxi. 43, "Therefore shall the kingdom of God be taken from you, and be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." If any ask me, as Rom. iii. 1, 2, "What advantage hath the Jew?" or the

professing Christian under the gospel dispensation? “or what profit is there of circumcision, or of spiritual privileges? I answer, “much every way, chiefly because that unto them have been committed the oracles of God, and so salvation is of the Jews;”* as our Lord saith: even so those that have gospel ordinances, have great helps for the conversion, edification, and salvation of their souls; for Christ hath set up his ensign among them for souls to flock unto.† These are wells of salvation, a feast of fat things, breasts of consolation, where souls may milk out, and be abundantly delighted; here are the keys of the kingdom, by means of which heaven gates stand open continually; the door of faith, the ministration of the Spirit, the day of salvation, &c.‡ And is not all this worth lamenting after the Lord to enjoy? if not, what is?

(4.) Because this is the character and disposition of a child of God, to lament after the ark and ordinances of God. “I have,” saith David, “loved the habitation of thy house,” Psal. xxvi. 8. Therefore he makes this his *unum magnum* one thing, which he desires of the Lord, “to dwell in the house of the Lord,” Psal. xxvii. 4. Two things excite a Christian spirit to lament after God for the ark:—

First, He hath a gracious principle, an enlightened eye to see what others cannot discern; the Christian calls such a place Beer-la-hai-roi, as Hagar did, Gen. xvi. 14, “The well of him that liveth and seeth me.” So the Christian sees God’s way in the sanctuary; there he beholds the beauty of the Lord. || The Psalmist saith, “They have seen thy goings, O God,

* Rom. iii. 2. John iv. 22.

† Isa. xi. 10.

‡ Isa. xii. 3. xxv. 6. lxvi. 11. Matt. xvi. 19. Isa. lx. 13. Acts xiv. 27. 2 Cor. iii. 8. vi. 2.

|| Psal. lxxvii. 13. xxvii. 4.

even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary."* Yea, the devout soul hath an appetite and taste suitable to what he meets with in the ordinances of God, faith, love, desire, and joy; as new born children have a natural instinct directing them to their mother's milk for conservation of life; so 1 Peter ii. 2, the saints "as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby." The law of God engraven in their hearts, corresponds with the word they hear explained by ministers: Christ within them, (by his Spirit and graces) as the hope of glory, prompts them to a love to Christ, and a longing after him in the holy supper, and all his other institutions.

Secondly, Add to this, the frequent experiences the believing soul hath had of the sweetness of divine grace in ordinances, which cannot but excite in him strong desires after similar enjoyments; Psal. lxiii. 1, 2, "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." So Song ii. 3, 4, "I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste; yea, he brought me into his banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love." No wonder if she was so distressed when she wanted him.

This leads me to observe,

2. That Christians should lament after the God of ordinances, or God in ordinances; so saith the text, "The house of Israel lamented after the Lord." Why?

(1.) Because God is infinitely more worth than all ordinances; his presence is prizable for itself. The ark is but to be esteemed for his gracious presence; "In his favour is life," Psal. xxx. 5. "His loving-kindness is better than life," Psal. lxiii. 3. This is the

* Psal. lxviii. 24.

marrow of heaven, the want of this is hell. "Woe also be to them when I depart from them," Hos. ix. 12: and this the child of God knows.

(2.) God purposely withdraws that men may lament after him; as when a mother steps out of a child's sight, and when she seems to be gone, the child raises a cry after her; Hos. v. 15, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early."

(3.) Because sincere lamenting after the Lord may occasion his return; he purposely hovers, waits and expects, that his people may call him back by their prayers, entreaties, humiliation; not as though God were moved, or changed by men's mournful complaints and outcries, but that such an earnest lamenting qualifies the subject, capacitates for mercy, and puts souls into the condition of the promise. Jer. xxix. 12, 13, "Then shall ye call upon me, and shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you, and ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

(4.) God blesseth his people usually in and by ordinances, with his best blessings, Psal. cxxxiii. 3, "There the Lord commands the blessing, even life for ever more." Eph. i. 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places*,* *things*, or *means* in Christ." It would be needless to reckon up all the blessings our dear Lord conveys to his people by ordinances, and for which it becomes us to lament after the Lord, in his appointments; (for now I join them together.)

[i.] Sometimes God gives outward blessings with his ark. So the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom,

* 'Εν τοῖς ἰπουρανίοις.

and all that pertained to him because of the ark of God, 2 Sam. vi. 12. The gospel of peace oft brings outward peace and plenty, though through the corruption of men's hearts it stirs up opposition occasionally.

[ii.] But the chief blessings are spiritual, as conversion of the soul to God, regeneration, effectual vocation; so that it may oft be said, as of Zion, This and that man was born there, Psal. lxxxvii. 5. Also increase of grace: 2 Cor. iii. 18, "We all with open face, beholding as in a glass," this broader glass of ordinances, and the secret glass of private duties, "the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory," that is, from grace to grace, "as by the Spirit of the Lord," or of the Lord the Spirit.* Besides, ordinances discover, and help to remove those foul spots that are on the face of the Christian, James i. 23, 24. Sanctuary discoveries resolve many intricate cases in the providence of God; see Psal. lxxiii. 17. Here also the hearts of God's people may be abundantly satisfied, Psal. xxxvi. 8; for here is goodness from God to do it, Psal. lxxv. 4. Ordinances are channels,† through which divine grace and influences flow to the soul, Zech. iv. 12. These display Christ, open gospel privileges, promises, terms of salvation, are as the gate of heaven; well then may, and must the observant believing soul, lament after both the ordinances of God, and God in his ordinances.

Fourthly, An objection may be framed against all that I have said. You will say, What is all this canting for? how doth it concern us? have we not public ordinances? doth not the gospel flourish? is there not excellent preaching in public places? The generality have no reason to complain, since we have christian magistrates, a glorious church, learned preachers; nay,

* Ἀπὸ Κυρίου Πνεύματος

† Canales gratiæ.

with respect to others that pretend tenderness of conscience, they complain before they are hurt; have they not their separate meetings in a public way without disturbance? Little reason have any to make this ado in lamenting; what cause have you to lament?

I answer as Cleophas, "Art thou only a stranger in our Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come pass there in these days?"* If you ask what things? Do I need to inform you, or rub up your memories by telling you, that twenty years ago two thousand ministers, then found in peaceable possession of their places of worship, were dispossessed and ejected by the Act of Uniformity, commencing August 24, 1662, and shortly after in 1665, were prohibited meeting together above four for religious worship, and another Act prohibiting them from coming or being within five miles of any such place where they had preached, or a corporation, and were severely menaced and punished by a second Act, against conventicles, with sharper penalties; and though the king's majesty set them at liberty for a season, yet that was quickly retracted, and many could have little benefit by it. Now, whether the silencing of ministers be not an obstructing of the gospel, and of ordinances, judge you; and if you say you are not concerned in this case, I shall not speak to you, but turn my discourse to others: only I shall briefly propose some questions. First, about the ordinances of God; and secondly, about the God of ordinances, and leave it to you to judge whether there be not some cause to lament after the Lord.

1. Are all congregations supplied with able, faithful ministers? God forbid I should condemn all, or censure any unjustly; blessed be God there are some gracious men in public stations, whose main design is

* Luke xxiv. 18, 19.

to win souls to God ; but O how small is their number ! I would rather you read an account of this in *Ichabod*, or Five Groans of the Church, writ by a conforming minister A. D. 1663 ; in which he laments 3000 raw young heads, that teach before they have learned, and 1500 debauched ministers, in which also many factious men, some illiterate tradesmen, simonists, pluralists, and non-residents are particularly described. God knows whether these things be true ; but it is well if many have not cause to complain as our Lord, Matt. ix. 36, who when he saw the multitudes, was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd ; you know what follows : if all public places were well supplied there would be less need of us ; if there were no need, we should be glad of a *supersedeas*.

2. Is there not work enough for all the ministers in England, if all were faithful, conscientious, and set themselves seriously to the work of God ? Oh how many thousand ignorant souls to be instructed ! obstinate, to be admonished ; careless, to be quickened ; weak, to be strengthened ; wandering, to be reclaimed !* Surely they that know any thing of the worth of souls, of the work of the ministry, and of the importance of eternity, cannot but bitterly lament that so little is done for saving of sinners, and that there are so few to lay out themselves, or that do actually or effectually perform the work of faithful pastors, for the conviction and edification of sinners' souls. If every minister in England were gracious, and had a hundred persons under his cure and charge, he would find it as difficult to manage, as a physician dealing with so many patients under several diseases. *Hic labor, hoc opus.*

3. Does not the liberty that some take in dispens-

* See Ezek. xxxiv. 4.

ing ordinances labour under many disadvantages? Are they not subject to fines, confiscations, imprisonments, banishments, and censures? and all have not an equal opportunity of feeding Christ's flock, where there is the same necessity. What liberty is taken, is but stolen, or from courtesy; still they are exposed to the rage of malevolent spirits, and under the lash of the law, and also under the censure of being indiscreet zealots, that adventure further than their more prudent brethren; yet still the candle is under a bushel, and they that need it the most, have least share in it, they are glad that they are out of the way, and are furnished with stones enow, even by existing laws, to cast at such as would disturb them in their career of sin, and while posting down to hell; and in these circumstances, those whose eyes are opened to see the blind running into a pit, cannot but lament that their hands are so bound that they cannot stop them.

4. Are there not sad symptoms upon us of a departing gospel? It would not now be seasonable to enumerate the prognostics of God's taking away his ark and ordinances. Mr. Gurnal,* speaking of the unkind welcome the gospel hath found among us, addeth, "O what will God do with this degenerate age in which we live! O England, England! I fear some sad judgment or other bodes thee! If such glad tidings as the gospel brings be rejected, sad news cannot be far off. I cannot think of less than a departing gospel. God never made such a settlement of his gospel amongst any people, but he could remove it from them. He comes but upon liking, and will he stay where he is not welcome? who will that hath elsewhere to go?" Read the rest. Two words on this; observe,

(1.) Have there not been many great attempts made

* Christian in Complete Armour, part 2, p. 325.

to quench the light amongst us? O what a combination is there at home and abroad, of Papists and atheists, to root out the name of Israel, and to banish the God of Israel, and cause him to cease from amongst us!*

O what crafty councils, and potent confederates, animated with devilish hatred, may we espy in this our native country! Antichrist makes many furious assaults, with a design to kill the poor witnesses, after they have been prophesying in sackcloth, Rev. xi. 3, 7. Even among ourselves, are there not some that are indifferent whether the ark or mass, gospel preaching or dumb idols take place? Yea, some say unto God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.† Men are scorched with the glorious rays of the gospel sun, and blaspheme God, rather than kindly melted by its warm and benign influences.‡ How many Ahabs hate Micaiahs? or Felixes at best, that adjourn the court of conscience, and plain preaching? or Gadarenes, that prefer their swine-sty to God's sanctuary, and desire the blessed Jesus to depart out of our coasts? God's ark is a troublesome guest to graceless Philistines. Some that received not the truth in love, || are in danger of being given up to Popish delusions, and of joining the mixed multitude that fall a lusting or longing for the onions of Egypt. If the gospel may be sinned away, surely it is in hazard now to depart. If monstrous lusts, defiances of heaven, unfruitfulness, decay of zeal, loss of first love, carnal confidence in privileges, and contempt of the power of godliness, neutrality and empty formality, have ever robbed any people of this pearl; surely, without an extraordinary display of mercy, we cannot keep it long.

(2.) Where are the souls that stir up themselves to

* Psalm lxxxiii 3—3. Isa. xxx. 10, 11. † Job xxi. 14.

‡ Rev. xvi. 9.

|| 2 Thess. ii. 10.

take hold of a withdrawing God? * Some I hope there are that stand in the gap, but oh how few, and how faintly! Where is there a Moses to hold up his hands, a Joshua to fall at God's feet, a Phinehas to execute justice? God sees that there is no man, and may wonder that there is no intercessor. † Strange that there should be none to guide our Zion among all the sons she hath brought forth! What! none to take her by the hand, of all the sons she hath brought up! ‡ What! is there no nail strong enough for bearing such a weight? Well, this is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

But may not the innocent deliver the island? may not the poor wise man deliver the city? are not saints' prayers effectual? Yes. But where are they? The old stock is worn out, and few new ones come in for a supply. Strong torrents are carried through the dead sea into the ocean of eternity; and new springs are yet rare and faint. Where shall we find Elijah's spirit doubled on a succeeding Elisha? Though a kingdom may have much treasure in it, yet if trade cease, and no bullion or merchandise be imported, it will decay, because it lives upon the old stock. This is our case: aged saints are worn away, few converts fit to plead with God come in their room. And this is the devil's design, to wear out the saints of the Most High, and extirpate the genuine seed of Jacob. But alas! "by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small." His face waxeth pale, having of late lost so much good blood. And doth not our Lord sometimes withdraw the Spirit of prayer, which is virtually saying, "Pray not for this people?" Do not stupidity and sleepiness seize on the disciples, even when Jesus is in his agony? Doth not this bode evil? Are there not in them, even in them,

* Isa. lxiv. 7.

† Isa. lix. 16.

‡ Isa. li. 18.

sins enow to weaken and make void their own prayers? Alas! what divisions, what decays, deadness, unprofitableness? The old Puritan spirit is gone; we are wofully degenerated: professors are grown like the world: how unlike are we to primitive saints? "Abraham is ignorant of us, Israel would not acknowledge us for their genuine seed." But may we not think our disease is grown so stubborn and inveterate, that no doses will conquer the disease, though the hard strugglings of nature may maintain life for a season? Judgments have been prorogued, upon the vine-dresser's interposing importunity, three years longer, but beware of the fourth: God's patience hath bounds; his Spirit will not always strive. We look like a people ripe for ruin: however, Noah, Daniel, and Job may deliver their own souls (though none besides) by their righteousness.* God can make those few names in Sardis to walk in white, though he come against her as a thief, and leave her in Egyptian darkness:† he can find harbour for his children, though he pull down the house upon the heads of formal hypocrites: and if there be not cause of lamenting after the ark when its removal is feared, to be sure men will see cause to lament when this evil is felt. "The anger of the Lord shall not return, until he hath executed, till he hath performed the thoughts of his heart; in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly."—Jer. xxiii. 20.

Secondly, Is not the God of ordinances much removed from amongst us? and is not he worth lamenting after? God makes gradual removes. It is true, sometimes the sun sets at noon day;‡ yet ordinarily the sun leaves the horizon by sensible declinings. The glory of the Lord goes out from the cherub, to the

* Ezek. xiv. 14.

† Rev. iii. 3, 4.

‡ Amos viii. 9.

threshold of the house, thence to the middle of the city, thence to the mountain.*

I shall briefly mention four removes which our Lord hath taken from us, under the form of questions?

1. Is not restraining grace much gone from amongst us? Some persons in former times were wont to be civil, orderly, and in many things conformable to the letter of the word; but now God hath cast the reins on their necks, and they get the bits of conscience betwixt the teeth of sensual affections, and obstinate sinning, and there is no restraining them; they run mad in their own ways; petty oaths by mass or troth, are converted into broad curses, and full-mouthed blasphemies; tippling into down-drive drunkenness, and open reeling; wanton dalliances into defended adulteries; squibbing at strictness, into open persecution of all that looks like seriousness; from questioning divine Providence, men advance to avowed atheism, and open defiance of heaven. Some men are given up to such sins as are not fit to be named, and which themselves formerly would have blushed to mention; and if any had predicted their committing them, they would have said as Hazael, "Is thy servant a dog?"† Sinners that used to walk under a vail or mask, now go bare-faced, and men glory in their shame.‡ Many abhor sobriety, justice, and temperance. We overpass the deeds of the wicked; the moral heathens would be ashamed of us. Men work all uncleanness with greediness: yea, if they court God in a few formal prayers, they think they are delivered to do all these abominations; as though they had got a Popish indulgence and dispensation to sin: as Breerwood in his inquiries tells us, the common people think they do the priest a kindness to find him work by new sinning to get pardons. Yea,

* Ezek. ix. 3. xi. 23. † 2 Kings viii. 13. ‡ Phil. iii. 19.

some think it strange of others, that they are not as bad as themselves:* and is not this matter of lamentation, to see the earth thus forsaken by a righteous God, and possessed by so many bears, lions, tigers, and goats? † that men are grown wolves, yea devils to each other! Is it not time to lament after that God, that gives up men to such profligate and shocking courses as hasten their own damnation, and England's desolation? Is it not time to seek God till he come and rain righteousness upon us? Hos. x. 12.

2. Is not converting grace much withdrawn from the ordinances of God? and doth not this call sensible souls to lament after the Lord? Time hath been that our Lord hath mounted his white horse, and hath bent his bow, and shot his arrows of conviction, and made them sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies, and caused people to fall under him, going forth conquering, having had his crown set upon his head by the daughters of Jerusalem. ‡ But alas! now the church hath a miscarrying womb, and dry breasts: ministers cry out, "Who hath believed our report?" I have laboured in vain. || God doth not go forth with his word as formerly. The apostles were fishers, and enclosed many at a draught; present ministers are hunters, they shout and run all day, and catch but one or two, and well too. It is worth a whole life's pains. Though it cannot be denied, God's despised servants have now and then seals of their ministry to God's glory, their encouragement, and the stopping of the mouths of slanderers. Jerusalem is built even in troublesome times: the gospel is not bound, though ministers be. Men civilly dead, may convey spiritual life. God hath

* 1 Pet. iv. 4.

† Terras Astræa reliquit.

‡ Rev. vi. 2. Psalm xlv. 5. Song iii. 11.

|| Isa. liii. 1. xlix. 4.

not left his servants without some testimonies in the consciences and conversations of their hearers, that he is in his ordinances of a truth. But alas! how few gleanings hath our dear Lord, compared with the full vintage Satan gets among men? We take these first fruits thankfully, till the full harvest come. Let ministers and people lament after the Lord, that he would fill his house with glory, hasten the day of his power, to make people cheerful volunteers in the Lord's warfare. Oh that more might knock at our doors with—"What must I do to be saved? Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Lord, clothe thine ordinances with thy power. When shall Aaron's rod bring forth ripe almonds? Lord, let the children of the covenant own the God of their fathers, and be indulged with covenant grace. Lord, let thy love to a world of sinners be manifested in converting grace, as well as in the gift of thy Son: let sermons be seconded with power: make thy word the arm of God unto salvation.

3. Doth not God much withdraw from the societies of his servants? Are there to be found that sincere attachment and faithfulness amongst God's people to each other as in former days? Is there not much pride, worldliness, decay of love to God, and want of such spiritual zeal for God, as was in the days of old? Alas! we have reason to think that the Spirit of prayer is much withdrawn; and also that close walking, that distance from appearances of sin, that devotedness to God, that endearedness and usefulness of Christians amongst themselves which formerly prevailed. Yea, hath not God seemed to take peace from the earth? Is not Manasseh against Ephraim, and Ephraim against Manasseh, and they together against Judah? * Papists against Protestants, and Protestants

* Isa. ix. 21.

against Papists, and they together against zealous worshippers, and exact walkers according to pure and primitive institutions? Are not some members of the same church, that desire to keep close to the rule, rendered black, while the sun hath looked upon them with some malignant aspects and reflections of displeasure? even the same mother's children are angry with them.* Their own watchmen pity them not: nay, some watchmen are so rigid and censorious, that they find them out, wound them, take away their vail from them,† expose the members of their own church, as if they were factious, traitorous, or heretical, and will hold no communion with them, though they have much charity for them, and pursue them with entreaties to beg their consent to walk with them towards heaven, and join in God's work for winning souls: but alas, they browbeat them, and seem to deny them liberty to worship the same God, own the same Bible, or have an interest in the same common Saviour: if this be not for a lamentation, what is? Methinks some deal with their brethren, as Saul's courtiers with honest David, 1 Sam. xxvi. 19, "They have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods: or, as it is, Ezek. xi. 15, "Son of man, thy brethren, even thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly, are they unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get ye far from the Lord, unto us is this land given in possession." Monopolies are dangerous in spiritual things. What envy hath excluding others occasioned in these cases? Lamentable is the account given in the English history, of the haughty carriage of Austin the monk, and petulant behaviour of the British bishops,‡ who, because of private animosities,

* Song i. 6. † Song v. 7. ‡ Mr. Clark's Martyrol. part 1, p. 13.

neglected to join with the other in preaching the gospel to the idolatrous Saxons. Austin predicted and menaced, that if they would not have peace with their brethren, they should have war with their enemies. Shortly after Ethelbert king of Northumberland, being a Pagan, went with a great army against the city of Chester, overcame the Britons, and slew eleven hundred monks, that is, persons religiously devoted to God, for praying on behalf of the Britons, only fifty having escaped with Brockmail mayor of Chester. A spirit of jealousy in so good a work, hath always bad effects; and pride hath dreadful consequences. Church divisions are much to be lamented, and very rarely issue without civil dissensions. For the divisions of Reuben there ought to be sad searchings, and heavy thoughts of heart.* Lord, when shall conscience-racking oaths be abolished? How long shall entangling orders for decency rend the vitals of thy church? When shall subscription to Christ's laws suffice?

It is sure a matter of lamentation that the devil casts the bone of contention among professing Christians, and they snarl at each other about it. How long shall the pride and wrath of men make and blow up that spark into a flame, which Satan the great makebate casts among them? When will men see the hand of Joab in all this? and discern at last that among all these contending clients, none is gainer but that common barrister? Lord, open men's eyes, heal our bleeding wounds, and bring back that ancient christian love, and peace, charity, and humility.

4. Once more; is there no cause for God's children to lament after the Lord for his return to their spirits? Is not God much withdrawn from the hearts of his people? If a child of God say as Samson, "I will go

* Judg. v. 15, 16.

out as at other times before, and shake myself; but he wisteth not that the Lord is departed from him.”* When he reflects on himself and finds it so, will he not see sad cause to lament? And have not some godly souls cause to say as Gideon, Judges vi. 13, “O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?” And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of? But now the Lord hath forsaken us,

(1.) In point of quickening, exciting, and actuating their graces. May not that sad complaint be taken up, Isa. lxiv. 7, “There is none that calleth on thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee; for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed† us because of our iniquities?” Where is that flaming love, that active faith, that gospel repentance, that lively hope, that filial fear, that spirit of adoption, that sound mind, that tender conscience, and those operative affections which existed in former days? It is much to be feared there is a general decay of grace, or damp in point of exercise on the spirits of living Christians: it will be well if the bridegroom find not even the wise virgins asleep.

(2.) As to strength and assistance, against the assaults of temptation, and out-breakings of corruption. Many thorns in the flesh, messengers of Satan,‡ do forcibly push forwards God’s children to sin, and they find not his grace sufficient for them, as at other times, but stumble, and fall, and are broken, snared and taken; even sometimes to the breaking of their bones, dishonouring of God, scandal of their profession, and endangering of their precious souls: “O let not such things be told in Gath, or published in Askelon, lest the uncircumcised Philistines triumph over God’s peo-

* Judg. xvi. 20

† *Heb.* melted.

‡ 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8.

ple, and be hardened in their sinful ways." Alas, where shall God's tender-spirited children hide their faces, when their brethren profane God's holy name, and men shall say, "These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land," Ezek. xxxvi. 26. These are your precisians, and scrupulous zealots, that will not do as others; now they shew that they are a pack of hypocrites. This cuts deep, and wounds to the heart.

(3.) As to communion with God. God's people of old could assert it with an expressive confidence, *truly*, said they, however carnal men scorn it now, 1 John i. 3, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ;" not only in that secret, essential, fundamental communion, whereby grace is maintained in its being and life, but that sweet, sensible, soul-refreshing fellowship, that gives grace its activity, and maintains intercourse betwixt God and the soul in duty. But alas! have not God's children cause to complain as the church, that God withdraws himself; she seeks him but finds him not,* in public ordinances, in secret duties, or in communion of saints. God's children complain with Job, chap. xxiii. 8, 9, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him," &c. He looks east, west, north, and south, but in vain; this is strange, that God who is every where should be found no where—but though the child of God be aware of God's general omnipresence, and experience his common providence, yet he is not satisfied without his presence, and gracious influence; and missing this, he hath reason to lament after the Lord when he hides himself.

(4.) As to assurance, settlement, and comfort. Sometimes God's children are left to a sad unsatisfied and

* Song iii. 1. v. 6.

doubting frame, they are full of fears, troubles, and jealousies, and are much in the dark in point of state; this is a very general complaint at this day. Many have blurred their evidences by sins, or carelessness, and cannot give any distinct account how their principles are established, or what condition their souls are in; they are damped and daunted as to their interest in Christ, title to the promises, and hopes of heaven. Have not these great cause to lament after the Lord? and surely they must say as David, Psal. li. 8—12, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice; restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit." O my God! my soul is cast down within me;* one while I argue with my own heart, communing, expostulating, challenging, charging my spirit, and alas, I can do no good with it; at other times, I turn myself to God, but still I am restless, I cannot be quiet, but am tossed with tempests, and not comforted.† Well, I am determined to look towards God's holy temple, and cast myself at God's feet in virtue of that promise, Hosea vi. 3, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is prepared as the morning, and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

Thus much for the doctrinal part, and the removal of an objection.

All the application I shall make of this subject, shall only be in the form of exhortation, that we may be induced to engage in this seasonable and needful duty of lamenting after the Lord, the ark of the Lord, and the Lord of the ark. For this purpose I shall,

First, Propose some motives and arguments to enforce this duty.

* Psal. xlii. 6.

† Jonah ii. 3.

Secondly, Ascertain what description of persons are concerned thus to lament after the Lord.

Thirdly, Lay before you some helps or directions to carry on this work of serious lamentation.

Fourthly, Offer some cordials to encourage our hearts till the Lord return to us.

CHAP. III.

MOTIVES AND REASONS WHICH MAY CAUSE LAMENTATION AFTER THE LORD.

I. It is indeed a very sad consideration that this people of Israel were twenty years before they began to feel their situation, or come to themselves; and therefore in the enumeration of motives to the discharge of duty, I may observe,

1. That a professing people may lie long under dreadful spiritual judgments, without a sensible perception of them: it was so with the people here; it is well if it be not so with us. And this senseless frame is a greater evil than any other judgment.

But you may ask, how comes it to pass that men may be so long senseless, and not lament after the Lord all this while?

Ans. (1.) From the nature of sin. Sin is of a hardening, stupifying, brutifying nature; when men fall into sin, their hearts are hardened by it, Heb. iii. 13. Sin is of a cold congealing nature, it freezeth the soul, rocketh conscience asleep; and like the fish torpedo, that diffuseth its benumbing poison through the hand and arm, and creeping at last to the heart, kills a man; so doth sin. It is not to tell how David's

sin rocked him asleep, and led him on to other sins, till it endangered his soul's sleeping the sleep of death.

(2.) From the worldly enjoyments men have in room of ordinances. As the captives in Babylon being well settled amidst conveniencies and accommodations, forget God's appointments, and Jerusalem comes not into their minds, while their enjoyments afford contentment. And though some returned, they can sleep quietly in their ceiled houses, while the house of God lies waste, Hag. i. 4. God's ark is forgotten when men's private coffers are full. Personal comforts thrust out spiritual, as the sun's beams eat out the kitchen fire.

(3.) From the want of quickening means in the absence of ordinances. When the prophets are dead naturally or civilly, their monitors to duty are taken away, Psal. lxxiv. 9. "We see not our signs; there is no more any prophet, neither is there any among us that knoweth how long." When men want a Haggai or Zechariah, they lie still asleep, for want of awakening excitements. It is Samuel that promotes this lamenting after the Lord.

(4.) From the withdrawals of God's grace, Ps. lxxx. 18, "Quicken us, and we will call on thy name." As long as God turns his back on us, we shall be so far from kindly lamenting after him, that we shall turn and go back from him. "My soul followeth hard after thee," Psal. lxxiii. 8. How comes that to pass? why, "Thy right hand upholdeth me." It is God that gives a repenting heart, a lamenting soul. Oh, what are we if God leave us to ourselves! Let us study these causes of senselessness, and let our souls be ashamed. Tremble at these causes and their effects; bewail sin; settle not in worldly enjoyments; beg quickening means, and above all, divine grace for our assistance in lamenting after the Lord.

2. That God's professing people may and must stir up themselves to lament after the Lord. All men have rational faculties, gracious souls have spiritual principles, sloth kills both: self-excitation is possible, and a furtherance to this lamentation after God. Men as men have consciences, and conscience is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly,* by self-reflection, discovering the want of God and goodness, checking for evil, putting on to what is good; if you follow it not as far as it leads you, you wrong it, rebel against its master, and deprive yourselves of further assistance; contradict this preacher in thy bosom at thy peril. Means intervene betwixt a man's can, and his cannot; if thou canst not move a spiritual step, thou must move a natural step after the Lord; if thou canst not create a new heart, yet thou canst and must endeavour to have a new heart and a new spirit, Ezek. xviii. 31. If thou be not able to do God's work, thou must be doing thy own work: bemoan thyself, tell him what an unruly bullock thou art, and desire him to turn thee, and then thou shalt be turned; stir up thyself to take hold on God; stir up the gift of God in thee.† Charge thyself as David, "My soul, wait thou only upon God." Psal. lxii. 5. "Awake thou that sleepest, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light," Eph. v. 14. "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion! put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem! shake thyself from the dust; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion!" Isa. lii. 1, 2. Now at last God expects you should labour to work your hearts to a discovery of your misery, the necessity you have of God, of his presence and ordinances. You may rouse yourselves to this work, you

* Prov. xx. 27. † Jer. xxxi. 18. Isa. lxiv. 7. 2 Tim. i. 6.

must, and if you do, God will help; if not, your destruction will be of yourselves.

3. This lamenting after the Lord and his ark hath been the practice, and is the true character of God's children. Eli's heart trembled for the ark of God. Phinehas's wife thought it not worth while to live when the ark was gone, 1 Sam. iv. 13, 21. The language of the prophet Isaiah is, "I will wait on the Lord that hideth his face, from the house of Jacob, and will look for him," Isa. viii. 17. This was when it was said, "bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples," *v.* 16. If you would seek and find God, seek not to familiar spirits, "but to the law, and to the testimony, *v.* 19, 20. For, should not a people seek unto their God? Sirs, shew what you are, and act as you seem. If you be God's children, run weeping after your father; cry after him, and say, "be not a terror to me," Jer. xvii. 17. Yea, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Lord, art not thou in the midst of us? We are called by thy name, leave us not, Jer. xiv. 8, 9. "Be not thou far from me, O Lord, for trouble is near, for there is none to help," Psal. xxii. 11, 19. Oh! where is that ancient serious spirit of lamenting after the Lord? Where are those genuine workings of a child-like disposition after such a father? What is become of that sighing frame of heart, that spirit of adoption, with which God's children of old were endued? It will be well if new notions do not drive out that old spirit of lamentation. Shew that you are saints by this, as those few declared themselves Saul's faithful soldiers whose hearts God had touched, following him trembling, or trembling after him, 1 Sam. x. 26. and xiii. 7. So Hos. xi. *v.* 10. "They shall

walk after the Lord; he shall roar like a lion, when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west." Observe it, God's roaring in terrible threatenings or executions, drives not God's children from him, but to him, only they come trembling, appealing from God to God, from an avenging justice offended, to tender mercies through the merits of Jesus. Learn this mystery and christian privilege.

4. This is no controverted point, but an acknowledged duty on all hands, to which I am persuading; who dare contradict it? Yea, who dare dispute it? What exceptions can any bring against this, of lamenting after the Lord? I challenge any caviller to produce any show of reason against either branch of it; either as to the ordinances of God, or God in his ordinances. I think all parties are agreed in the theory. O that all were also agreed in the practice of this duty! whatever disputes men make about other rules or canons of practice, methinks there should be none about this. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded, and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you; nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing," Phil. iii. 15, 16. Whence I discern,

(1.) That it is a vain, preposterous thing for persons to spend time in disputing about abstruse and obscure points, while they neglect momentous and evident duties.

(2.) The only way to have unity in less material truths or duties, is a conscientious practice of what is necessary and indubitable. I may truly say, that nothing is more likely to make us cordial friends, than the practice of the duty in my text; when Judah and Israel fall a weeping and seeking the Lord then

they go together. How amicable doth converting grace make those that were at deadly and desperate strife? for repentance turns the hearts of parents and children to each other.* Alas! till our faces be set towards the Lord, we shall rush with fury one against another: but if we agree in our devotedness to God, we shall agree amongst ourselves: lamenting together would clear our eyesight, and create a harmony of hearts.

5. Other persons in all other cases do lament after the objects that their hearts are set upon. David followed his deceased friend Abner with sorrow, and bitterly lamented the death of his son Absalom. The companions of Jephthah's daughter yearly lamented her. David much lamented Saul, (though his enemy while living,) and his sworn brother Jonathan. Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, and all the singing men and singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations: yea, they made them an ordinance in Israel, 2 Chron. xxxv. 25. And which of you are so hard-hearted, but you would lament a dead friend or brother, sister, wife, child, or parent? And canst thou not find in thy heart to spend some mournful thoughts on thy departing Lord, or follow the sad hearse of deceased ordinances? Ah carnal hearts! Ah hard hearts! Woe to insensible sinners! Shall a poor idolatrous Micah cry out after his teraphim? And shall we let the only true God go with silence and dry eyes? Is not our God worth lamenting after? Will even careless women lament at last for the teats, for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine? Isa. xxxii. 12, and shall not God's children lament for the full breasts of gospel ordinances? Shall not children cry and long for the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby? 1 Pet. ii. 2. If you were sensible, you would cry out, my father, a little

* Jer. l. 4, 5. Mal. iv. 6.

bread for an hungry soul, my mother, admit me to the breasts of consolation; I am pining, languishing, famishing to death, let me be nourished to eternal life.

6 If we lament not after the Lord and his ark, he will go yet further from us, if not totally leave us. There were never such symptoms of God's taking away the candlestick, and leaving us to the idolatry, and cruelties of popery in this kingdom, since the Reformation, as there are at this day: horrible abominations and atheism preparing for it, our ingratitude for prevention thus long, the general antipathy to a sound ministry, a spirit of giddiness disposed to entertain the most senseless fopperies, a mincing of some grosser Popish doctrines by pretended Protestants, human inventions coined in the darkest times of popery retained, also courts, fees, officers, and ceremonies; popish names, places, and customs defended; want of sympathy with our suffering brethren abroad; attempts for reformation not succeeding, but opposed; instruments reserved prepared for scourges; denying plots as clear as the sun; preferring Popish tyranny before Christ's government; most debauchery in some that should be best; popish emissaries swarming; popish families increasing; honest ministers much laying aside weapons and antidotes; fearlessness in many, and unpreparedness of all for such a dispensation; impressions on many of changes; liberty of attending on ordinances to lay in for a storm; unprincipled professors must pass an ordeal-trial; judgment beginning at God's house; choice saplings taken out of the hedge, transplanted to heaven; witnesses prophesying in sackcloth must be slain, the whore must sit as a queen, and see no loss of children; Antichrist must render himself more cruel and odious, to stir up king's hearts against the church; indifference of great potentates in the cause of religion; policy

for outward security, the compass that most steer by ; Christ's interest low in Protestant countries ; God's laying them under severe rebuke by his immediate hand : little notice taken of providences, no public fastings and humiliations, former guilt of blood unwiped off. Such things as these forbode a black diffusion of Popish darkness, and barbarous showers of blood ; God Almighty prevent : but certainly these things call for bitter lamenting after the Lord, either to prevent them or prepare our hearts for them, or both. I shall add,

7. There is no way to bring our Lord or his ark back to us, but this course of lamenting after him. God hath withdrawn himself purposely to make us follow him mourning ; and he seems to stand still and catch what we have to say in this case, Jer. viii. 6. "I hearkened and heard," saith God, "but they spake not aright." What was that ? certainly repenting of their sins, and lamenting inquiries after God ; and Jer. xxxi. 18, 19, if God can but hear persons bemoan themselves, follow him, desire the Lord to turn them, and turn to them, see what kind language he gives them, verse 20. "Is Ephraim my dear son ? is he a pleasant child ? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still ; therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." God doth act in this case as a loving father, who being provoked to scourge or leave his offending child, looks back on his sobbing, broken-hearted lamenting child, saying, Alas, my child, what ails thee ! what's the matter with thee ? What wantest thou ? Dost thou want a heart to repent, or a smile of favour ? Dost thou lament so sadly after reconciliation with me, and my return to thee ? I am glad of it, that was all I aimed at ; I have attained my end ; come, come, thou art welcome to me, come my dear, my lovely child, let me

wipe thy tear-bedewed cheeks, and kiss thee again; I am glad my rod and anger work so kindly, I will return to thee with love and sweetest embraces. Thus doth our Lord return with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and they shall be as if he had not cast them off: there is no way probable or possible to bring God or his ark back but this, and shall we not take this course? It is true, it is a doubtful and dangerous case, we are not certain he will return, but yet there is a *maybe*, a *who-can-tell*, in it: we are sure, running from him, and sinning against him, with a hard heart, will undoubtedly rob us of him, and ruin us; but we have lost more labour to less purpose, therefore, let us turn to the Lord with all our heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, &c. Joel ii. 12, 13: and then say, as God directs them, ver. 14, "Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord our God?" Oh, how well doth God take such a conduct! How willing is he to return back to us! only he expects we should be sensible of his withdrawing, and bitterly lament after him.

8. If we do not lay to heart the loss of God's presence and ordinances, God will make us lament on other accounts: if he design us good, he will pinch us till we feel, and cry out; if not, we shall be left to lament hopeless, and helpless in hell torments. If we will not lay to heart spiritual judgments, God threatens to send a curse upon us, and to curse our blessings, Mal. ii. 2. How? why, if men prize not their temple privileges, God can blast the fruits of the earth, Hag. i. 9, "Ye looked for much, and lo it came to little, and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it," or blow it away; why? saith the Lord of Hosts? "because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man to his own

house." Self-seeking here is self-undoing; men ruin themselves by neglecting God's interest; if men will not lament the ark's captivity, God will make Judah go into captivity.* If men lay not to heart the mourning ways of Zion, God hath a way to make them go without strength before the pursuer.† Men can well dispense with the loss of the pleasant things of the sanctuary, it shall be tried how they will regard the loss of their temporal pleasant enjoyments.‡ If men lament not the gates of Zion, the gates of the city shall lament and mourn, and being desolate, the city in a widowed state shall sit upon the ground.|| If professing people lay not to heart sad and silent sabbaths, God may make the land to keep her sabbaths.§ Great and fair houses must be desolate without inhabitant,¶ because God's house is desolate, and none regardeth. God can tell how to meet with the selfish and heedless: if they regard not God's interest, God will care as little for theirs. He can tell how to come near you in matters of sense,** when you make nothing of what concerns your souls; and ordinances of God will then be good, when sickness, pain, poverty, or death arrest you—or these spiritual things will be good when out of your reach, and you shut up in the prison of hell, where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, Psal. cxli. 6, "When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words, for they are sweet." When that sad plague of sweating sickness was here in England, how much were proud nobles in apparent love with faithful ministers? how glad were they of advice from them? then ordinances were of more worth than purses full of gold. God can make his ministers

* Lam. i. 3.

† Lam. i. 4, 6.

‡ Lam. i. 7, 10, 11.

|| Isa. iii. 26.

§ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21.

¶ Isa. v. 9.

** See Micah ii. 4, 5.

to be prized by the profanest scorers; yea, he knows how to make a wounding sword to open a way through their bleeding sides, for instructions to enter the most flinty hearts, as Bernard told his ranting brother.

9. How long must the Lord wait for your sensible lamentations? We are soon weary of the yoke, and think it long to wander in the wilderness; sometimes we are for returning back into Egypt, and then all, in post haste for Canaan, as Israel in the desert.* The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loose, and not die in the pit;† but then we would break prison, and are loth to take God's way, or stay God's time; this retards rather than quickens our deliverance. God puts us to our *how longs*, because we put him to his *how longs*; "How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" Jer. iv. 14. "How long will it be ere you attain to innocency?" Hosea viii. 5. "O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" Jer. xiii. 27. We were in haste for a restoration many years ago, as Moses for Miriam, "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee;" God saith, "If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days?" Numb. xii. 13, 14. But our heavenly Father hath spit in our face in the open sight of the world, and we have been shut out of his house well near three times seven years; yet alas, it is to be feared we are not evangelically ashamed. Absalom was three years at Geshur, and two years at Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face;‡ and pretended dissatisfaction therewith. Oh! but where is our real longing to enjoy the Lord in his ordinances? Alas! it is not length of time that will put our hearts into frame. When at last will God raise up some awakening

* Numb. xiv. 4. with v. 40.

† Isaiah li. 14.

‡ 2 Sam. xiii. 33. xiv. 28.

Samuel, that shall sound the alarm in the ears of all Israel? Oh! when shall we awake out of our long sleep? when shall we see our need of God in his ordinances? when shall our souls lament after God to purpose? surely it is time to bestir ourselves once at last.

10. Can we lament to any else that will or can hear or help us? May not kings or great ones say as a king did once to a crying woman, who said, "Help, my Lord, O king." He said, "If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?"* Alas! we may say, "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains. Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel, Jer. iii. 23. The greatest princes are not to be trusted. God thinks fit to frustrate our expectations from men; to disappoint our carnal confidence in man. "Surely men of low degree are vanity," if they have a mind to help they cannot; "and men of high degree are a lie," if they can help; yea, if any promise to help they will not; our best course then is to pour out our hearts before him, and say, "God is a refuge for us," Psal. lxii. 8, 9: for all power is God's, ver. 11. We may say as David, "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul; I cried unto thee, O Lord," Psal. cxlii. 4, 5. The comforter that should relieve our souls is far away. There is none to guide poor Zion, of all the sons whom she hath brought forth; neither is there any that taketh her by the hand of all the sons that she hath brought up, Isa. li. 18. "As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help; in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us."† We are as Naphtali, and have been strug-

* 2 Kings vi. 26, 27.

† Lam. iv. 17.

gling as sore, for a firm masculine parliament, as the ancient primitive church long travailed for a man child, a christian emperor; we had one. They also struggled for uniting the Protestant subjects, and alleviating our grievances; they are broken up. We had a second which set themselves to help us; but the children were come to the birth, and there was no strength to bring forth, all attempts proved abortive. Since our Moses and Aaron (by votes or disputes) have represented our case, sought favour, and used means of help, the tale of our bricks has been doubled, the spirits of men more enraged, our favour abhorred, and a keener sword is put into some men's hands to execute the law with more severity; and is it not time to have recourse to God? We are not permitted so much as to petition to men, and make a true representation of our case; that way is barred, and all other doors are locked up: what else can we do but lament after the Lord? he is able to help, he is willing, and hath promised. Oh! let us go to our God. There and there only we may ease our hearts, and find help: let us lift up our eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh our help; "Our help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth," Psal. cxxi. 2.

CHAP. IV.

DESCRIPTION OF PERSONS PARTICULARLY CALLED UPON TO LAMENT.

II. WHO are the persons or people that are to lament after the Lord? I answer,

1. Unconverted persons. These have the greatest reason to lament after the ordinances of God, and the God of ordinances; for alas, those poor souls are "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world," Eph. ii. 12. Ah sinners! what will become of you if you live and die without God? You had better be without money, trade, credit, ease, house, relations, clothes, meat, every thing, all things in the world, than without God: what will your lives or any thing advantage you without God? Alas! have you lived thus long in the world without an interest in God? How know you but death is at the door? and what will you do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation that shall come from far? To whom will ye flee for help, and where will ye leave your glory? Isa. x. 3, 4. Without me, saith God, they shall bow down under the prisoners, and they shall fall under the slain: woe to you, if death the king of terrors meet you, and God the king of heaven be not on your side. What a woful case was Saul in when the Philistines were upon him, and God was departed from him? * Oh when sickness, diseases, death, and thy own conscience make war against thee, and thou hast no God to flee to, how sad thy case! Alas, friends, estate, honours, or all the world can do for thee, will be insignificant: if thou live and die without God, thou must be for ever banished from him. And how canst thou in an ordinary way expect to have relation to God, without the means of his appointment for obtaining that end? The ark of the covenant is the way of covenanting; the preaching of the gospel is the door of faith; † saving faith, by which the soul is entitled to

* 1 Sam. xxviii. 15.

† Rom. x. 14.

the favour of God, comes by hearing, and if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.* Little reason have the mad, frantic world to rejoice over the slain witnesses, to make merry, and send gifts one to another because these prophets tormented them,† that is, would not let them go quietly to hell, but would be jogging them out of their security, and summoning them to repentance. No, no, their departure may be like Ezekiel's book, written within and without, with lamentation, and mourning, and woe.‡ Ah poor sinners! God seems to stop ministers' mouths, and saith, thou shalt not be to them a reprover,|| my Spirit shall strive no more with them;§ feed them no more, that which dieth let it die, and that which is to be cut off let it be cut off;¶ as if he had said, I will concern myself no further about them, they regarded not my counsels, and slept away the day of grace, and refused the calls of God, now they shall be given up, as a branch cut off from the tree, I will prune it no more, but take it away, John xv. 2, and lay it under that gospel curse, "Never fruit grow on thee from henceforth for ever." Or like the flourishing vineyard of the Jewish church, Isa. v. 5, 6, "Take away the hedge thereof, break down the stone wall, lay it waste, it shall not be pruned, nor digged, but there shall come up briars and thorns, I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." And have men cause to rejoice in this? Is it not rather ground of the greatest lamentation, as a prologue and forerunner of damnation, and a token of rejection? Will any but madmen rejoice at the approach of calamity, upon themselves? Or will any but frantic bedlamites triumph that those are gone who stopped them from running into a pit or a fire, or that kept them from dashing out

* 2 Cor. iv. 3.

† Rev. xi. 10.

‡ Ezek. ii. 10.

|| Ezek. iii. 26.

§ Gen. vi. 3.

¶ Zech. xi. 9.

their own brains? We think those young men fools, that are glad their parents are dead who restrained their vicious courses. If carnal men's eyes were open to know the advantages of a powerful ministry, or pure ordinances, they would lay it to heart as the most dreadful evil that ever befel them, and lament after the Lord with bitter cries, for the return of the means of grace, and say: "O Lord, is light gone, and my soul left still in darkness? is life gone, and I dead still? are means of salvation departed, and my soul left in imminent danger of perishing? Many tears did ministers shed for me: O what prayers to God! what beseechings of me to be reconciled to God! but I regarded not. Woe is me, these ambassadors of peace are called home, or have their mouths shut, what can I now expect but a proclamation of war? Lord, have mercy on me, and send those men of God to knock again at my door, and I hope I shall give them and their message better entertainment." Thus carnal persons should say; but alas, such as most need, do often least regard these things, God knows; and after twenty years lying in the grave, we may fear they will not still believe, though we should arise from the dead. If however, after all this, there be little or no hopes of those persons laying this matter to heart, I will turn to another class.

2. Ye gracious souls, lament you after the Lord.— Though Israel play the harlot yet let not Judah offend; though wicked men will not understand nor lay any thing to heart, yet let God's people, his children lay to their hearts the displeasure of God, and with bitter cries lament after their departing Father. Oh that it could be said in this case, as God's own testimony is, Hos. xi. 12, *Ephraim compasseth me about with lies*, pretending to worship God, when they intend nothing

less, *and the house of Israel with deceit*, cheating men, thinking to deceive God himself, *but Judah yet ruleth with God*, that is, keeps up his interest at the throne of grace and prevails with me, and is faithful with the saints, in point of communion and reputation, or with the most holy.* O blessed Judah! but doth not God's Judah need stirring up to lament after the Lord! Alas! how senseless and slack are the best hearts in this exercise! Who would have once imagined that such a spirit of worldliness, security, and neutrality, would have seized upon God's own children? Ah friends! can you let God depart either from your spirits or from the assemblies of his people, and not stir up yourselves to take hold of him? Who would have thought that God himself or the tokens of his presence should go from you without weeping eyes, or mournful complaints? Who must hold him if you will not? Who must fetch him back if you will not follow him, and call after him? You that have interest in him; you that have given up yourselves to him; you that have had sweet experience of his presence; and now pretend more love to him than any one else; you that he hath drawn with cords of love, will not you lament after him? Have not you some reason to say as the nation of Israel, Hos. ii. 7, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now," especially considering how he hath hedged your way with thorns, disappointed you in your overtaking your other lovers; have not your souls grown lean, and ready to famish in other ways? Have you not in all this time discerned some difference betwixt the pure and wholesome waters of the sanctuary, and the impure puddle water of men's traditions? Yea, have you not to your cost discerned some difference by your dear-

* Marg.

bought experience, betwixt the powerful ordinances, and the very same or similar formally, heartlessly, and lifelessly administered? Tell me, deal ingenuously and candidly in the case; have not your souls been ready to pine for want of provision? Have you not even been tempted to loath some dishes handed to you by blind or slovenly cooks? have you not been in danger of being rocked asleep by such truths as should have awaked you, and would, if they had been faithfully managed? Have you not been forced to eat that which some have trodden under their feet, and to drink that which some have fouled with their feet? * Alas, sirs! whatever others have, have not you some reason to lament with holy David? Psal. lxxiii. 1, 2, "O God thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary:" O my Lord, time hath been that my soul hath been satisfied as with marrow, and fatness, and my doubts resolved, graces quickened, lusts discovered and weakened in thine ordinances, so that I could truly say from my own experience, God was in them of a truth; but alas, for this long time matters have been otherwise, I have attended (as I judged) in obedience to thy command, and have sometimes met with airy notions or sapless things, or mixture of errors, or such complimenting of God with a dry formality, that methinks my soul is dried away with this light food: I have reason to lay the blame upon myself, and charge my own unprofitable heart as the proper cause; but O my Lord, I long for a heart-searching, state-distinguishing, sin-rebuking word. O when shall my soul enjoy heart-melting ordinances! Thou that adaptest means

to the end, and dost use to produce conversion, consolation, and confirmation, by most proper efficient instruments, give suitable means of grace, and grace by the means; "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known, in wrath remember mercy; and let all thy children say, Amen." Hab. iii. 2.

3. You that are young, of the rising generation, that are coming up, and coming on, in the room of your ancestors, it becomes you to lament after the Lord and his ark. Be it known to you that the piety of your predecessors will not be your sanctuary or security.—You may please yourselves with being the children of the church, but think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father;* for God is not under any obligation to you; you may be children of the devil, and may be cast into hell under that title:† no, no, you must have a faith of your own, a personal, as well as a federal relation to God. It is disputed at what age children are to stand on their own legs for personal faith, at five, or seven, or ten, or twelve; to be sure, at years of discretion, when they can discern betwixt good and evil, they are to choose for themselves, and are not to depend on relation to their parents any longer; however, they may improve their parent's covenant. But, O children! begin betimes to cry after your Father: God loves to be followed, as with the hosannas once, so with the small voice, and to be held with the little hands of the young: try what you can do with him; say not, you need him not; you cannot set up without him, you cannot live safely without him; and I am sure you are undone if you die without relation to him, and you may die young. O then make sure of God, you are cast upon him from your birth; say to

* Mat. iii. 9.

† John viii. 44. Luke xvi. 25.

him, thou art my God from my mother's womb, so shall you be a seed to serve him, and shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.* What an advantage will it be when your father and mother forsake you, by unkindness or death, if you have a God to take you up.† If God hath been your trust from your youth, he will not cast you off in old age;‡ but if you run away from God, all your younger days, with what confidence can you lament after him in old age? May he not say, go to the gods and lusts which you have served and gratified? you come but to me for a reserve, with self-ends, and because you can follow your sensual pleasures no longer; you would never have had recourse to me, if you had been capable still to have made as good a bargain of the world as you were wont: you followed your lusts with a young and swift foot, but me you can but follow with a slow snail's pace; a little of this lamenting more early had been more acceptable. It is a hard venture, an awful risk, if you go on laughing in the devil's ways, to take it for granted that you will be cordial in lamenting after God in old age, and that the Lord will receive you: and as you would enjoy God, lament after the ordinances of God. Thy testimonies, saith David, have I taken as an heritage for ever. O blessed heritage! O precious patrimony! beg it, plead for it, be not content without it. Whatever other inheritance you have, say, Lord, mine ears have heard, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. || What providences were arranged to settle ordinances? what excellent, powerful, heart-warming preaching they had? how God wrought wonders on the consciences of men by his word and Spirit? what pure worship they had,

*. Psal. xxii. 10, 30.

† Psal. xxvii. 10.

‡ Psal. lxxi. 5, 9, 17, 18.

|| Psal. xlv. 1.

communion of saints, and wholesome discipline, and what sweet intercourse with thyself in all? now, Lord, thou hast threatened, and in part executed this spiritual plague, the famine of thy word, obstructing and removing ordinances, and thy hand is still upon us; thy end is not attained; Papists threaten to darken our heaven and totally to put out our lights, and thyself seemest to menace the complete removal of our candlestick; stop, O Lord! execute not thy whole displeasure. Alas! shall we be that cursed generation, that must again be involved in worse than Egyptian darkness? Alas! who shall live when God doth this? God forbid that we should outlive this bright sunshine of the gospel, that we should not be heirs of our fathers' spiritual privileges, as well as earthly patrimonies. Oh! when these are lost, we must sadly sigh and say, what have our forefathers been doing that they have deprived us of the means of our soul's good? Must they and we meet in hell? they for non-improvement, we for non-enjoyment? Woe is to us! cursed children of cursed parents! Lord, if we have not peace, or plenty, let us have the gospel of peace and true piety; the gospel of grace, and grace by the gospel, and then we shall say, "the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places, we have a goodly heritage," Psal. xvi. 6.

4. Aged persons and householders. You that are parents have reason to lament after the Lord of the ark, and the ark of the Lord, that the waters of the sanctuary may run both with a clear and strong current to your families and posterity. Alas! we that have children, have been instrumental in propagating depravity and guilt, and wrath to our offspring, and what can we do to heal and help them? But if the Lord be our God, he hath promised to be the God of our seed. God forbid we should entail a curse on our

posterity, and give them occasion to curse us to all eternity. What unworthy parents are those that have fair estates left them, and by their prodigality leave their children beggars or bankrupts! But oh! how sad would it be to deprive our posterity of this gospel-legacy? it would be both their loss and our own. Lord, suffer us not to go off the stage in a snuff, and leave such a stench behind us. Better we had never been born, than to blaze and be consumed in hell flames, we and our descendants of following generations bundled up in faggots together. God thinks good to bind up parents and their seed in the bond of the covenant. O Lord! we are resolved to follow after thee for the sure mercies of David. Be thou our God, and we shall have better hopes for our seed. O remember that word, Isa. lix. 21, "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord, my Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." This word is full and satisfying:—Thy Spirit shall be upon me and mine in sanctification.—Thy words in my mouth, and children's mouths in profession, and solemn worship.—They shall not depart from my seed's seed to many generations.—No, not for ever.—God, even Jehovah undertakes this.—It is through Christ the Redeemer that is come to Sion.—It is a new covenant mercy.—And it doth concern all converts, even such as turn from transgression in Jacob; and am not I one of these? My dear Lord, make thou this word good to me and mine, thou that livest for ever and ever. I shall live in my posterity, when I shall be here no more, let the gospel message survive me, and the gospel grace live in them when I am gone. Oh!

cut not off thy kindness from my seed ; let not them that follow me be deprived of that which I have found so much sweetness in. O that my Ishmaels may live in thy sight !* What will become of such as are born in sin, if they want means of conviction and conversion ? There is much ado to awaken the sleepy consciences of our dead posterity under quickening ordinances. O what then would become of these, if such helps were gone ? How could I endure to see or foresee the destruction of my own offspring ? Oh ! it cuts me to the heart to think of the damnation of any, much more those of my own flesh : Lord prevent. I will pray in hope, live in hope, die in hope of the continuance of gospel privileges.

5. Ministers must make it their work to lament after the Lord. You, you are the persons mainly concerned ; you must sound an alarm to awake others ; you are appointed by the Lord as instruments to carry on this work ; and if ever God do return, he will excite his servants to rouse themselves and others to this exercise ; as Samuel did here, “ Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests : howl, ye ministers of the altar : come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God.”† Yea, let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, “ Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them ; wherefore should they say among the people, where is their God ? ‡ Alas my brethren ! have you been so long cast out of God’s public work and worship, even twenty long years, and have you not yet learned to lament ? Shall our master discard us from his service, and not judge us worthy to blow our trumpets of rams’ horns, or break a pitcher, or hold

* Gen. xvii. 18.

† Joel i. 13.

‡ Joel ii. 17.

a lamp for him? * Surely he is very sorely provoked, shall I say, three shepherds he cut off in one month? † nay, near three thousand in one day: and hath drawn out his wrath to a great length, and is there no fault in us? Yes, certainly our Father would not have fixed such a brand, or poured so much contempt upon us, upon us particularly, but he must have found great fault in us; he hath doubtless seen much amiss in us. He doth not use to single out a class of men to shoot his arrows at, without cause; we cannot excuse instruments, but certainly we have deserved all this at God's hands; is not God punishing Eli's house for the iniquity he knoweth of? ‡ Let us, my brethren, deal faithfully and impartially with ourselves before God and the world, cast the first stone at ourselves, and at last justify the Lord, by taking shame to ourselves. Hath God set us in this office only to tell others of their faults? Have we not reason to call to remembrance our own faults this day? I hope such as are truly gracious have made this reflection many times. Nor is it my present design to rake in this muddy channel; only it becomes us to inquire why God hath made us contemptible before all the people, Mal. ii. 1—9. My present object is to excite our lamenting after the Lord, that if it be possible we may fetch him again. I may say as the prophet, Mal. i. 9, "And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us. This hath been by your means." O it is well if our people have not reason to say so of their ministers, (howbeit sincere repentance will not make men throw it off themselves by laying it on others,) but we may sadly echo, yes, yes, it hath been by our means, we have put out our candles, by the thief we have lodged therein; we have obscured our glory by

* Josh. vi. 8.

† Zech. xi. 8.

‡ 1 Sam. iii. 13.

sinning; we have robbed our people of the ark, and exposed them to seduction and destruction by the abominations that have been found amongst us. Let us fall earnestly to our work of preaching, reforming, praying, and calling God again; who knows but if we mourn among our people, they may lament also? * Our watery eyes may affect the people's hard hearts. If the fishers mourn and such as angle at the brooks lament,† our people will be moved, and God will hear our universal cry, and awake for us. Some will needs have our wearing black to import our mourning; if so, let us not be hypocrites, but lament indeed, not merely in show. Some observe, that people are much formed after the preaching, examples, and dispositions of their teachers: but it is to be feared, they will sooner dance after our mirth-stirring pipes, than mourn after our pious elegies: however God forbid the blame or blemish should proceed from us. "For Zion's sake let us not hold our peace, and for Jerusalem's sake let us not rest until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth," Isa. lxii. 1. For God saith, ver. 6, 7, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace, day nor night. Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

6. Magistrates, supreme and subordinate, should lament after the Lord. It is not a work below them, though they may think it a work above us, to remind them of it; but humble persons have been monitors to mighty princes. An inconsiderable page rouseth up Philip, king of Macedon with this admonition, "Remember, sir, you are a man." Daniel's counsel was seasonable (he wisheth it may be acceptable) to the

* Matt. xi. 17.

† Isaiah xix. 8.

Babylonian monarch, to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it might be a lengthening of his tranquillity, Dan. iv. 27. God gives Jeremiah a commission, to say to the king, and to the queen, "Humble yourselves, sit down." * It is not unbecoming the greatest princes to worship at the foot-stool of the King of kings. It is prophesied of the gospel church, that "kings shall be her nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers," Isa. xlix. 23. Yea, saith the Lord, "they shall bow down to thee, with their faces towards the earth," &c. Which is to be understood, not in a literal, Popish sense, of a civil subjection of their power to the proud usurpations of that man of Rome; but a voluntary resignation of all, to the great Jehovah, and our blessed Jesus; an undervaluing of their earthly honours in comparison of spiritual privileges; as Constantine the Great, and Theodosius, each of whom professed he would rather be a member of Christ, than head of the empire. It is not below majesty on earth to lament after the God of heaven. David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah followed the Lord with fears and cares, prayers and tears, and how doth God approve and applaud the tender hearted Josiah? 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27, 28, "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof; and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me," (mark the outward tokens of inward sorrow) "I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord." And when Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, was unruly, God took a course to humble him, and brought him to seek God by earnest prayer, and great humiliation; † but when

* Jer. xiii. 18.

† 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12, 23, 24. ch. xxxvi. 12, 13.

his father Amon, and his son Zedekiah, did not walk in those mournful steps of penitent lamentings after the Lord, God took another course with them, and cut them off. God hath even brought heathen kings upon their knees, to lament after God in the best manner they could; as the king of Nineveh, Jonah iii. 5, 6; and God took it well, ver. 10. Outward humiliation also prevented Ahab's temporal destruction, 1 Kings xxi. 27, 29. And when God threatened Rehoboam by Shishak's invasion, and Shemaiah's commination, the princes of Israel, and the king humbled themselves, and said, "The Lord is righteous," 2 Chron. xii. 6, 7. And God saith, "I will not destroy them, but grant them some deliverance, or deliverance for a little while." Much more, if princes and nobles be sincere in humiliation for sin, and lamentation after the Lord and universal reformation: O what mercy doth the Lord reserve for such! Thus in the days of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, the instances are numerous and pregnant. O that God would stir up the hearts of the governors of his people, to say, "Surely we and our people have provoked the Lord against us." Yea, it is well if our hands have not been chief in the trespass. O that, as we have been exemplary in sinning, we might be exemplary in our repentance; as we have driven God from us and our people, so we might be the first to fetch him back again. God forbid that we should say with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord?" or refuse to let the servants of the Lord go and serve him according to scripture rules, though they may differ from us in some modes of worship. Yea, it is fit the governors of Judah should say in their hearts, "The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be our strength in the Lord of hosts their God."* These,

* Zech. xii. 5.

these are the chariots and horsemen of Israel, as once a king said of a prophet.* God forbid, we governors should arm or animate some protestants against their brethren, while papists are putting us on, and warming themselves by the fire of their own kindling; and when they spy their opportunity, will take advantage of the conflict they have encouraged, and destroy the combatants. Let us rather improve our utmost interest to make them friends; and bespeak their joint prayers for us. And since we need the Lord, and his appointments as well as others, as much as the meanest of our subjects, let us also follow the Lord with bitter cries and lamentations: "The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves."† Why may not we also work hard in digging these sacred wells of ordinances? and then cry out, "Spring up, O well!" and also put on others, saying, "Sing ye unto it?" May not we too pass through this valley of Baca (or weeping) and make a well? the rain filling the pools;‡ and so this valley of Baca, will be a valley of Berachah. || Our speaking comfortably to those laborious Levites that teach the good knowledge of the Lord,§ will reach their hearts, and so we shall bring upon ourselves the blessing of them that were ready to perish. May we not even call them up hither to public worship, and send them to the people in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of peace. We, even we, have need of ordinances as well as others; we have ignorant minds, stubborn wills, strong passions, violent temptations; and of all sorts of persons, nobles are most unwilling to put their necks to the work of the Lord.¶ We have greater hindrances in the way to heaven, and therefore

* 2 Kings xiii. 14. † Numb. xxi. 17, 18. ‡ Psal. lxxxiv. 6.

|| Blessing.

§ 2 Chron. xxx. 22.

¶ Neh. iii. 5.

need better helps than others. Oh ! let it never be said of us, that when the poor are but ignorant souls, foolish, and know not the way of the Lord, that we, the great men, noblemen and gentlemen, that know much indeed, but do less for God, nay more against him, that we should altogether break the yoke, and burst the bonds : * our interest is greater, and influence more upon others, therefore our sin of neglect will be greater, and account heavier. Lord, let us have means of grace, and grace by means : be thou our portion in this, and another world, or of all men we shall be most miserable ; our loss will be more dreadful, our torments more intolerable ; as we read of one of our own degree in sacred writ, who in this world was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, but in the other world was found in hell, and being in torments, was denied one drop of water to cool his tongue. † O Lord ! suffer us not to riot and rant here, and be cast out from thy presence hereafter ; but let us lament after thee now, that we may everlastingly enjoy the manifestations of thy favour.

7. Let christian churches, congregations, and societies lament after the Lord. Our dearest Lord seems to depart from them : oh that once at last we could discern the sad symptoms of his removal ! This is the case in the chapter before us, 1 Sam. vii. 5, “ Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, v. 6. and they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day ;” why they met in Mizpeh, whether because Samuel judged Israel there, or it had an altar or place of prayer, I shall not dispute : ‡ or what this drawing out water was, whether it was the water of trial, or a ceremony used at such solemnities, or water of penitential tears, which is most likely : these tears

* Jer. v. 4, 5. † Luke xvi. 19, 23, 24. ‡ Vid. Poli Syn. Crit. in loc.

running from their eyes, betokened and accompanied their affected and affectionate hearts running after the Lord; one while mourning for the sins that banished him, another laying to heart their loss of him, and with an earnest eager heart breathing in prayer after him: this was their practice, Judg. ii. 1—5. where an angel of the Lord doth reckon up—God's kindnesses to them—their duty to God—their ill requital of God by disobedience—and God's displeasure against them. Upon which the people lift up their voice and wept; and so great was that weeping, that the place received its title from it; they called the name of that place Bochim, that is, the place of weepers; they were baptized in their own tears: Oh! cried they, one to another, brother, neighbour, do not you hear these heavy tidings? God is angry; the Almighty commenceth a suit against us; he hath sent a summons to us, drawn up an indictment against us; who is able to contend with him? We are conscious to ourselves that we are guilty, deeply guilty; we deserve to be forsaken of God, for we have forsaken him; thus they looked at one another with grieved hearts, seeing others weep, they fell a weeping, and cried bitterly with a concordant outcry, Lord, come, come again, leave us not in the hands of these devoted Canaanites, who bear a mortal grudge against us; a bitter and hasty nation, a people cruel and skilful to destroy. Another instance you have in Exod. xxxiii. 1—5, where God chides them, seems to disown them, as if they were not his people, but belonging to Moses; he tells them he will send an angel before them, but he will not go with them, for they are a stiff-necked people. The passage saith, "when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned, and no man put on him his ornaments." Alas! alas! say they, doth God take his leave? Will he depart, and not go with us, but substi-

tute an angel in his room? What can an angel do? Can an angel bear our manners, forgive our sins, and supply our wants? No, no, all the angels in heaven cannot do that for us which we need: an angel of the Lord may do much in opposing and destroying our enemies, and defending us, but we are conscious to ourselves that we are a rebellious people, have a stiff neck that none can break or bow but God; and though it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a sin-avenging judge, yet there is some encouragement if we have in the midst of us a covenanted God; yet, yet, we have hopes thou wilt be a tender-hearted Father. Lord, we follow thee naked,* quite stript of any aid but thine: our late guilt hath made us naked as to defence, and we make ourselves naked as to ornaments, and have no manner of excuse for our wicked conduct; scourge us, O Lord, but forsake us not. We broke off our earrings to make a golden calf, now we put off the rest of our garments, as not being worthy of one rag, and as having forfeited all our mercies: our fine attire shall go, we will strip ourselves in a holy revenge, that having put off our clothes, we may follow the faster after thee with sighs and tears. O that we could also put off our sins with our garments, and so put on the spirit of obedience to thy will.

But this is what I urge, that Christians in their societies and assemblies, do unanimously and socially join together to lament after the Lord. God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him, Psal. lxxxix. 7. Let Christians provoke one another to this regard for God; let them bring motives to quicken; yea, let them hold up one another by mutual supports in this holy pursuit of God with prayers and tears, as iron sharpens

* Exod. xxxii. 25.

iron, so let us sharpen one another, taking each other by the hand; let us every one call his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree;* as Philip found Nathaniel under the fig-tree and told him the joyful tidings of Messiah;† let persons in the same family get together in God's solemn worship, and lament after the Lord; husbands apart, and wives apart;‡ children apart and servants apart, and sometimes all together; let neighbouring families get together, and humble themselves and say, come neighbours, God is gone or going, let us lift up our voices, hands and hearts together, to prevail upon him to return. Alas! we have conversed about our farms, oxen, sheep, and trades together, shall we not at last begin to converse with each other as Christians? We have drank, feasted, played, and been sinfully merry together, and by our sins banished God, and shall we find no time to mourn for our sins and lament after the Lord together? Let villages, towns, and cities gather into assemblies, and christian societies, and do as those mentioned Zech. viii. 21, "The inhabitants of one city shall go to another," not stay till they come to them, "saying," not being mute statues, but lively monitors, "let us go," let us travel to the place of God's solemn worship, "speedily," alas, we have put off such exercises too long, till God is almost past returning, "to pray before the Lord," not to go to such a city, to buy and sell, and get gain, but "to seek the Lord of hosts." Ah! we have lost him, him who is the God of armies, who arms our foes against us. All this shows great zeal for God, and flaming charity to one another, as when men are converted they will draw others to God in his worship, and give a lively example of it in practice.

But it may be objected, that this practice is uncouth,

* Zech. iii. 10. † John i. 45, 48. ‡ Zech. xii. 12.

that this path is untrodden, few it may be said use it in the place where we live, we shall be laughed to scorn for our labour. It is answered ver. 22, "Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before him." God will greatly multiply converts and so take off the scandal of paucity of worshippers; it is not a few giddy-headed, factious spirits, but it is nations, many and strong, nations rich and potent. Gentile converts flock like doves to the windows, not by compact and fraud, but by peculiar operations of the Spirit in the ministry of the word, people of divers languages, at a great distance from one another. The same spirit actuates all gospel worshippers, to make them flock to God in ordinances; yea, warlike nations, and islands afar off, unapproachable or invincible by men, shall be conquered by the gospel; as it is said of Britain, though the Romans could scarce come to it, yet our Lord subdued it:* you need not fear want of good company; your zeal itself may provoke others; one active Christian in a place shall have companions in God's work in due time; and how dost thou know but thou wilt find some spark of goodness in some of thy neighbours that thy invitation may blow up, and draw forth? Try them by a gentle call, and thou mayest find more of God in them than ever thou wast aware of; possibly bashfulness, sense of weakness, want of acquaintance with Christians, and want of a call and opportunity have kept some lights under a bushel, which if brought out of their concealment, and a little snuffed, might shine bright in the church.

But it may be said, alas, I am a person of weak gifts, I cannot take a part in any societies, I can be of no use, but a burden.

* Romanis inaccessa, Christo vero subdita.

In reply I may say, thou needest help so much the more; hence it follows, ver. 23, "That ten men shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew;" like little children that are not able to go of themselves, being afraid to fall, will get hold of the hem of their father's garment, to hold them up, and strengthen them to walk more securely, or to direct them in a way that they have not known. Sincere proselytes will look after the communion of saints. The Apostle mentions fellowship in the gospel from the first day, Phil. i. 5, and there is great advantage from it, for Solomon saith, "two are better than one," Eccl. iv. 9—11, which he illustrates there in several cases, on which I shall not enlarge; but it is certain you may find great help in the communion of saints.

But you ask, how shall I know they are saints, or fit to join with? I may be deceived and misled into by-ways of error.

I answer, we have heard that God was with his apostles by wonderful signs, gifts, and miracles, who were besides distinguished by holiness of conversation; and if there are appearances of God being for a people or among a people, you may safely associate with such as God thinks fit to own, and communicate himself to; when I am convinced from the bright beams of gospel light, and from the powerful influences and convictions of the Spirit, that this is indeed the way of God. I am then resolved to inquire after God in it, and join with them that travel in it heaven-wards.

CHAP. V.

DIRECTIONS AND ASSISTANCE TO FORWARD THE EXERCISE PRACTISED BY ISRAEL.

III. YOU may next be directed to some things which may contribute to your furtherance or assistance in lamenting after the Lord. What course should we take both to perform this duty aright, and to obtain what we lament after, namely, either the God of ordinances, or the ordinances of God?

Here I might repeat what was mentioned in the explication, by way of instruction: as,

1. They were inclined after the Lord. It were well if sinners would but stop their vain career, stand still, pause upon it, bethink themselves, and have a tendency God-wards; this is the first step to repentance, see Jer. viii. 6.

2. Settled after the Lord. Oh that men were assured upon good grounds, that their hearts were well fixed, piously disposed, and devoted to God, as our Saviour, who stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,* or as Paul, Acts xxi. 13.

3. Congregated, gathered, united together, to go hand in hand after the Lord, Zeph. ii. 1, "Gather yourselves together, yea gather together, O nation not desired!" Gather yourselves by mutual accommodation, and sincere repentance, to get under the wing of God, as chickens under the hen, or (as the allusion in that text is) that ye be not as chaff that is dissipated by the wind, verse 2, for there is an affinity in the words; sincere repentance unites to God and his people.

* Luke ix. 51.

† קיש *colligite* a קש *palea*, idest contrahite vos, ne sitis sicut palea.

4. They grieved, being full of sorrow, and complained of themselves in seeking after the Lord, Jer. xxxi. 18, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself:" Oh that I should by my sin forfeit God's presence, and for sin lose it! how miserable am I in this so sad and overwhelming loss!

5. They cried, called after the Lord, by earnest supplication, and expostulation; as it becomes a child to follow his mother with bitter outcries to fetch her back, Jer. xxxi. 9, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them."* That is the best prayer that flows from love, and follows God with grief and tears from a sincere regard for God, without outward constraint, and slavish fear.

6. They betook themselves to the Lord by faith, repentance, and reformation. O what efficacy is in this course! Judg. x. 13, God saith, "I will deliver you no more," but bids them cry unto the gods whom they had chosen, v. 14. For they had cried to the Lord, v. 10, and confessed sin, yet God seems peremptory in denying aid; then they reinforce their confession and supplication, and withal added reformation, v. 16. They put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord, and see the blessed effect, his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel, and he delivers them. No way like this.

7. They acquiesced in the Lord, were fully contented and satisfied with the Lord, both as to the object of worship, and manner of worshipping: and O for such a frame as that! Isa. xxvi. 13, "O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name," that is, by thy precepts, according to thy institutions

* Marg. with favours, (so the word וּבְתַחֲנוּנַיִם signifies from חָנַן misertus, gratificatus est, doluit.)

will we worship thee; our fear towards thee shall be no more taught by the precepts of men;* we will worship thee only in thy own way; and by thee, that is, in thy strength, by the assistance of thy grace, thou alone shalt be the author and object of our love, desire, pleasure and delight. "Ashur shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ye are our gods, for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy," Hos. xiv. 3. These are the duties implied in the text before you, which are required of us all, in this world of sin and sorrow.

But to impress our hearts, and to assist in the due performance of these required duties, I shall propose some considerations in the form of directions, to carry on this work successfully.

1. See to your state and principles; except you be related to God you will not lament after him, nor be much concerned about him, or his ark, whether going or coming. Relation is the foundation of affection. A child will cry after his own father. Now God is not our father since the fall, till regeneration make a real, and adoption a relative change of our state; and when we have received the Spirit of adoption, then and never till then, shall we cry, Abba, Father, Rom. viii. 15. They only will cry after God that love him, fear him, and honour him, as a father, with a filial affection, and they only shall be received by him: O therefore, examine your state God-wards! Hath converting grace under ordinances changed your hearts? Hath the Spirit awakened your consciences, convinced you of your undone state by nature, transformed you by the renewing of your minds, translated you out of darkness into light? deal faithfully with your souls in this case: you come into the world with your backs turned upon

* Isaiah xxix. 13.

God, and you will never lament after him without a turn in another direction. Naturally there is an enmity and antipathy in our hearts to God and his ways. Hath God crushed and conquered that disposition, and planted right principles in you, to incline you to him? if yet you find not a divine nature, a new nature produced in you, flatter not yourselves, you will rather run farther from him, than lament after him. Let your souls be chiefly concerned for this first, then for the rest. Union precedes communion: a real title is antecedent to the laying of a claim: a principle of grace is before an actual exercise of it: there must be life before there can be any desire of, or nutrition by food. I have no hopes of prevailing with unconverted souls to lament after God, till they have life and breath, voice and lungs, except formally, for company, or for carnal purposes, which is insignificant. Oh for grace, truth of grace, and a reality of interest in Christ, and all the privileges he hath purchased.

2. Inform yourselves thoroughly of the terms on which you stand with God. Consider how the Lord acts towards us, as to our individual cases, and the nation in general. We shall never lament after him till we see him withdrawn. Ignorance of the state of things with us keeps persons in a senseless frame. What the eye of body or mind sees not, is never laid to heart: make some observations and reflections on things at this day: make also a comparison betwixt former and present times. What think you? Hath not God manifested himself more in his providences for us, than of late? Have we not reason to take up the church's complaint, Psal. xlv. 1, 9, or to expostulate as Gideon Judg. vi. 13, "O my Lord! if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of?" I have told

you how much restraining grace is withdrawn from many; how rare conversion is by ordinances; how much God hath withdrawn both from the societies and spirits of his servants. I shall not trouble you with repetitions; look over those things, compare them with what you see and observe, and if you find the Lord as formerly, be thankful; if otherwise, be humbled, and lament after him. It is to be feared, that if you be observant, discerning Christians, you will yet find out more than hitherto hath been mentioned, both demonstrations of God's removal, and prognostics of future removes. The most excellent and eminent servants of God are snatched away by death from amongst us, and God saith, "they are taken away from the evil to come," Isa. lvii. 1. The spirit of giddiness, atheism, and idolatry is spreading at a strange rate, beyond all parallel. Other things I might mention, but I leave them to your inquiry: only there is one text which methinks is astonishing, Zech. xi. 8, "Three shepherds also I cut off in one month, and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me." It is one of the saddest words in all the Bible. Whether they were good or bad shepherds, that were cut off, it is dreadful that it had no better effect than mutual abhorrency. Oh that this was not our case! We lie under woful consequences of God's loathing us, and it is well if men do not loath him. A spirit of opposition to godliness is the sad effect of divine dereliction, which produceth greater spiritual and temporal plagues. Hence he adds, verse 9. "Then said I, I will not feed you, that that dieth, let it die, and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off, and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another." They shall have no gospel pastors to feed their souls; that is a spiritual plague which fell on the Jews for rejecting Christ. They shall devour one another with cursed

rage and malice, as in seditions, conspiracies, or in their necessity of food by the terrible famine. Thus the Jews were destroyed in Jerusalem's miserable ruin. The like prognostics are upon us. Lord prevent the same effects, and awake our hearts to use God's appointed means for prevention.

3. Make diligent inquiry into the reason of our present and approaching calamities. Is there not a cause? surely "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground."* Sin is the mother and nurse of sorrow. Is not God bringing our iniquities upon us? Doth not our own wickedness correct us, and our backsliding reprove us?† Doth not this rod say, "Thy ways and thy doings have procured these things unto thee, this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart," or soul, Jer. iv. 18. Let ministers and people, lay their hands on their hearts, and let us search our consciences and conversations? Is it not I that shut out ministers, as the good woman said, I broke my minister's leg. My pride, unteachableness, unprofitableness, formality, neglect of duty, censurings and uncharitableness, sensuality and wordliness, hypocrisy and lukewarmness, vain glory and mindlessness of God's glory and my soul's eternal good; these, these made all the excluding, banishing, fining, imprisoning laws that ever came out against God's servants; these chiefly have broken up all assemblies, scattered meetings, armed all the officers, retarded our deliverance. By our sins are our enemies strong,‡ and the hands of our friends weak. Alas! it is my own iniquity that hath brought us low, put back a good work, banished God, and lift up the right hand of our enemies; nor is it the sins of the profane,

* Job v. 6.

† Jer. ii. 19.

‡ Peccatis nostris fortes sunt barbari.

but of professors, "Of the rock that begat us we have been unmindful, and forgotten God that formed us, therefore, when the Lord saw it he abhorred us, because of the provoking of his sons and of his daughters," Deut. xxxii. 18, 19. Oh our wretched ingratitude, rebellion, and covenant-breaking, our sins have reached to heaven; therefore our judgments are unparalleled. We may say as Dan. ix. 13, "Under the whole heaven hath not been done, as hath been done upon us." It is well if we have not reason to add also ver. 13, "That all this evil is come upon us, yet made we not our prayer,* before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand thy truth." It is true, we have prayed, but it is well if we have so prayed. Is not the accursed thing to be found amongst us to this day? We have been long in the fire, but are we cleansed? Alas, alas, may not that sad complaint and charge be brought against us, Jer. vi. 28—30, "They are grievous revolvers, walking with slanders, brass and iron, they are all corrupters, the bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed of the fire; the foundler melteth in vain, for the wicked are not plucked away, reprobate silver shall men call them because the Lord hath rejected them." O that this were not our case, and that character also given of the same professing people, Jer. ix. 3—7. But I shall leave Christians to this heart-searching work, beseeching, requiring and charging all persons to deal faithfully with their own souls; find out the Achan that troubles the camp, and stone it; cast lots to find the Jonah that raiseth this tempest, cast it overboard, confess, bewail, reform, supplicate pardon of sin, and who knows but we shall have a calm?

4. Endeavour to impress your hearts with a sense

* *Heb.* intreated the face.

of the evil of God's departure from us: otherwise you will not think it worth the while to spend time in lamenting after him. Come to a heart, a house, a society, a congregation, or the nation, and make inquiry, is God there? If it be answered, no, he is gone wholly or partially, what is then left that is good? Surely if God go, all good goes, and all evil comes, 2 Chron. xv. 3—6. "Now for a long season Israel had been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law," whether this was under Jeroboam, and his successors, or at some other time, "and in thosetimes there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries—for God did vex them with all adversity." Mark it, when God goes, all evil comes. They were without the true, pure, public worship of God, and without a standing ministry, to teach publicly, plainly, and powerfully, but had in their places, false prophets, lying Rabbies, or graceless loiterers, and it may be the people loved to have it so. No wonder if they had civil discords, foreign invasions, ecclesiastical dissensions, all things going to wreck; setting up one ruler against another, so joining in parties and factions; using barbarous cruelties, embroiling all in sad contentions, and imbruing their hands in one another's blood. When God goes he breaks down the hedge of his protecting providence, so that the boar out of the wood wastes his vineyard;* then it is eaten up, trodden down, it shall not be pruned nor digged, but there come up briars and thorns;† yea, he commands the clouds that they rain no rain upon it; what then will become of it? Surely the inclosed vineyard of the church soon becomes a wild common of barbarous infidels. When God removes his candles, darkness comes,

* Psal. lxxx. 12, 13.

† Isa. v. 6, 7.

but when he removes candlesticks also,* Mahomet fills up the room. The famous Asiatic churches are a dreadful instance. If the sun sets, night comes on: if the king be absent, what court can be kept? if Christ stay not, where is the church? if God should leave his glorious mansion in heaven, it would instantly become a dark dungeon of hell: yea, if God depart from a people as a friend, he comes against them as a dreadful foe; if he go away he tears as a lion,† he consumes as a moth: if he hide his face, he comes in wrath, and fury to slay them, Jer. xxxiii. 5. Saul was in a woful plight when God was departed from him, and the Philistines were upon him.‡ Yes, if God depart the devil comes. When the good spirit went from Saul, an evil spirit from the Lord troubled and tormented him, 1 Sam. xvi. 14, 23. Satan was from God, as framing his nature, and commissioning him to punish Saul, but his wickedness and malignity in his designs and actings were from himself. O how glad is the devil to take up that room which God leaves! truly then saith the Lord, Hos. ix. 12, "Woe also to them, when I depart from them;" there is a woe of sinning, and suffering which attends God's departure. Whither will not men run when God forsakes them? If the hand withdraw, the staff falls; if the glass without foot be not held up, it falls, and breaks, and the liquor spills; the very best man is no more daily, than as the Lord makes him; Samson, David, and Peter, will fall if God go; much more they that have no hold of God, or God of them in a covenant way, they will not stop till they reach the height of sin and fall into the depth of hell! Hos. ix. 17, "My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken to him." Hos. vii. 13, "Woe unto them, for

* Rev. ii. 5.

† Hos. v. 14.

‡ 1 Sam. xxviii. 15.

they have fled from me, yea destruction to them, because they have transgressed against me: yea, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," 2 Thess. i. 9. Were we kindly affected with all this, we should lament after the Lord. We have reason to tremble, lest it prove our case, and removing his ordinances is a great step to all this; but if we knew what it meant, we should with old Eli have "trembling hearts for the ark of God, 1 Sam. iv. 13.

5. Study the advantages and benefit of having God present with us: as fear of evil is one motive to avoid it, so a desire of the contrary good, adds wings in seeking earnestly for it. When God goes, all good goes. So when God returns or continues with a people, they enjoy all good, inward and outward. The people that have God with them, have a strong guard to defend them, a wise guide to direct them, rich grace to supply them, high honour to advance them, full rest to content them, an abundant reward in the enjoyment of him; they have enough, they need no more. "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord." * Luther's Psalm, that song upon Alamothe, Psalm xlii, is admirable for this; for when the church can say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble," ver. 1, she builds great confidence and comfort on this solid foundation; ver. 2, "Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed," &c. Yea, she stands upon this impregnable rock, triumphing over all dangers and enemies, with this word repeated, ver. 7, 11, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge:" and "if God be for us who can be against us?" Who would not follow after such a God with prayers, tears, groans, and hearty la-

* Psalm. cxlii. ult.

mentations, that he would return to us and continue with us? Oh! who would not have a hand in bringing back the King, such a King as by his presence can make us truly and eternally happy? See what it is to have God with us, Isa. xlii. 13—16. Yea, it becomes every one to study the usefulness of God's ordinances, that their hearts may be engaged to, and enlarged in lamenting after the ordinances of God? Both these are larger subjects than I can prosecute, to explain the advantages coming to a people by the presence of the ordinances of God, or the God of ordinances. You must look on the ordinances as fruits and tokens of God's special favour, for all have not the ordinances of God, Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20, "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments, unto Israel: he hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them." That this sunshine of gospel light is on one place, when not on another, proceeds from a discriminating providence, which sent ambassadors, for the gospel to be brought to it. Surely that is preventing kindness: but when it hath left some impressions on the hearts of men, some myrrh upon the handles of the lock,* such should, yea will lament after him, when he is gone, as the church did: for such have tasted how good the Lord is, and look on the ordinances as their heritage and highest privilege. O that you knew what helps ordinances are, to promote God's work in our hearts, in creating and increasing faith, repentance, love, and new obedience; this is that clear crystal-glass through which we may see the face of God, and be transformed into his image;† that glass in which we may see the face of our souls,‡ and be humbled and ashamed: here you may have your doubts resolved, fears dispersed, hearts satisfied,

* Song v. 5.

† 2 Cor. iii. 18.

‡ James i. 24.

graces quickened, fellowship with God promoted, and your souls prepared for heaven. O that your eyes were opened to see the necessity, excellency, and utility of God's ordinances! I am very confident, that if your souls be as new-born babes, you will have a desire after the sincere milk of the word, having previously tasted that the Lord is gracious, 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3. As for others that want spiritual life and light to discover and feel the marrow of ordinances, no wonder if they slight or despise both the appointments themselves, and such as long for them, and lament the want of them; and therefore I urge this, that you learn by your own experience the sweetness and advantage of enjoying the presence of God in his ordinances.

6. Acquire and maintain a public spirit. O beware of a private selfish spirit, to look only after your own concerns, and worldly interests! This hath been the ruin of the church, and also of particular persons at last, Hag. i. 4, 6, "Is it time for you, O ye! to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? therefore ye have sown much, and bring in little;" as if he had said, you think to secure your personal and domestic comforts with neglect of my concernments, but I will cross you in that which concerns you, because you are heedless in what concerns me. On the contrary, David concerned himself about God's house, and God built his house, 2 Sam. vii. 2, 11. So true is that declaration of our Saviour, whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.* Self-seeking is the way to self-undoing, self-denying is the only way to self-advancing; scripture and experience prove this. Well then, my advice is, that you chiefly mind the interest of our Lord in the world; and lay as great a stress on this in your

* Matt. xvi. 25.

prayers, as if it were your own case; and indeed it is your own; your little boat hangs on the great ship; but all judge not so, therefore there are few lamenters after the Lord: however, if you would look on Zion's case as your own, and so view it as having yours really involved, it would be both a help and a spur in your lamentings. The more gracious persons have been, the more have they forgot themselves to think of the church. Upon me, saith St. Paul, cometh daily the care of all the churches.* Upon Moses lay the burden of all the people.† Uriah will sympathize and consider the circumstances of the ark, and Israel, and Judah in the camp, and not gratify himself with the delights of the city.‡ Nehemiah inquires after, and condoles with his suffering brethren.¶ Look through the bible and you will find this gracious public spirit breathing in all the servants of God, Psal. cxxxvii. 5, 6, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem! let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy;"§ as if he had said, I profess myself to be a member of that mystical body, the church, and how can a member rejoice when the body mourns? If the touching of one string of an instrument make the rest move, how can I forbear a sad echo to the church's mournful elegy? shall not her dewy eyes cause mine eyes to water? how can it go well with me when it goes ill with the church? O that I could set self aside! We have need, saith one, to be redeemed from ourselves rather than from the devil, or world.¶ I should make a sweet bartering, and give old for new, if I could shuffle out self, and substitute Christ my Lord in place

* 2 Cor. xi. 23. † Numb. xi. 11. ‡ 2 Sam. xi. 11.

¶ Neh. i. 2, 4. § *Marg.* The head of my joy.

¶ Mr. Rutherford's Letters, p. 17.

of myself. Oh wretched idol! when shall I see thee entirely withdrawn, and Christ wholly put in thy room? Oh that I had but gone as far now as the heathens Primer!* "We are not born for ourselves;" surely then I should not be so much taken up with my own matters, but think on the church. Alas! what is my danger to Zion's damage? if it go well with Zion it shall comfort my heart, whatever my personal troubles be. But I must hang my harp on the willows, while the church is in captivity. Lord, do good in thy good pleasure to Zion, build thou the walls of Jerusalem;† though my broken bones be not set, or though my heart still keep bleeding.

7. Learn the right art of praying and pleading with the Lord! this lamentation is in the way of supplication; a gracious promise is given, Zech. xii. 10, "I will pour upon the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, princes and people, the spirit of grace and of supplications;" and then follows a great mourning, both in families and in closets. O that this work were set forward! Surely if all the people of England, or only the professing people, would engage in this so needful an occupation, what a mercy would it be! Prayer is needful at all times, in all cases, but much more in such circumstances as ours at present; if any thing bring back a departing God, it must be believing prayer, 2 Chron. vii. 14. "If my people which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." You see the duty; you see the encouragement; prayer is adapted to a distressing state of things, and a mournful dispensation: prayer is the channel of comfort: afflictions prompt us to seek

*. Nobis non nati sumus.

† Psal. li. 18.

out promises, promises to seek faith, faith to seek prayer, prayer to seek and find God. What should God's children do were it not for this privilege of praying? When they cannot preach, and hear, they may pray; when they cannot meet personally together, they may meet at the throne of grace; when they are shut out from petitioning men, they may be admitted to the court of heaven, and the Lord's ears are still open to their cry.* I should think the spirit of prayer to be the best token for good to us; "thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear," Psal. x. 17. Moses besought the Lord, and the Lord seems as if restricted by his prayer; let me alone, saith God.† The people here entreat Samuel not to cease to cry to the Lord for them;‡ and he did pray, and you see the issue. Oh that we could not only pray, but lift up a prayer for the remnant that is left!|| If God return to us, it must be upon the wings of such an elevated prayer. When Sennacherib had sent Rabshakeh to blaspheme God, the scripture account saith, for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amos, prayed, and cried to heaven.§ For this cause: if any thing will stimulate God's children to pray, surely it will be the dishonour of their Father; they would not answer them, but complain to God; this was then, and is still, the most effectual course to speed. When Nehemiah was to make request to a great king, he saith, then prayed I to the God of heaven.¶ It was an ejaculatory prayer, for he spoke it not, yet it was effectual; he thought if by prayer he could move the main wheel, all the rest would move. This is the way to set to work all second causes. Indeed we have no other means in prospect: let us betake ourselves to this spi-

* Psal. xxxiv. 15.

† Exod. xxxii. 10, 11.

‡ 1 Sam. vii. 3.

|| 2 Kings xix. 4.

§ 2 Chron. xxxii. 19, 20.

¶ Neh. ii. 4.

ritual armour, for prayers and tears are the church's weapons, Eph. vi. 18, 19, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication, in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel." This is our case, we beg our people's prayers for our restoration. Oh that ministers and people could strive (or be in an agony) together in their mutual prayers to God for each other!*

If you could pray more and better, we should come the sooner, and with a greater blessing, even in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ;† and for your encouragement to pray for us, we hope we can truly say as the Apostle, Heb. xiii. 18, "Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." Though we suffer as evil doers, and are reproached as factious, seditious, and schismatical; as Paul was accounted an apostate and an enemy to the law; but we conduct ourselves as subjects, as ministers, living orderly in our places, giving none offence, so that none can challenge us in any thing save in the matters of our God, and in that they must excuse us, if we cannot in all things see with their eyes, nor swallow down such oaths and subscriptions as some dare whom we judge not, but are afraid of nothing so much as sin; and as for our preaching to you, though prohibited by men, we are under obligation to preach as our duty, for woe to us if we preach not the gospel. Zeal for God's glory, and love to your souls, expose us to all these censures and oppositions: it is for your sakes that we bear all these affronts, and will not you pray for us? Surely yourselves are concerned in our work; we are content to endure all for the gospel's

* Rom. xv. 30.

† Rom. xv. 29.

sake ; we ask nothing of you but your reception of our message and prayers for our persons ; we spend our time, and strength, and lungs for you, and will not you pray for us ? If God help us, will not this turn to your advantage ? Your prayers will return into your own bosoms. We have been serving almost three apprenticeships in our divorcement from public places and employments, yet our God hath not forsaken us, but secured our persons, and some liberties ; he hath delivered us, doth, and will deliver us, 2 Cor. i. 10—12, “ You also helping together in prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf ; for our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience,” &c. Having obtained help of God, we continue to this day at great uncertainties ; as Melancthon said,* so we may say, we have continued by divine bounty and care of us twenty years, and could never say assuredly, nor upon any probable grounds, that we should abide one week to an end : much of this may be ascribed to the effectual prayers of the church, as a means under God. Who can tell but in a short time your prayers may fetch us back again : howsoever, we are persuaded that these things shall turn to our and your salvation, through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, Phil. i. 19 : only see that your prayers be such as God will accept. I cannot enlarge on this point, but shall glance at the due qualifications of such a prayer as will undoubtedly prevail.

1. Your persons must be in covenant, John ix. 31.

2. You must exercise faith upon the mediator Christ, John xvi. 23.

* Ego jam sum hic, Dei beneficio, quadraginta annos, et nunquam potui dicere, aut certus esse, me per unam septimanam mansurum esse.—*Melch. Adam, vit. Melanct. p. 357.*

3. You must pray in the Holy Ghost, Jude, 20.
4. Ask what is according to God's will, 1 John v. 14.
5. Aim at God's glory as your main end, 1 Cor. x. 31.
6. Cast away all sin in heart and life, Psal. lxxvi. 18.
7. Live in the daily exercise of repentance, Heb. x. 22.
8. Maintain a holy awe of God in your hearts, Psal. ii. 11.
9. Set your hearts in order for the duty, Job. xi. 13.
10. Pray with understanding, minding the object, 1 Cor. xiv. 15.
11. With fervency and importunity, Luke xi. 8, 9.
12. Forgiving others that have offended you, Mark xi. 25.
13. Watching against temptations, Col. iv. 2.
14. Living up to your prayers, John xv. 7.
15. Maintaining communion with God, Luke ii. 37.
16. Coming with hopes to succeed, James i. 6.
17. Be sincere as to frames and intentions, Matt. vi. 5, 6.
18. Be daily sensible of wants and weaknesses, Matt. v. 6.
19. Wait patiently for returns of prayer, Psal. v. 3.
20. Be thankful for any incomes after prayer, Phil. iv. 6, 7.

Such dispositions as these you must have and bring into your exercises in the duty of prayer, and then you shall prevail for yourselves and others. This is the third general head.

CHAP. VI.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERSEVERANCE IN LAMENTING AFTER THE LORD.

IV. THE last thing at which I shall briefly aim, is to suggest some considerations which may serve as cordials to support and bear up our hearts till our souls find our dear Lord, or he turn again to us, in our lamentations after him.

1. Souls lamenting after the Lord are most likely to be the remnant who shall escape in approaching calamities : these have the mourner's mark on them, and ordinarily are left, Ezek. ix. 4, 6 ; and Ezek. vii. 16, " But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning every one for their iniquity." If land-destroying calamities come, you are likeliest to survive and be a holy seed, for storing the church in future times.

2. You may be the instruments to prevail with the Lord to keep in the midst of us : yet there is a possibility ; " Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him ? " Joel ii. v. 14. There is yet a may-be in it, Amos v. 15, " Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate ; it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph." God hath condescended to hearken to his people's supplications, why not to yours ? The poor wise man hath delivered the city : * the innocent may deliver the island. † Lot succeeded for Zoar, Abraham for Lot, yea, very far for the cities of the plain. Make a trial ; and what com-

* Eccl. ix. 15.

† Job xxii. 30.

fort will it be to you, if your prayers in the tone of lamentation turn the scales for God's stay with us !

3. However, you may stay him with your own souls ; is that nothing ? God is as willing to be friendly with us, as we can be to desire it, and much more, Isa. xxvii. 5, "Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me ; and he shall make peace with me ;" and is this nothing ? Oh what is God's presence worth ? How have David, Job, Heman, and all the saints prized it ? Do you not want it ? "Follow on to know," and own and acknowledge, "the Lord, and you shall find his going forth is prepared as the morning, and he will come to you as the rain," Hos. vi. 3. Your fleece shall be wet when others are dry. If you cannot obtain mercy for others, yet as Noah, Daniel and Job, you may deliver your own souls by your righteousness.*

4. Yet the Lord hath not forsaken us ; he is still in the midst of us by his gracious providences and influences ; he hath been hitherto prevailed with, though he has threatened to leave us, and we had cause to fear the event ; his candlesticks are fixed, and candles are shining, though not all in their proper sockets, but under a bushel : this is an encouraging mercy, that our God hath not forsaken us. "Even now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage," Ezra ix. 8, 9. It was not our deservings that hath kept him with us ; no, no, "Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel," Jer. li. 5. What is the reason then that God is not quite gone ? See 1 Sam. xii. 22,

* Ezek. xiv. 14.

“The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake, because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people.” The argument holds for us, and it is still in force; blessed be God he hath not cast us off as yet, and the covenant with our ancestors still holds good, as in 2 Kings xiii. 23.

5. God seems to be in suspense whether he should leave us or not, to draw us on in our lamentings after him; just as he expresseth himself, Hos. xi. 8, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim?” Strange language as spoken by the infinitely wise and immutable God; as though he were perplexed and knew not what to do. Surely this is spoken after the manner of men, and speaks God loth to punish, for indeed it is his strange work; as if he had said, the severity of my threats call on truth to carry them into execution, but how shall I prevail with myself to do it? * The glory of my name, my free grace, and constant love to my covenanted people, arrest my wrathful hand when ready to strike the fatal stroke—the righteousness of the judge saith, strike; the bowels of a father say, hold; and when God thus deliberates, it is to stay and see if his people will get hold of him, by faith and prayer; is not this his carriage towards us in his providence? certainly the Lord comes and goes as if he were loth to punish us, and is not this a very great encouragement to us to lament after him? Since he looks back as a mother to her child, with a wishful eye, as if he had not the power to go, as if he should say, call me back and you shall have my presence, my heart is towards you, though I am forced to turn my back on you,

* Sed quomodo hoc á me impetrabo?

you shall have me with you if you will lament evangelically after me.

6. You have good company in your exercise, though there be too, too many vile atheists and libertine wretches that say to God, "depart from us, cause the Holy One to cease from the midst of us;" yet there are mourners in Zion who are very importunately crying and lamenting after the Lord, with all their might seeking to fetch back the ark; though they be few comparatively, and though despised, and possibly hid in corners, and as little taken notice of as those seven thousand in Elijah's days, that had not bowed their knee to Baal.* But God searcheth out such retired worshippers, that pray, and complain to their Father in secret, and he will reward and answer them openly, with what concerns more than themselves. Oh! it is good to be of the number of these hidden ones! How blessed a thing is it to combine interests with this lovely society? There is a communion of saints in prayer, though unknown to one another. And I can say it, for your encouragement, O ye praying, mourning souls, that you are not alone, God hath thousands in these nations that have been hard at it many years, and present circumstances do quicken their cries. Our danger increaseth our pains, and those advance our cries; be not discouraged, you have many assistants. A threefold cord is not easily broken; God hath some children to cry after him from all parts of the kingdom, and though many of the old stock of weeping souls are worn out, yet some wrestling young ones are planted in their room, some begotten in the bonds of the gospel, for the word of God is not bound, though ambassadors be. Zion hath been built in this troublous

* 1 Kings xix. 18.

time. And I think it may be truly said, that as the ark hath more visible followers, so more sincere lamenters after it, than when it was taken out of its public station ; as Tertullian of old said, so it must be acknowledged that the more God's field is cut, the more grass springs up.

7. God hath a dear and tender regard for such as lament after him for the ark's sake, and will do them good upon that very account ; Psal. cxxii. 6, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee ;" they shall not only prosper and prevail for Jerusalem, but God will prosper them in other respects, in their graces, in comforts, yea oft in worldly concerns. A public spirit is a personal gainer ; God never suffers such to be losers by him, that deny themselves for him, Zeph. iii. 18, "I will gather them that are sorrowful, for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden." Such as study God's interest, have the Lord to study their interest. If we put our shoulder to bear his burden, he will bear both us and ours.* "Consider now," saith God, "from this day and upward from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it, from this day will I bless you," Hag. ii. 18, 19. How much doth God value and how fully doth he reward an esteem for his worship ? God builds their houses that have but a good will to build his house ; as in David's case. Thus our Lord bids us prove him by our obedience and see if he will not open the windows of heaven, and pour down a blessing, Mal. iii. 10—12. Who would not then own and lay Zion's cause to heart ?

8. The ark and ordinances when lamented over in their absence will be the sweetest and most profitable

* Psalm lv. 22.

when returned and enjoyed. None will so gladly welcome the ark, and improve its return as they that most deeply laid to heart its removal. Such, like those who have appetites, will not come with indifference to this soul-refreshing food; a thirsty person will prize and be glad of a little water; David never so eagerly longed for God's presence and ordinances, as when he was in a dry and thirsty land, where no water was; Psal. lxiii. 1. "The full soul loaths the honey comb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet."* O what pantings! as the hart chased panteth for water brooks; you will gain more by a day's preaching then, than formerly in many days.

9. Souls that lament after the Lord shall enjoy him without medium or means at last. In heaven you will need no ordinances; Rev. xxi. 22, "I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb, are the temple of it;" for you shall see his face immediately, and no more through a glass darkly; yea you shall see him as he is,† which cannot but felicitate souls perfectly, therefore it is called the Beatifical Vision. O what a day will that be! You shall not then need to fear any disturbance from men or devils, but his servants shall serve him, and his name shall be on their foreheads; there is no more skulking into corners, nor meeting in the night for fear of men's laws, and persecution. Yea the more you have lamented after the Lord and his ark, the more shall you increase your joy in the Lord. The more your sorrows abound, the more will your comfort abound. The lower the ebb, the higher the tide. You that loved Jerusalem, shall be glad with her, yea, you shall rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourned for her, Isa. lxvi. 10

* Prov. xxvii. 7. Psal. xlii. 1.

† Rev. xxii. iv. 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 1 John iii. 2.

10. In the mean time God himself will supply the want of ordinances; the great God will be a little sanctuary when in want of other means of worship;* he himself will supply that defect. David could encourage himself in the Lord his God;† Habakkuk rejoiced in the Lord, when destitute of outward comfort, and even in the absence of external privileges.‡ What want you from ordinances, that the all-sufficient God cannot supply you with? light, love, warmth, strength, solution of doubts, satisfaction of your hearts; God is all in all, and all without all these helps. O friends! though you may not chuse to be without the means of grace, because they are God's instituted ways of conveying himself to us here, yet you must be content to be without them, when providence cuts you short of them, and say in this case as holy David, with which I shall conclude this subject, 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26, "Carry back the ark of God into the city, if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."

* Ezek. xi. 16.

† 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

‡ Hab. iii. 16—18.