

THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY;
OR,
A Discourse
ON THE
GATHERING OF ALL SAINTS TO CHRIST,
COMPRISING SOME
MEDITATIONS UPON II. THESS. II. 1.

TO THE
CHRISTIAN READER.

NEXT to the immediate enjoyment of God, which is the summit of a gracious soul's felicity, it is no doubt an adventitious comfort to the children of God, that they shall meet with all the holy souls in heaven, of whom they have heard, and with whom they have enjoyed sweet communion in this lower world. What a transport of love was there in the case of the affectionate Jonathan and his beloved David, on their mutual embraces when they "kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded!" 1 Sam. xx. 41. Who can read that passage without emotion! But O, with what raptures of transcendent joy will those holy souls be filled, upon their meeting in heaven! Where briny tears shall be wiped from their weeping eyes, and sin and sorrow shall flee away! Such joy would swell their hearts and extinguish life, (as the father died for joy on his two sons coming off victors in the Olympic games) did not Almighty grace capacitate and strengthen them. When they told Jacob that Joseph was yet alive, "Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not," but when he saw the waggons sent to carry him, "the spirit of Jacob revived."* O but what full demonstrations both of the certainty and exalted nature of the felicity of our pious friends, will there be in glory! No hesitation will remain whether it be so, no bitter ingredients to allay this joy. How will these pure streams mingle and recur with ecstasy to all eternity! The once tender-hearted mother will turn her desires into delight, and say, "What, my son! and what, the son of my womb! and what, the son of my vows!"† Thou art welcome hither, now my tormenting anxieties are turned into triumphant songs. What

* Gen. xlv. 26, 27.

† Prov. xxxi. 2.

sweet solace will the godly husband and gracious wife find in each other ! Once “ heirs together of the grace of life,”* now full possessors of the life of glory. The pious christian friends that “ walked to the house of God in company, and took sweet counsel together,” are now “ abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God’s house, and drink of the rivers of pleasures ;”† yea, bathe themselves in an ocean of delights. Surely it will be no small accession to their joy to meet their old friends, relations, and companions there, never to part more. If Archimedes was so transported with finding out a mathematical conclusion, that he cried out *εὕρηκα, εὕρηκα*, I have found it, I have found it, much more will the glorified saint be exceedingly elated, when after all his pains and fears, he can say, I have found my beloved, and all my christian friends before the throne ! O happy day, O transporting sight ! To behold the Sun of Righteousness in all his glory, and those radiant stars glittering in that upper firmament ; this indeed will surprise the soul with astonishment. The reading of the incomparable writings of eminent ministers, hath been often a great refreshment to studious and serious minds. Heinsius, the learned librarian of Leyden, professed, that when he had shut up himself among so many illustrious authors, he seemed to sit down there as in the very lap of eternity, and pitied rich worldlings who were strangers to his delights. But O how elevated in the scale of being are the spirits of just men made perfect ! What pleasure will they take in the graces and happiness of each other ! If David could say of Jonathan, “ very pleasant hast thou been unto me ; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women,”‡ O what love and delight will there be in heaven, the proper element of love, where souls will be filled with God, and delight in his image shining in all the saints !

It is certain, that all the real saints that have died since the world began, are taken up into heaven and enjoy God and each other ; but whether the saints departed were previously participants of that glory which they have had since Christ’s ascension into heaven, is doubted by some, indeed the contrary asserted,||

* 1 Pet. iii. 7. † Psalm lv. 14. xxxvi. 8. ‡ 2 Sam. i. 26.

|| Dr. Owen’s *Christolog.* p. 158.

which I dispute not; nay, I am apt to think, every glorified soul loosed from the flesh, will be some addition to the joy of the glorified above. O what acclamations of joy will every soul landing safely in glory, occasion to the celestial inhabitants! Well met, brethren, after a tedious, dangerous voyage, in this haven of rest; glad, full glad are we that you are got safe. And whether the saints successively going off the stage of this world, inform them above of the state of the church below, I have not to say; but as there is no grief there, or causes of sorrow, so there are multitudes of objects and occasions of joy and triumph—the grand source of felicity, the place, the company, the duration—all afford occasions of delightful enjoyment, matter of comfort: and why may we not think their reflections upon their former state in this lower world, will contribute something to their happiness; yea, and their communicating experiences one to another in that blessed state. If any doubt, whether glorified souls will have such mutual, intelligible intercourse with each other, for satisfaction, let them read the excellent discourse of that valuable man Mr. John Flavel, called, *Πνευματολογία*, or a treatise “On the Soul of Man,” 274—281, where you will find an answer to the objection of their wanting the organs and instruments of speech and hearing: “Surely,” he saith, “the spirits of just men are not mutes; such an august assembly of holy and excellent spirits, do not live together in their Father’s house, without mutual converse and fellowship with each other as well as with God.” The great question is, how their intercourse is conducted? and he affirms out of Zanchy, “that it is but turning the key of the will, and their thoughts and desires are presently seen and known by others to whom they would discover them, as a man’s face is seen in a glass, when he pleaseth to turn his face to it. Would one spirit make known his mind to another? it is but to will he should know it, and it is immediately known; and this internal way of speaking, is more noble, perfect, and excellent than by words and signs, both in respect of clearness, and also of despatch and speed.” See both explained in the passage just now quoted.

This is the language of spirits, called the tongue of angels, 1 Cor. xiii. 1; but after the resurrection, when bodies are

united to souls, possibly there may be the use of bodily organs, howbeit in a more excellent way than now there can; yet in the glorified state, the joy of the soul shall be shared with the body. The best pleasure however is, that of the soul. Spiritual delights are far more refined and exalted than sensual; immediately after a gracious soul is parted from the body, it attains to a perfection of knowledge with more ease than it could attain to a small degree of knowledge whilst in the body. Yet it is questioned whether the glorified soul shall have an increase of knowledge, which certainly would be an addition to its happiness; for, the soul being a finite being, cannot at once attain a comprehensive knowledge of God, but what is enjoyed will be beatific. O what an emphasis is in that word, “seeing God face to face, and seeing him as he is!”* who now can tell what it means? It is true, the happiness of saints lies in “being ever with the Lord,” and God’s being “all in all” to them:† but their mutual delight in one another will be a blessed circumstance of their felicity.

Whilst I was musing on a great number of believers having breathed their last, ministers and Christians, formerly and lately, known and unknown, whom I shall now never see in this world, I began to consider what is become of them: surely they are not lost but preserved, when shall we meet again? where shall we meet? in what place or condition? I am assured by divine revelation, that the souls of believers do immediately pass into glory, and as our Lord saith to the penitent dying thief, “to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise,” so he saith of the soul of Lazarus, “that he was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom;”‡ there only saints are, there all departed saints are, it is a place and state proper for saints only, yet common to all the saints, not one excluded, we need not fear want of good company, yet it is not the company of fellow saints that will make us happy, and as one saith, “Though the strings receive not their sound and virtues from each other, yet their concurrence causeth that harmony which could not be by one alone; for all the lines may be drawn from the centre, and not from each other, and yet their collocation make them more comely

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 1 John iii. 2. † 1 Thess. iv. 17. 1 Cor. xv. 28.

‡ Luke xxiii. 43. xvi. 22.

than one alone could be.”* But in this, caution is necessary, that we give Christ his prerogative, and ascribe not too much to men, to expect that from them which is not in them; survivors are too prone to this idolatry, as popery testifies: but in heaven our affections will be regular, God will have his due, and saints theirs; we shall behold God in his saints. All the glory will redound to God, for what God’s children have been and then are; “when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day.”† O what a happy, honourable, triumphant assembly will that be! The contemplation I have had on this day and state, hath extorted from me these meditations, which have been very delightful to me in transcribing; and I shall pray that they may be profitable to the reader, and that we may land safe in that blessed haven, where so many of our pious friends and relations have arrived, that we may rejoice and sing together the song of Moses and the Lamb for ever; which is the prayer and care of

Thy faithful friend and monitor,

Sept. 22nd, 1698.

O. HEYWOOD.

* Mr. Baxter’s *Saints’ Rest*, Part, I. p. 97.

† 2 Thess. i. 10.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

2 THESS. II. 1.

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him.

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

THAT Jesus Christ will come down from heaven to judge the world, is an article of our faith, commonly believed among professed Christians: but there have been useless, endless disputes about the time of his coming. One would think, however, that what our Lord saith Matt. xxiv. 36, should silence men's curious inquiries and presumptuous assertions concerning this secret, for he saith, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only;" no, nor Christ himself as man.* No, say they, the day and hour cannot be known, but the year may. But that is a poor evasion, for by day and hour is meant the time; and if Christ know not, no wonder if he foretold it not to his disciples: for wise reasons it is concealed, and especially that we may be always ready. Grotius indeed saith, that Paul thought the

* Mark xiii. 32.

coming of Christ would be in his days, yet you see in the passage to which I have referred, and the context, and also in the chapter before us, that it would not be till certain signs foretold should come to pass, and after that, Christians were still to expect it as uncertain. Ignorance of it is needful, but error about it is hurtful; let us study what tends to practice.

In the text, the blessed apostle doth earnestly beseech them by all that is dear unto them, that no pretence either of spirit, word, or apostolical letter, do persuade them that Christ's coming is near at hand, for fear of tormenting their minds, or staggering their faith when they should find it otherwise. What those preceding signs are, see Baxter's Paraphrase on this chapter.

All that I shall do is, to take notice of this solemn appeal or obtestation in this text, wherein he adjures them : first, by the coming of our Lord ; secondly, by our gathering together unto him.

It is a sacred and solemn oath, like that in 1 Cor. xv. 31, " I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily : " so here, it is as if he should say, as you have a high and honourable regard for Jesus Christ himself, and as you have a great concern, and make due preparation for the coming of Christ, by which he will gather us all to himself, and actually perfect the unity of his mystical body, both which are represented as proper objects of faith, which we admire and expect and highly esteem ; I do again beseech you by these, be not too credulous of men's predictions, who assign that day to this or that time as they fancy ; sometimes preposterously hastening it, other whiles procrastinating it, to a vast distance. I must tell you, saith Paul, these conceits are scattered by Satan's artifice ; and it becomes a dangerous figment or invention of men's brains, for if it come not to pass,

some languish in their faith, others grow presumptuous in their security. If the devil prevail thus far, he will so work, that he will leave nothing sure or fixed in matters of religion,* as Calvin saith on this text; yea, by this means men loosen the cords, and break the bands that join together the articles of our faith, and even strike at the foundation article of the resurrection.

Observation 1. Ministers must beseech.

As they may command in their master's name, so as servants they must beseech all the faithful,† 1 Thess. iv. 1, "We beseech you and exhort you;" ἐρωτώμεν, we humbly and earnestly desire you, as if we went down on our knees to you: hence 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8, "We were gentle among you even as a nurse cherisheth her children." Our business is important, sinners are obdurate, we have great need to use the most obliging terms, as though God did beseech sinners by us, "to pray them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God," 2 Cor. v. 20.

Obs. 2. All God's servants are brethren.

Be they high or low, rich or poor, the most eminent apostles or meanest, yea, weakest believers, they are brethren, they have all one father, God, one elder brother, Christ, one holy Spirit that animates them all, one covenant of grace to include them, one heavenly inheritance of which they are heirs. Hence the apostle saith, Col. i. 2, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ." O what an endearing relation is this! let us live up to it.

Obs. 3. Christ will certainly come to judgment.

It is certain this Nobleman is gone into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return to reckon with his servants, Luke xix. 12—27. Christ's

* Ut nihil in religione certum aut fixum reliquerit.

† 1 Thess. v. 12.

coming to judge the Jews, was the image and earnest of his last coming,* described 1 Thess. iv. 15—17.

Obs. 4. The coming of Christ is a most endearing consideration to believers.

This is to the Christian as the harvest is to the husbandman, James v. 7, 8, “Be ye also patient,” saith the apostle, “stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” O what a glorious morning will that be, when the Sun of Righteousness will shine once again with healing in his wings! Then let the heirs of glory “lift up their heads, for the day of their redemption draws nigh.”† You cannot entreat them by more strong and obliging obtestations or arguments.

Obs. 5. Though Christ’s coming be sure to the saints and certain in itself, yet the time is uncertain to us.

Our Lord saith to his inquisitive disciples, Acts i. 6, 7, “It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power:” hence he saith, Matt. xxiv, 42, 44, “Watch, therefore, be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” This is a key that the wise God retains under his girdle; he keeps this secret among the mysteries of his glorious empire; let us be content with a wise ignorance here.

Obs. 6. Bold comments upon dark prophecies are apt to shake men’s minds.

If sudden approach be foretold and it prove not so, men are tempted to believe nothing, though this is unreasonable that men will not believe what God saith, because what men say prove falsities; but many confident expositors will needs thrust their comment into the text; yet, a judicious Christian must distinguish, there may be great commotions, yet no immediate presages of a conclusion, Mark xiii. 7.

* Imago et arrhabo adventus ultimi.

† Luke xxi. 28.

Obs. 7. That at Christ's second coming, there will be a great gathering together of saints to him.

All the elect shall be gathered into one Ἐπισυναγωγῆς, aggregation or congregation, a mighty solemn meeting. Ἐπ' αὐτὸν or πρὸς αὐτὸν, James ii. 2; which some interpret of free liberty to meet to worship God in this world after their dispersion by persecution, which was forbidden by Pagan emperors, but granted by Constantine's edicts, thus Grotius and Hammond—but this is forced, there is a greater congregation at Christ's second coming.

The apostle, Heb. xii. 22, 23, mentions an “innumerable company of angels, and a general assembly, and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” I shall say little of the angels, though God hath by Christ united them to the church, so the apostle tells us, Eph. i. 10, “That he hath gathered together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him.” The angels of themselves are but creatures, and therefore changeable, so the word שַׂנַּאֲן, employed to signify angels, signifies mutable, Psal. lxxviii. 17; but receive confirmation by Christ, though not reconciliation; so that now they leave not their stations as did the apostate angels. But whether angels stand by Christ's mediation, or by God's election, (therefore called elect angels) I determine not. But I am now to treat of converted souls, which then shall be united in one body; that will be a wonderful amphitheatre, an astonishing sight when all the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and confessors shall be brought forth into open view, and shall be advanced to those celestial mansions with the highest acclamations.

In discoursing upon this pleasant subject, I shall consider the following things:—

- I. The mode and period of the saints being gathered.
 - II. What is implied in gathering this assembly.
 - III. For what purposes they are gathered.
 - IV. In what light they are regarded when gathered to Christ, and the reasons of their being assembled.
 - V. What improvement may be made of it.
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CHAP. II.

ON THE MODE AND PERIOD OF THE SAINTS BEING GATHERED.

BEFORE I proceed to the consideration of these particulars, I shall briefly explain the import of this term, and its allusions.

1. It alludes to a hospitable person taking in wanderers to lodge them, and kindly entertain them; so the word is used, Matt. xxv. 35, “I was a stranger and ye took me in,” *ξένος ἦμην καὶ συνηγάγετε με*, ye gathered me. Alas, God’s children are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, Heb. xi. 13; as men oft cast them out, and “they wander about in sheep skins and goat skins, in deserts, mountains, dens, and caves of the earth,” ver. 37, 38; but their gracious Father takes them in and provides them house and home, “a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens;”* Lazarus at the rich man’s gates is taken up into Abraham’s bosom, a better lodging than the rich man’s stateliest chamber; thus God gathers them.

2. It alludes to a man’s gathering a rich treasure together, gold, silver, or precious stones, as David

* 2 Cor. v. 1.

gathered a prodigious treasure for building the temple, “three thousand talents of gold, seven thousand talents of refined silver, all manner of precious stones,” 1 Chron. xxix. 2—4. Solomon gathered silver and gold, and the peculiar treasures of kings. But what are all these to God’s treasure? which too he calls his peculiar treasure, more worth than both the Indies.* These God hath his time and way to gather up, Matt. iii. 17, “They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I make up my jewels.” God’s jewels lie loose and scattered, but he will string them, and lay them up safe with himself in heaven.

3. This word alludes to congregating together, as in a synagogue for religious acts, a holy religious meeting, “He hath built us a synagogue,” said the Jews, that is, for religious worship, so the Hebrew word *עדה* imports a religious meeting. And we read of a synagogue of the Libertines,† but this assembly of saints may be called the synagogue or the congregation of licentiates, or highest graduates in divinity, that have in some sense commenced *per saltum*, and have ascended out of the church below, into the church triumphant above, being highly preferred by their blessed master.

4. The word imports a meeting in an honourable council, above an ordinary assembly, Matt. xxvi. 3, “Then assembled together the chief priests, and scribes, and elders,” &c. these were the Sanhedrim and sat as judges upon causes criminal and capital, *συνάγεσθαι*, it signifies not a vulgar, or a common meeting, but a convention of states, to sit upon life and death; and though that was a wicked meeting to condemn the Son of God, yet this glorious assembly of saints shall be

* Laying up in store, Isa. xxxix. 6. Eccl. ii. 8. Exod. xix. 5.

† Luke vii. 5. Acts vi. 9.

convened to be assessors with Christ to judge their judges, 1 Cor. vi. 2, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world, yea, angels." All the saints of God are kings and princes in all the earth.* O what an honourable jury will there be to applaud the sacred decisions of our Lord!

After having given the meaning of the word, I proceed,

I. To show the mode in which, and the time when the saints are and shall be gathered; how this gathering together is managed, or how the saints come to be gathered together, and when.

1. Converting grace gathers sinners out of the world to God. This is initial and preparatory; the word in Eph. i. 10, "Gathering together in one," ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι, is very emphatical, it signifies to recapitulate, or re-collect, or reduce all to a head; it implies that mankind by sin are separated from God, disjointed one from another, the members scattered, just like an old ruinous house that is fallen; all the pieces thereof are gone asunder, till the workman come and put them together, and rear up a stately fabric of the old materials. Man hath not lost the faculties of his soul by the fall, but its rectitude. All the imaginations of man's heart are become evil; he hath banished himself from God into a foreign country. In a natural sense, "God is not far from every one of us;"† but in a moral sense, God and unconverted sinners are at a great distance, they are "far off, alienated from the life of God," but grace brings sinners from their wanderings. The Spirit through the word unites them with a blessed cement in an efficacious manner, so that

* Rev. i. 6. Psalm xlv. 16.

† Gen. vi. 5. iii. 8. Luke xv. 13. Acts xvii. 27.

“he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit:”* and the blood of Christ unites God and the soul meritoriously. O blessed conjunction, O happy meeting! God hath found out a way in the gospel, “to gather together the outcasts of Israel.” Alas, we are all as sheep going astray, but our “Lord gathers the lambs into his arms,” and brings them into his fold; Jews and Gentiles make one fold;† for saith the apostle Paul, “ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,” Gal. iii. 26. Faith makes a mystical, love a moral union; Eph. iv. 15, “But speaking the truth in love,” or teaching it in love, “may grow up into him in all things, which is the head even Christ.” O this, this is the foundation of all the rest; conversion is the first collection.

2. God gathers his saints by death to himself. It is said of Abraham, that he should “be gathered to his fathers in peace,” Gen. xv. 15; and “he was gathered to his people,” Gen. xxv. 8. Interpreters observe that this is usually applied in scripture to good men, with respect to the soul, that they go to their pious progenitors, and because this is applied to Ishmael, therefore the Jews think he was a penitent; but however, the phrase is applied most ordinarily to good men, as Jacob, and Aaron, and Moses; of Josiah‡ it is said, 2 Kings xxii, 20, “I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace.” It is true, he died in battle, but in peace with God, and was translated into everlasting peace along with the saints; this is the way of divine providence to carry his children through a tempestuous sea into an haven

* Eph. ii. 13. iv. 18. 1 Cor. vi. 17.

† Eph. ii. 13, 22. Isa. lvi. 8. xl. 11. John x. 16.

‡ Gen. xxv. 17. xlix. 29. Numb. xx. 24. xxvii. 13.

of rest ; they shall not always be tormented with Satan's temptations, the world's opposition, or their own corruptions, but when they have done their work here in this weary world, "they shall enter into peace, they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness," Isa. lvii. 2. O blessed change, God gives them repose after the troubles of this weary pilgrimage, "they rest from their labours ;" their bodies sleep in Jesus, and are safe in a quiet repository, and their souls do enter into paradise, that is, the third heaven, the immediate presence of God.* As earth is the common mother of all, so heaven is the receptacle of all believers.

3. God gathers them up out of their graves by the resurrection of their bodies, and the reunion of their souls to those self-same bodies. This was a doctrine believed and well digested under the old testament, Job xix. 25—27, "Though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God ; thy dead men shall live," saith Isaiah, chap. xxvi. 19, "together with my dead body shall they arise." The new testament doth abundantly confirm this great article of our faith, John v. 28, 29. 1 Cor. xv. 20, &c. O what an army of saints will start up out of the earth ! Their scattered bones and dust shall be reared up, and re-organized, and our Lord will bring their glorified souls along with him to sing out the high praises of Jehovah. Roses die, sweetest flowers perish, and the beauteous complexion of the earth turns to a bleak and withered hue in winter, yet in summer there is a kind of resurrection ; if you say of them, life is remaining in the root and seed ; we say, the soul is the root of the body, and Christ the root of the soul, and both are living, Col. iii. 3, 4 ; and though there be no physical

* Rev. xiv. 13. 1 Thess. iv. 14. Luke xxiii. 43.

contact, yet there is a relative union betwixt soul and body, and the soul hath to it a deep-rooted love and inclination; the silly snail with its natural life and power, can make for itself a habitation, yea the silkworm becomes a winged fly, the warmth of the hen turns the egg into a chicken; these are emblems of the resurrection.* And what cannot the power of God effect? If a skilful workman can turn a little sand and ashes into curious transparent glasses, why should we doubt whether the mighty power of God can communicate a glorious perfection to the flesh that is dissolved into its elements? Luther saith, I love the noble art of chemistry, it is such a fine emblem of the resurrection. O what a blessed transporting sight will that be, to see the sanctified soul united to the glorified body, to receive their reward together!

4. By the same power of God some shall be changed, others raised from the dead, the souls of the glorified saints shall descend and be united to their own bodies, and then ascend to meet the Lord in the air, and the wicked are left behind on their dunghill, the earth, in fetters, to receive their sentence, and to be confined to their prisons; this is that mystery, which possibly the blessed apostle Paul heard from God when he was caught up into the third heaven, and heard “unspeakable words,” *ἄρρητα ρήματα*, wordless words.† 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52, “Behold,” saith he, “I shew you a mystery, we shall not all sleep,” that is, die, “but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye;” this is further confirmed and explained, 1 Thess. iv. 15, “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep;” and ver. 16, and 17, “The dead in Christ

* See Mr. Baxter on Self-denial, page 296. † 2 Cor. xii. 4.

shall rise first, then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." Calvin saith,* "He speaks here of the faithful only; the resurrection of the wicked, is also a kind of change, though they are not mentioned: but with respect to such as shall bear the name of the heavenly or of Christ, it is equivalent to death, as there will be an abolishing of the former nature, and an introducing of a new one." This is a species or kind of death, but as it is not a separation of the soul from the body, so it is not a sleep, but a sudden transition from corruptible nature to a blessed immortality. Here is the difference between those that die and such as are changed: the former put off the substance of the body, but they that are changed, put off nothing but the qualities of the body, the dead shall rise before the living are taken up. He sends the clouds for chariots, as Joseph his waggons for Jacob and his family. O what vast numbers will then mount up like a cloud and darken the heavens! this is in order to their congregating above.

5. The angels of God are sent to gather up the scattered saints, Matt. xxiv. 31; "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."† It is true, some take this to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, but most interpreters apply it to this last day. Paul saith, "the trumpet shall sound;"‡ as of old, they called the congregation of Israel together by the sound of a trumpet; so now, "the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God," 1 Thess. iv. 16. I confess here are hard points, which no mortal I believe

* Calvin on 1 Cor. xv. 51. † Mark xiii. 27. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 52.

can resolve, as (1.) Concerning this trumpet, what it is, Calvin saith, I leave to others to discourse subtilly on it.* (2.) What kind of shout this is, which must be a sort of magnificent accompaniment of the Judge, and summons for all to appear; for the word in Greek ἐν κελεύσματι doth also signify a command, alluding to mariners or soldiers summoned to be ready. (3.) Who this archangel is, and what degrees there are among the angels, which schoolmen voluminously dispute, or whether it be not Christ himself, because it is said, "the dead that are in their graves shall hear his voice," John v. 28. And (4.) Whether this shall be an oral shout or voice from the mouth of Christ, or only an expression of his divine power, I am not able to determine. But such a summons there will be, and all the sons and daughters of Adam shall appear, not one person gentle or simple can sculk or hide himself, the meanest shall not be looked on as inconsiderable, and the most potent princes will be on a level with their fellowmen; in vain shall the "kings of the earth, great men, rich men, the chief captains and mighty men, bond and free, hide themselves, or call to the mountains and rocks to fall on them," Rev. vi. 15, 16. No, no, the summons will reach all, and all must obey and appear, whether they will or not; the mighty, almighty God can fetch them out, his all-seeing eye discover them. See the summons, Psal. l. 1—6, "He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth that he may judge his people;" these are his words, "gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." O what a vast multitude will then appear! "Thousand thousands minister to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him;" yea, a great multitude

* Reliquo aliis subtilius disserendum.

“which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues will stand before the throne and the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands.”* O what a glorious, splendid, shining company will there be!

6. Yet further, these multitudes gathered together will have their spirits in perfect harmony, they shall all speak one language, as the whole earth did before the confusion at Babel; there will be an agreement of minds, wills, affections, consciences, and conversation; no clashing, no discord, they shall be fully united, cemented, and perfectly joined together, and all according to one rule and canon; they all engage together in one celestial song, the heavenly choir of angels stand round about the throne, echoing to an innumerable company of believing glorified Jews and Gentiles, saying, “Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving be unto our God for ever and ever, Amen,” Rev. vii. 10—12. It is worth observing, that upon Antichrist’s ruin, “a great voice of much people in heaven was heard, saying, Hallelujah,” Rev. xix. 1; “and again they said Hallelujah,” ver. 3; then again, the four and twenty elders, and four beasts, still employ the same tune, Hallelujah; and still upon a new summons they add always Hallelujah, this was the Hosanna Rabba, as the Jews call it, or a *Hallelujatica victoria*, as the old Britons called their victory over the Saxons. All but faint emblems of that great solemnity, in which the multitude of glorified souls are with one heart and voice unanimously adoring their Redeemer, acquiescing in his righteous sentence, not one dissenting, they neither contradict one another, nor oppose the will of God: there is not a jarring string in this music: whatever dissensions or lan-

* Dan. vii. 10. Rev. vii. 9.

guages may be here, they all speak the same things there. Yea, though they did not understand one another's dialect in this world, yet they shall all speak the language of Canaan; whether it be Hebrew, as some conceive, who knows? but it will be intelligible by all that then meet together. The scripture saith, "they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion," Isa. lii. 8. Now if ever that text shall be fulfilled, that as two eyes look both on one object, so the eyes of all saints shall be towards the Lord: there will be a sweet agreement in principles, practice, professions, and affections, as the primitive Christians who were "of one heart and of one soul," Acts iv. 32; then shall "we all come to the unity of the faith," Eph. iv. 13.

7. These congregated saints shall be admitted into one place and state of glory; that is, "before the throne of God, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them," Rev. vii. 15. These bright stars shall make a glorious constellation in the heavenly firmament: though possibly one star may differ from another star in glory, yet they shall all be irradiated with the Sun of Righteousness: though these vessels of grace be of various quantity, yet they shall all be full in that vast ocean; not the weakest or feeblest shall be lost or left behind, "the feeble among them shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them," Zech. xii. 8. Not a grace or duty; not a mite given in charity shall be lost. Tears shall be found bottled, and a cup of cold water shall be rewarded;* there is room enough in heaven for all the saints, "In my Father's house," saith Christ, "are many mansions," John xiv. 2; many for number, large for extension. The city

* Psal. lvi. 8. Matt. x. 42.

is four square, having twelve gates, filled from all quarters of the world; "the gates of it continually open," never shut.* O the stupendous vastness of that upper region! Earth is but a speck or point, compared to it; though the text in Revelations speak but of twelve thousand furlongs, which, according to some, make but fifteen hundred miles, what is that to heaven? If the city of the great King be meant there by the New Jerusalem, as some think, doubtless it is exceedingly spacious, if indeed it be a place which can be circumscribed: but where the King is, there is the court; as the angels do always behold the face of God, and therefore are still in heaven, though employed about saints on earth;† so it may possibly be with the saints after the resurrection. Who knows whether the purified earth may not be one place of their celestial happiness? yet some think it will be wicked men's hell, and place of torments. But be that as it may, we are sure there is room enough for all the saints in heaven; and our Lord will have them all with him, not a hoof left behind as slighted, for he purchased all at a dear rate, and prayed for them when he was leaving the world. A summary of his present intercession, we have John xvii. particularly verse 24, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." This will be a blessed congregation indeed, a spacious temple, a large paradise, not in corners, houses, or chapels, nor as in the present state where they are often persecuted, fined, and imprisoned; in that world they shall have liberty, yea, possibly every saint shall have his proper mansion, yet in full communion with God, and the rest of glorified spirits.

* Rev. xxi. 10, 12, 25.

† Matt. xviii. 10. Heb. i. 14.

CHAP. III.

WHAT IS IMPLIED IN GATHERING THIS ASSEMBLY.

II. It is further proposed, to give a more particular account of the assembling of the saints, and this I shall do in these seven particulars :—

1. That all the saints in the several ages, places, and conditions, wherein they have lived, shall be gathered into one general assembly, may seem strange, but it is true ; all the children of God that ever have lived for five thousand years and upwards, since man was placed on this earthly globe, all that ever have lived, do live, or shall live till the end of time, shall be assembled ; such as have lived in far distant places, many thousand miles asunder, separated by vast tracts of ground, mountains, and seas, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America ; such as have died many thousand years ago, and have been long singing the praises of God and enjoying his presence in the church triumphant, old testament saints, and new testament saints. The children of God in the church militant, yet fighting under the banner of Christ, shall meet with victors that have been long crowned : persons of all conditions, ages, sexes, qualities, rich and poor, old and young ; such as never saw each other's face in this world, no, nor ever heard of each other, yet then they shall meet together, Luke xiii. 29, "They shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." It is said, Acts ii. 5, "There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." But what were they compared with those who shall come out of all countries of the world ; O

what a vast number of souls shall be congregated ! such as never appeared together in this lower region. When there shall be a general collection of the human race far beyond what appeared in the theatres, or amphitheatres of the ancient Romans, or armies of Mahometans ; “ multitudes, multitudes here,” as Joel speaks, “ in the valley of decision.”*

2. That all this congregation shall then be perfectly holy. So it may be truly said of this assembly, as the murmuring princes said of Israel, “ All the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them ;”† there is not one feeble person among them, no infant of days, but they are grown up to be strong, have become giants in grace ; they stand in no need of ordinances ; ministerial gifts, and the exercise thereof are “ only for perfecting of the saints,” Eph. iv. 12. But now they are above them, being perfected ; that city “ hath no need of the sun, or of the moon to shine in it.”‡ As soon as ever the breath departs out of the body of a child of God, he shakes off all sin, and puts on a new garment of perfect holiness ; he takes his leave of the body of death and earth together. Not one speck of pollution to be seen upon all this great multitude. Souls take their leave of sin, as they are taking their leave of this world. O what a glorious sight will that be of pure white saints ! surely a lovely sight ; there will be no pride, passion, or impatience, nor any thing to vex themselves or others. The dregs are left behind, and refined quintessence floats upwards. Consecrated souls are now elevated to the highest pitch, and purified from loathsome and defiling corruptions. O what a blessed day will that be !

3. That all troubles and temptations in this lower world shall then cease. Neither the devil nor wicked

* Joel iii. 14. † Numb. xvi. 3. ‡ Rev. xxi. 23.

men can follow believers off this dunghill, although the devil be called, "the prince of the power of the air,"* yet he cannot stop or hurt the saints as they pass through his dominions; nor shall he shoot a dart at them or after them. All troubles are at an end, death itself, the king of terrors is destroyed, he had no sting to wound the saints before, now he hath no being; the fear of him was gone in some degrees in their lives, now the very thought of him is gone;† they are delivered from the first, as well as the second death; they shall never receive a mortal wound, no, nor any wound; the accuser and abuser of the brethren is cast out, not only cast down, but quite cast out, and all his artillery and his instruments.‡

4. When saints are thus gathered together, they shall know one another. It is true, some kind of imperfect knowledge shall cease, that knowledge which is only acquired in the use of means shall vanish away, 1 Cor. xiii. 8; or that which is seen through a glass darkly, then shall we see face to face, ver. 12. I must needs confess those two words are beyond my comprehension, of "knowing even as we are known, and of seeing God as he is;"|| and I suspect that no mortal can understand what they mean; but I think the faculties will be strangely enlarged, so that the saints will know all natural things, and pierce into the essence of the most intricate existences, the nature and powers of terrene creatures, the properties of angels, the mysteries of redemption, the counsels of God; though they are not omniscient, their knowledge must be limited, yet I think they will know all the ancient patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Paul, Peter, though they had never seen them in this

* Eph. ii. 2.

† 1 Cor. xv. 56. Heb. ii. 15.

‡ Rev. xii. 10.

|| 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 1 John iii. 2.

world; thus the rich man though lost, knew father Abraham, and Lazarus in his bosom.* Luther in his discourse the night before he died, said that saints shall know one another hereafter: as would appear from Adam's knowing who Eve was, though he had been asleep,† and the disciples knowing Moses and Elias in Christ's transfiguration, Matt. xvii. 3; indeed this mutual knowledge will not be the least part of the saint's heavenly delight.

5. The souls of men live after they are separated from the body. For, what is it that is gathered with the saints? It is not the body, for that is laid in the dust, but it is the soul, for the body and soul meet not till the great day of the resurrection; nor doth the soul sleep in the dust till then, for our Lord said to the penitent thief, "to day shalt thou be with me in paradise;" and Paul desired "to be loosed, that he might be with Christ; nor doth the soul cease to be, it hath an existence in a separate state; men may kill the body, not the soul.‡ Atomists and Epicureans will not admit an annihilation of any one atom in the universe, surely then not this excellent creature, the soul of man. Yea, the soul of man continues its individuality, that is, its distinct being, and falls not into one common universal soul of the world, as some have imagined; spirits have a numerical difference, a distinct being. Nor are we to think that the soul returns into the essence of God, because the text saith, "The spirit returns to God who gave it," Eccl. xii. 7; it doth return to God to receive its sentence from him, not into his being, for then we should make God divisible, and consisting of parts, which is contrary to his infinite, divine nature; thus souls have a distinct being,

* Luke xvi. 23.

† Gen. ii. 23.

‡ Luke xxiii. 43. Phil. i. 23. Matt. x. 28.

yet depending on God the first being, as individuals, and must be accordingly judged.

6. That the soul being gathered with the saints, enters immediately into glory. To know where Lazarus's soul was, while he was in the grave, requires more skill than I can pretend to; some think it hovered about the grave by Christ's order, as designing its re-entering the body; but scripture assures us of the immediate salvation of gracious souls, "they enter into peace," when the body rests in its bed, Isa. lvii. 2; they are pronounced "blessed that die in the Lord;* when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we appear with him in glory," Col. iii. 4. Now they shall be glorious in their souls; at the resurrection, their bodies will be glorious, even like Christ's glorious body.† This answers that query, whether the saints shall have greater glory at the resurrection, than they had immediately after their death? It is easy to determine, that so far as there is an addition of a glorified body to the glorified spirit, so far is the glory greater, what further, I know not. Though Dr. Hammond thinks the word *ἀνάστασις*, translated resurrection, when flesh is not joined to it, signifies, that life which the soul enters upon immediately after death, called resurrection, that is, glorification; certainly the soul hath some intuitive knowledge in its separate state and felicity also, so far as it is capable.

7. When these blessed souls are thus gathered together, they shall never part, they shall live with God and each other for ever. Here we part and meet again, and meet and part again, and part so as that we shall never meet again in this world; but in the other world we shall part no more through the ages of eternity; after millions of years their joys are as fresh as at the first

* Rev. xiv. 12.

† Phil. iii. 21.

moment, they are never weary, nor interrupted, they are "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple;" these waters have a perpetual spring, this day hath no night;* they shall reign with Christ not a thousand years definitely, but for ever and ever. O what a lasting and everlasting enjoyment of God and saints will that be! What can part them? God will not, the devil and wicked men cannot, themselves shall not, for they have within them an incorruptible seed, even of that word "that liveth and abideth for ever," 1 Pet. i. 23. It is not with saints in heaven, as with boon companions in playing, drinking, carousing, and matches of sport and vanity, who must part; nor is it with saints there as with God's children here in the worship of God, who have their intermissions, cessations, and interruptions; but where the work, praising God continues, the place continues, it hath foundations, the persons continue, "he that doth the will of God abideth for ever," 1 John ii. 17.

CHAP. IV.

FOR WHAT END THE SAINTS ARE GATHERED TOGETHER.

III. THE next division has a reference to the end or design of the saints gathering together.

1. The primary and principal design is, the glorifying of God. The great God doth all things for this great end, 2 Thess. i. 10, "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." The glory of the saints shall reflect glory to

* Rev. vii. 15. xx. 6. xxii. 5.

God. God considers himself honoured in his saints' honours, as the prince is magnified by the splendour of his court: if God be glorified in the bitterest sufferings of his saints, how much more in their exaltation? * O what a lustre will they display, when they are all crowned as kings, when they shall shine as the firmament, as the stars, yea, as the sun in his meridian glory; † O what a wonderful change is this, to be raised out of the dust and from the dunghill, to sit upon thrones? How came this to pass, surely the author of this glory will have the chief share therein, all God's perfections will be conspicuous. The saints' meeting together in the aforesaid manner, will tend to the glory of,

(1.) God's sovereignty, wherein he chose such as were children of wrath even as others, to make them vessels of mercy, and left others as good as they to perish and be banished from God to all eternity; then his eternal counsels will be unfolded, and that scripture fully explained, Rom. ix. 15, 18, 22, 23.

(2.) God's wisdom will be conspicuous in contriving a way for man's redemption and salvation. The wisdom of God is a mystery, "even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory," 1 Cor. ii. 7. Then the secrets of this wisdom will be clearly laid open to angels and men, which now they desire to look into, and to learn more of which they become scholars in the church, ‡ Eph. iii. 10.

(3.) The power of God will be displayed bringing poor weak creatures through such a world of difficulties and oppositions, as sheep in the midst of wolves, lions, and bears, in a howling wilderness, even themselves shall wonder how they ever got hither, and shall reflect with pleasure and triumph, that they were "kept

* 1 Pet. iv. 14. † Dan. xii. 3. Matt. xiii. 43. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 12.

by the power of God through faith unto salvation," 1 Pet. i. 5.

(4.) But no attribute of God will shine so bright in that day of the saints' meeting together, as that of his free grace, this orient pearl in the gold ring of glory will shine the brightest. That uphill city is built all of free-stone, none of them had mounted so high, had not the arms of love been under them. When this head-stone of glory is laid, it will be with "shoutings, grace, grace unto it," Zech. iv. 7; the celestial palace will ring with acclamations of grace: grace laid the foundation, and grace lays the topstone in glory. The glorified soul will stand amazed, and say, "who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto?"* and saints and angels will stand gazing at them, and at God in them, that of such polluted creatures hath made such a holy people, that of such lepers so disgusting in appearance he hath advanced many above the ordinary rate of men, "equal unto the angels."† Fellow saints will adore free grace, devils will fret, reprobates gnash their teeth with envy, angels will gladly admit them into their society, and God will be glorified in all.

This is the first and chief end God hath in view in gathering the saints together.

2. There is also a secondary, subordinate end of God's bringing his saints together, and that is for their mutual communion, converse, and society with each other.

Negatively, it will not be,

(1.) To trade, buy and sell, and have civil commerce together, to make great purchases, or to go to fairs and markets, or meet upon exchange for business; there are no such things there; "Nor shall they marry or

* 2 Sam. vii. 18.

† Luke xx. 36.

be given in marriage;" nor converse as husband and wives, Luke xx. 35.

(2.) Nor shall they suffer together, or be thrown into prisons, or driven into dens and caves of the earth, to endure hardships, seeking relief, or begging their bread; the devil and his instruments are there non-suited, "the accuser of the brethren is cast down," Rev. xii. 10; and all his angels and agents.

(3.) Much less shall they sin together, by acts of immorality, or idle talk or chat, there shall not be uttered one vain word to all eternity; nor shall they quarrel, or contend, and thereby grieve and fret or vex the spirits one of another, or sadden the hearts of each other. No, no, there shall be perfection of grace, and complete harmony of minds and affections.

(4.) Nor shall there be one word of complaint as now there is; Christians when they meet here, spend much of their time in mourning over themselves, in mourning over one another, in mutual compassion, confessing their faults to each other, acquainting christian friends with their grievances, begging their advice, and the help of their prayers.* Oh, saith one, I am ignorant, hard-hearted, unbelieving, have a treacherous memory, am very unprofitable. Oh, saith another, I am sore assaulted with Satan's suggestions, and hellish temptations; another saith, I am in the dark, God hides his face, I know not what to make of my condition; another complains of dark providences, and is afraid of missing his way, in such a case; all have their peculiar distresses and grievances; and one while raise their hearts to God, another while to christian friends; but there shall be no such thing as a whimper of complaint, when they meet together in that solemn day.

* James v. 16.

But more positively and affirmatively, the purposes for which the saints shall come together are these two:

To augment their personal felicity, and to enjoy mutual society and intercourse.

With respect to their own personal felicity, they shall assemble,

(1.) To rest together; as their bodies shall rest in the grave, so shall their souls rest with God. This is the time of "refreshing that comes from the presence of the Lord," Acts iii. 19; "Now they rest from their labours,"* painful and marred with sin, never to be pestered any more with the hurries of a distempered world, temptations of a malicious devil, or corruptions of a treacherous heart. Rest is sweet, this rest is most sweet, "when they enter into peace they rest in their beds," Isa. lvii. 2.

(2.) To be rewarded; "great is their reward in heaven," Matt. v. 12. This reward doth greatly animate God's saints amidst their labours and losses, they still "have respect to the recompence of reward," and they shall not be disappointed for it is a sure reward;† and their confidence "hath great recompence of reward," Heb. x. 35. Not from any thing we have done in point of commutative justice, yet by distributive justice, by virtue of God's promise in the new covenant, God will be as good as his word.

(3.) They meet to rejoice together. At present, "they rejoice in hope of the glory of God," Rom. v. 2. But heaven is the true proper element of joy. If at a distance and unseen, the Christian "can rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," upon the exercise of a faith of adherence; O what joy will the Christian have above; this is an entering into our master's

* Rev. xiv. 13.

† Heb. xi. 26. Prov. xi. 18.

joy, because our vessels are too narrow for this joy to enter into us.* O what a transport of joy at the saints' arrival!

(4.) They meet to reign. "The saints of the most high shall take the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever," Dan. vii. 18. Rev. xxii. 5. Not only shall godly ministers "receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away;"† but suffering saints shall have a crown of life, "which God hath promised to all that love him," James i. 12. Earthly crowns are but gaudy trifles, compared with this crown that all saints shall receive. This is a high transcendent preferment.

(5.) They meet together to receive their inheritance. At present they are only as children in their minority, but at death they take possession of their rightful inheritance, and it is an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them," 1 Pet. i. 4. All God's children are heirs, and "heirs according to promise,"‡ and this glory they have hereafter is a "reward of inheritance," Col. iii. 24. The kingdoms of the earth are not to be compared with this blessed inheritance above.

(6.) They meet together to triumph on their blessed conquest. What wonderful triumphers shall saints be hereafter, "who are more than conquerors here?"|| All the saints shall be clothed with "white robes and have palms in their hands," Rev. vii. 9. O the triumphant song they sing, Rev. xv. 3. It is unintelligible to others, and cannot be learned by any but such as overcome. O happy souls!

(7.) They meet to see the execution of God's vengeance upon the wicked, Jude, 14, 15, "Behold

* Isa. xxxv. 10. 1 Pet. i. 8. Matt. xxv. 21.

† 1 Pet. v. 4.

‡ Gal. iii. 29.

|| Rom. viii. 37.

the Lord cometh to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly, of their ungodly deeds and hard speeches—the righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance,” Psal. lviii. 10. The more the saints’ will is melted into God’s will, the more satisfaction will they have in the executing of justice, not so much on the wicked considered as God’s creatures, but as his enemies, see 2 Thess. i. 6—9.

(8.) They meet for a clear manifestation of their inward principles and outward practices. Saints are called hidden ones,* their best part is most out of sight; “their life is hid with Christ in God, but when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we appear with him in glory,” Col. iii. 3, 4. Yea, and the “creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God,” Rom. viii. 19. O what a display will there be at that day of men’s inward states one to another, never before known, 1 John iii. 1, 2.

(9.) They meet to have their graces perfected. Then, and never till then, is the day when that is accomplished, Eph. iv. 12, 13, “The perfecting of the saints; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;” then will every corner of the soul be filled with grace. He that hath “begun a good work in believers here, will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ,” Phil. i. 6. Now they have gained what they were pressing after: O blessed day! O happy attainment!

(10.) Yet, once more they meet to enjoy God immediately together. This crowns all the rest, this is the summit of all, the acme and highest felicity of a rational soul. This is what they have been long breathing after. Some glimpses of his blessed face

* Psalm lxxxiii. 3.

they saw through the glass of ordinances, and were thereby "changed into the same image from glory to glory," 2 Cor. iii. 18: that sight of God was only "through a glass darkly, but then it will be face to face," 1 Cor. xiii. 12. "When he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," 1 John iii. 2. What man dwelling on this side the grave knows the meaning of that word? God said to Moses, thou "canst not see my face;"* it is well if we can see his back: but then the Lord will unveil his face to glorified souls. We cannot tell now how a finite soul is capable of seeing an infinite object; but then as the faculties will be astonishingly enlarged and extended, so this vision will exceed our present low apprehensions. This is called the beatific vision, when it is promised "to the pure in heart that they shall see God;"† and it is this that makes them completely happy. That is one of the sweetest words in the bible, 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18, "Then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord, wherefore comfort one another with these words."

CHAP. V.

ON THE INTERCOURSE WHICH THE SAINTS HAVE AT THEIR MEETING TOGETHER.

THE former chapter referred to the principal design of the saints' meeting together, which was the glorify-

* Exod. xxxiii. 20.

† Matt. v. 8.

ing of God, and enjoyment of him, in which consists their personal felicity.

The latter concerns their mutual society, and familiar intercourse one with another, which will be an addition to their joy and happiness in those heavenly regions.

Communion of saints is one article of our faith, and the great privilege of believers in this lower world; both that which is catholic with all saints through the world, and that which is personal and immediate with members of the same society. As soon as any man commenceth Christian, he espouseth this communion, Phil. i. 5, "For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." Wicked men talk of their good fellowship in feasting, drinking, jesting, and gaming, alas, they are all but child's play, yea devil's sport to this, and leave the soul comfortless and guilty; but this fellowship of God's children is delightful, honourable and profitable, a distinctive character of a saint, an emblem of heaven, a step to communion with God.

Yet that fellowship they have in glory far exceeds what they have below, for they are freed from the dregs of corruption and sinful passions, their souls are purified, their graces perfected, and though they be personally different, yet all centre in God.

That the saints above have familiar intercourse one with another, is generally asserted, and very probable; because such a communication must greatly heighten their pleasures and happiness. But how this is carried on, is not so evident; whether it be by imprinting their conceptions on the minds of each of other, as Scotus saith; or by arranging their conceptions in their own minds, and so in some peculiar way representing them by certain forms to others, so Aquinas; or

by forming sounds, which after their way are intelligible. But we that are so much strangers to the nature of spirits, cannot conceive of these things.

Yet after the resurrection, when bodies are united to their souls, possibly they may hold discourse vocally. It must be said, even whilst in this world, in a sound sense, that they “know no man after the flesh,” 2 Cor. v. 16; how much less in heaven, when their bodies become spiritual, will they know each other, or confer together in a low sensual manner, as they do here in this world.

Let the more learned read Dr. Tuckney’s discourse in his *Præl. Theol.* page 152—157, upon this question: That the blessed in the state of glory shall know each other,* for which he brings proofs out of scripture, of Dives and Lazarus, and also Moses and Elias at Christ’s transfiguration.

But of this I shall say as he does, that this question contains in it a theological truth, not a fundamental article of faith;† not necessary to our salvation, but useful to our edification and consolation.

Now if it be asked, what subjects the saints glorified shall in all probability discourse upon, I confess it is a difficult question; for I find 2 Cor. xii. 4, that when the apostle Paul was caught up into the third heavens, he heard *ἄρρητα ῥήματα*, “wordless words, or words that could not be uttered,” or which it is not lawful or possible for a man to utter. God forbid that I should presume to express either the matter or the manner of these conferences above; but words or things they are that are uttered, and we may lawfully conjecture what the saints above converse about, by the

* *Beati in statu gloriæ se mutuò sunt agniture.*

† *Quod questio ista in se contineat veritatem theologicam, non fundamentalem fidei articulum.*

holy laudable discourse they have here; and they may be such as these:—

1. Concerning the work of creation. For though the visible heavens and earth shall be burnt up, yet nevertheless, according to his promise, they shall see new heavens and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness,” 2 Pet. iii. 12, 13. Fire purifies, so the visible heavens which were defiled with men’s sins, shall be purged with fire, and the “creature shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption.* And O what a fine show will that present? far beyond golden mountains, rocks of pearl or diamonds, or crystal streams; a semblance of it we have in Rev. xxi, which is the wonderful workmanship of the great Creator, enough to employ the eyes and tongues of those celestial inhabitants to the praise of Jehovah, Rev. iv. 9—11: and though the first creation be past away, yet the mighty fabric of this vast universe will possess the thoughts of the saints, with admiration of God’s power, wisdom, and holiness which shine therein, and they will review them in discourses one to another, with adoration of God, to the honour of his Majesty.

2. Concerning man’s apostacy. How excellently God had placed man in the primitive state of perfection, formed after his own image, adorned with the beauties of holiness, and having “dominion over the works of God’s hands.”† Yet he unreasonably revolted from God, and rose up in rebellion against him, by violating the moral law engraven on his heart; and the positive law of not eating the fruit of one tree; whereby he utterly ruined all his posterity, made himself and his offspring subject to God’s wrath and curse here and hereafter to all eternity. This will be made subser-

* Rev. xviii. 5. Rom. viii. 21.

† Psal. viii. 6.

vient to the advancement of free grace in our deliverance out of it.

3. Especially the saints will discourse on the means of our redemption. The infinite wisdom, grace and love displayed in God's contrivance of it; the transcendent love, care, and faithfulness of Christ in the management of it, the nature, birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Son of God, his offices, suited to our state, and all his mediatorial undertakings. This will be a voluminous book for saints to read, fairly written in indelible characters; and the glorious object before their eyes, at the right hand of God, in heavenly places, above principalities, to be a perpetual monitor of his glorious transactions.* This will be the subject of triumphant praise among the celestial inhabitants to all eternity, Rev. v. 8—14.

4. The privileges of believers, the blessed fruits of Christ's purchase. Now they shall more fully understand and form a due estimate of the benefits of reconciliation, justification, and adoption, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost; these privileges will be the topics of discourse one to another; they will say, O what blessed effects of divine grace! We enjoyed them, but did not duly conceive of them, now we see what it is to be the children of God, to be justified and sanctified; these were greater mercies than we were aware of. Let us cast our eye back, and consider what we were once, what fools, what vile creatures, but how we "were washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," 1 Cor. vi. 11. Ah, what a pleasant theme is this!

5. The ordinances enjoyed. Oh, how many affecting sermons have we heard! How often have we

* Eph. i. 20, 21.

been feasted together at the Lord's table! What sweet fellowship have we had with the saints in the lower world! Many a heart-melting fast, many a soul-refreshing thanksgiving, many an edifying, heart-warming conference; I could then say, "it was good for me to draw nigh to God."* Those duties led us to this glory. God helped us to improve ordinances, and now we are got quite above ordinances.

6. The difficulties of their pilgrimage. While the saints stand on the shore of eternity, and look back on the stormy tempestuous sea they have passed, the pirates, rocks, and sands they have escaped, by the conduct of the great Pilot, it fills them with admiration and astonishment. How many raging devils, and furious onsets of men, what temptations and persecutions they have passed through? What hard duties they have performed, what corruptions they have mortified, what burdens they have borne? all these exalt their joy to a high pitch.

7. Ministers and their hearers will communicate their former experiences. O, will the convert say, it was a blessed day that ever I saw such a minister's face, or heard his voice; I remember the text, the doctrine, the particular, that first touched my heart; "I sat under the shadow with great delight, the fruit was sweet to my soul,"† God healed me by the same hand that wounded me; possibly the minister never knew till now all the souls he hath been an instrument to convert. Now they have a reciprocal joy, when "sower and reaper rejoice together," John iv. 36.

8. Pious relations will mutually reflect on days that are past, though now not as husband and wife, yet as formerly in that relation. They "were heirs together of the grace of life,‡" prayed, wept, suffered, and

* Psal. lxxiii. 28.

† Cant. ii. 3.

‡ 1 Pet. iii. 7.

sweetly conversed together, the father wept over the miscarrying child and prevailed with God, his miscarriages cost him dear, but his conversion was as life from the dead, that was a costly child. How the child makes his reflections, recounts the pious father's and mother's prayers and tears, counsels and admonitions.

9. The distinction grace has made betwixt them and others. Such a one was as well born, bred, educated as we, was sometimes under convictions, and sat under the same means of grace, was of fine parts, made a profession, and was once as likely for heaven as I, but fell into gross sin, or kept on in a course of formality, and he is now consigned to eternal torments, why am not I in his case? "Who made us to differ?"* It was nothing but free grace that gave me a repenting heart: I was as likely to perish as he, and as unable to help myself as he.

10. Christians will discourse on the various providences of God in this world. I was sick, and the Lord raised me up; had I died then, I had been undone, for I was in a graceless state. God "in faithfulness afflicted me,"† I had perished, if I had not perished; I was wandering, and God brought me home by the painful cross; I had not been thus happy, if I had not been miserable; all things did work for my good. The Lord supplied my wants, supported me in troubles, vouchsafed many mercies in my pilgrimage, whereby he rendered my condition comfortable: many a particular dispensation of providence will be then laid open to others.

11. The seasons of special enlargement. They will then declare what God hath done for their souls. Many things that passed betwixt God and their souls, that were not fit to be divulged in this world, will then

* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

† Psal. exix. 75.

be laid open to the glory of God, and their own and others' joy and abundant content, as those two disciples said, Luke xxiv. 32, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?" O, what sweet intercourse with God had my soul in such a chamber, closet; there did he give me his heart, and I gave him mine:* it was a little corner of heaven. Such an ordinance or opportunity, was as one of the days of heaven; I could have been content there.

12. Lastly, They will discourse on the felicity to which they are now advanced, and the perpetuity of it. This state is beyond "what eye hath seen, ear heard, or could enter into the heart of man;"† little, ah little did I then know of what I now enjoy; one hour in this blissful state, compensates for all my days of service or suffering. O that I had done more for God! I am, saith Luther, ashamed that God should so abundantly reward so little work: but God acts like himself, I did but little for God, but God doth much for me. Who would not serve such a master? My sufferings were but light and momentary, but this is a far more "exceeding and eternal weight of glory."‡ O what a bountiful master have we served. Nor is this for a short season, to have an end, but it is lasting, everlasting; it would damp our joy, if we were in danger of losing this felicity; but let us take courage, we shall never be expelled out of this our paradise as Adam was out of his. This happiness shall run parallel with the life of God, and line of eternity.

You will say, how do you know that this shall be their discourse, have you been there to hear it, or who told you?

I answer, no; but we may rationally infer so much, partly from some general hints in scripture, and partly

* Cant. vii. 12.

† 1 Cor. ii. 9.

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 17.

from their profitable and comfortable discourse on earth, which will then be heightened; and, indeed, because they shall speak and do such things as most tend to the glory of God, and their own greater joy and felicity.

CHAP. VI.

IN WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES THE SAINTS SHALL BE GATHERED TOGETHER UNTO CHRIST, AND REASONS WHY THEY MUST BE GATHERED TOGETHER.

IV. OUR attention may now be directed to the circumstances in which the saints are gathered together unto Christ, and the reasons of their assembling.

I must confess, interpreters greatly differ about the meaning of these words, ἐν ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῇς ἐπ' αὐτὸν, which some interpret of meetings of Christians together in assemblies, Heb. x. 25. And so render ἐπ' αὐτὸν, *propter ipsum*, as James ii. 7, “that worthy name,” τὸ ἐπικληθὲν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς, “which is called upon you.” So they will have this to refer to the free liberty of Christians, in uninterrupted meetings in countries and cities, after the scattering of the Jewish nation who censured Christians as a wicked sect; but in the days of Vespasian and Titus, and especially in Constantine's time, they enjoyed liberty of meeting together for celebrating God's public worship. So indeed, συνερχεσθαι, and συνάγειν, *convenire, congregare*, in a public edict signify: but most take it for that general or rather universal meeting at Christ's second coming in the air at the last day, 1 Thess. iv. 14, 17, when all the people

of God shall be gathered to Christ. Now this gathering of saints to Christ doth comprehend these four things:—*The state and qualification of the object—The reason or relation betwixt them—The frame and disposition of the subject—The sight, vision, or fruition of Christ.* I shall very briefly consider these.

1. The state and qualification of the object, that is, Christ, under a double notion: namely, as God and man; and, as advanced to the right hand of God.

(1.) They shall be gathered to him as God and man, which is a state of the highest perfection. Completely perfect man, as glorious a creature as Adam in innocence, and yet much more endeared to his saints, by their reflecting on what he hath done and suffered for them and the fruits thereof; this is he of whom it is said, when he “bringeth in his first begotten into the world, he saith, and let all the angels of God worship him,” Heb. i. 6. How admirable is his person, constituted of two natures, divine and human! never did created or uncreated existence present such a person, in whom all perfections meet, in whom all excellences are united.

(2.) As exalted to the right hand of God. They are not now to be gathered to Christ, as he was in his state of humiliation, when multitudes flocked to his preaching, when he was but in the form of a servant, or going to suffer on the cross, no, nor yet in his state of transfiguration, which was glorious, yet temporary: but now he “is set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,” Heb. i. 3. God hath now given him “a name above every name, far above all principalities and powers, and hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be the head over all things to the church,”* Eph. i. 20—22. It is this state of

* Phil. ii. 9, 10.

glory in which Christ is enthroned, and now receiving homage from all ranks of creatures, attended with innumerable angels; it is Christ in this glorious state, to whom the saints are to be gathered.

2. The reason thereof, which consists in the relations between Christ and his saints, all which carry abundance of delight and sweetness in them. For, it is not as strangers or enemies that love him not, nor yet as malefactors brought to the bar, that dread him as judge: but they are gathered to Christ under these important relations:

(1.) As sheep connected with their shepherd, whose voice they "know here, and whom they follow," John x. 3, 4; yea, they own him with a more than ordinary endearedness, because he laid down his life for the sheep, verse 15, and carries the "poor lambs in his arms,"* and leads them to quiet resting places, where "they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid."†

(2.) As soldiers gathered to their captain, not to fight, but to take the spoil; the Captain of our "salvation is made perfect through sufferings," he is now "crowned with glory and honour, and brings many sons unto glory," Heb. ii. 9, 10. He marks out a crown for every soldier, and sets the victorious champion with him on his own throne, Rev. iii. 21.

(3.) As scholars to their master, who sets them not in a low form, as under graduates, but they commence the highest degree of perfection in the university of glory, to know as much as creatures are capable of knowing, "they shall know as they are known," 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Now the believer is a vessel unto honour, meet for his master's use, set on the shelf of glory.‡

(4.) As subjects to their prince, to be introduced

* Isa. xl. 11.

† Ezek. xxxiv. 23.

‡ 2 Tim. ii. 21.

into the king's presence chamber. Not any longer to be banished into a foreign country; no, nor yet to be retainers, hanging about the court at a distance, but approaching into the king's presence. Jesus Christ is in the immediate presence of God, saints shall be with him;* in "whose presence is fulness of joy, at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore," Ps. xvi. 11.

(5.) As friends to a feast. Our Lord called and accounted all his saints friends in this world, and he deals familiarly with them, providing for them a feast of fat things; but there will come a day when he will "drink new wine with them in his father's kingdom." O blessed feast! O happy society! When he will say, "eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."†

(6.) As children are gathered to their father, not only to receive a blessing, but to take full possession of their inheritance, "knowing that of the Lord, ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ." All God's sons are heirs, and then it will be manifest who are sons; that is a blessed word, "*He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*"‡

(7.) As members are united, Eph. v. 30, "for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Now alas, the members are oft disjointed from each other, and too much distant from the head, but there will come a day when they shall be joined all in one; there will then be no discrepancy betwixt head and members, they being grown "up into him in all things, which is the head even Christ," Eph. iv. 15, 16.

Thus much for the relation they have to Christ, which is the reason of this gathering together to him.

* Heb. ix. 24. † John xv. 14, 15. Matt. xxvi. 29. Cant. v. 1.

‡ Col. iii. 24. Rom. viii. 17. 1 John iii. 2. Rev. xxi. 7.

3. The frame and disposition of the subject. There is in every child of God, a kind of natural propensity, which inclines them in a peculiar manner towards Christ, as the needle towards the loadstone, by which they move and bend heaven-wards; "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, saith David," Psal. cxvi. 7. As all creatures move to their centre, so doth the sincere soul God-wards; and can never be at rest, till it be closely joined and adhere to him, and that God who hath fixed these innate principles in the soul, will promote and perfect them. Now this frame and disposition of a child of God, proceeds first, from the convictions of conscience, and deficiency he finds in other things: secondly, from a sensible experience that the soul hath of satisfaction in Christ.

(1.) The consciences of God's children are fully satisfied, that all the world cannot give the least solid satisfaction to their souls. This made Solomon cry out, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity;"* the Christian cries out, away with these toys, worldly enjoyments are not commensurate to the desires of an immortal soul, Matt. xvi. 26. The judgment is convinced that the "world passeth away, and the lust thereof," 1 John ii. 17; all the splendor of the world fades, there is a vanity and emptiness in all sublunary things. That is the Christian's motto: "I wish not for, I am not content with worldly perishable things;"† I must look beyond the moon to heaven for felicity; I have sucked the juice of every flower in this garden of the world, yet my soul is empty.

(2.) The Christian hath tasted that the Lord is gracious, and this sets him a longing and hungering for more grace and incomes from above, 1 Pet. ii. 2, 3. The Gauls having tasted the delicious wine of the grapes that grew in Italy, were never at rest till they

* Eccl. i. 2.

† Non est mortale quod opto.

had conquered the country. So it is with the pious soul, sense brings the clearest evidence, especially spiritual senses, for some natural senses may be deceived, "this I pray," saith the apostle, "that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment," Phil. i. 9; *ἐν πάσῃ ἀντίσει*, in all sense, for the soul hath its senses as well as the body, and being sanctified and duly exercised, they discern between good and evil;* and indeed this is the proper genius of the new creature, to press forwards and aspire upwards, Rom. viii. 23, "we which have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body." There are heaven-born principles implanted in believing souls, that make them soar aloft after the enjoyment of God.

4. The gathering to Christ, includes the sight, vision and fruition of Christ, the full enjoyment of him; beholding God is properly fruitive vision of him; "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," Matt. v. 8. This is not in the way of mere speculation, but fruition; if "we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him," Rom. vi. 8. This is by the sight of him, and appearing with him in glory," Col. iii. 4. This blissful sight of Christ, is that which makes heaven, for where the king is, there is the court; this glory consists in conformity to him, and communion with him. This is to be gathered to Christ, that is, to have Christ fully revealed to us, an approach to him under the dearest relations, the soul disposed and duly qualified to enjoy him, and full vision and fruition of him. If any of these be wanting, we cannot in a scripture sense be gathered to Christ.

Another consideration is, why our Lord will thus gather his saints at the last day.

* Heb. v. 14.

Though I have touched on some things already, that might be improved as reasons, yet I shall add,

1. Because this is the good pleasure of God. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day;" how careful is God of his jewels, he will gather them and make them up carefully; to be sure he will neither keep them out, nor cast them out. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth, and will own them that are his," 2 Tim. ii. 19; "the election must obtain salvation;"* it runs invisible, much under ground, but will appear at last in the mansions above.

2. Because this is the fruit of Christ's purchase; "For Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God;" he is the ladder of Jacob, upon whom believers ascend to glory. This was the end of his reconciling us by his blood, to "present us holy, unblamable, and unreprouvable in his sight;" our Lord will not lose the fruits of his purchase: yea, he follows it with his prayer, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am;"† God always hears him.

3. Because of the sanctifying and sealing work of the Spirit. "God," saith the apostle, "hath chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth;" observe it, sanctification and salvation, have an inseparable connexion. Saints in the old testament and in the new have the "same spirit of faith," this animates all the members of Christ, running through the veins of his mystical body; and this is the "seal and earnest of our future inheritance;"‡

* John vi. 39. Mal. iii. 17. John vi. 37. Rom. xi. 7.

† 1 Pet. iii. 18. Col. i. 20—22. John xvii. 24.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 13. 2 Cor. iv. 13. i. 22. Eph. i. 13, 14.

to be sure God will not lose his earnest, or throw it into hell.

4. Saints shall be gathered together to Christ, because they are all included in the same bond of the everlasting covenant; it is called the “bond of the covenant;” and by this covenant all the saints become “one stick in the Lord’s hand.” Suppose abundance of twigs be bound up together, yet they all make up but one bundle, many stones make but one building, many inhabitants make but one city or kingdom. All saints are fellow citizens; God will not part them either in this or in the other world. Sincere and persevering souls, shall all meet before the throne, to sing hallelujahs with harmonious melody. All the saints through the world are children of the same father, God; yea, they that “are of faith, are children of Abraham,”* in a spiritual sense; one “household of faith—fellow heirs of the same body—fellow servants—brethren in Christ, faithful brethren—fellow citizens with the saints—and of the household of God.† Such special relations call for this congregating: no doubt they must be gathered together at last.

CHAP. VII.

INFERENCES DRAWN FROM THE PRECEDING DISCUSSION ON THE SUBJECT OF SAINTS BEING GATHERED TOGETHER.

THE improvement I shall make of this subject shall be first, for information in these ten inferences:

* Ezek. xx. 37. xxxvii. 17. Eph. ii. 19—22. Gal. iii. 7.

† Gal. vi. 10. Eph. iii. 6. Col. i. 7. i. 2. Eph. ii. 19.

1. That God is omniscient and omnipotent. Known “unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,” Acts xv. 18. He is infinite in knowledge and wisdom, he takes account of the meanest creatures, and is of infinite power to gather them up; these are the Lord’s people, and his inheritance, which he hath redeemed by his “mighty power and stretched out arm,” Deut. ix. 29. As God brought his Israel out of Egypt, so he exerted the same power in bringing them into Canaan, and the same power that converted sinners, will also save them; for they are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,” 1 Pet. i. 5.

2. That Jesus Christ is a complete Saviour. He “is able to save to the uttermost,” Heb. vii. 25, εἰς τὸ παντελές, every way, to all intents and purposes, soul and body, in all cases, difficulties, and conditions, and under all dispensations. Yet it hath a further meaning; he is able to save totally, finally, perfectly, and perpetually, so as none shall need to come after him, to finish what he hath begun; yet further, he saves, so as he shall never cease to be a Saviour to all eternity: for, though he finished his suffering on earth, and his crowning work will terminate at the great day of judgment, yet felicity will emanate from him, through the ages of eternity; as he shall be looked on as the author, so he will be the medium of their happiness, and embrace them in the arms of his love for evermore.

3. That death is not terrible to a gracious person. It is true, to nature it may well be called “the king of terrors;”* it is a dissolving of this compound, man; but it is the shell and clothing of the soul that is laid by, an elementary composition that is dissolved, the soul is thereby set at liberty and takes its flight into

* Job xviii. 14.

another world, a world of spirits; a better state than here: death is but a bridge, a porter that opens the door to heaven. Christ hath deprived death of his sting, perfumed the grave, and made it a means of manumission into the blessed society of God, angels, and saints, thousands better than we are gone; who are we to be exempted? It is no untrodden path, our best friends are above, let us not be afraid to follow them.

4. That heaven is a capacious place. All the saints in the old testament are gone thither, and millions, in new testament days, have ascended to glory, "a hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of Israel," and a "great multitude which no man could number," Rev. vii. 4, 9. Moses and Elias came from heaven at Christ's transfiguration; Abraham in glory, and all his spiritual offspring, which makes a vast number; yet there is room enough left in those fair mansions above. How small a point is this habitable world compared with heaven, where there are an "innumerable company of angels and spirits of just men made perfect." Yet none refused or kept out that are written "in the "Lamb's book of life." Heaven is capable of entertaining all the sons of God, it is a universal receptacle for all pilgrims and strangers here on the earth.*

5. No unclean thing shall enter heaven; nothing that defileth. No dogs shall tread on that golden pavement, "without are dogs;" as large as it is, wicked, graceless sinners shall not creep or crowd into it: our Lord keeps the keys of paradise in his own hands, he cannot be guilty of an oversight, for his eyes are "like a flame of fire,"† none can give him the slip clandestinely, he knows them that are his, and he disowns others; "for without holiness no man shall see the

* Heb. xii. 22. xi. 13. † Rev. xxi. 27. xxii. 15. ii. 13.

Lord," Heb. xii. 14. Grace and glory go hand in hand; unconverted sinners cannot more easily enter heaven (continuing so) than devils or lost souls. Persons must be gathered by conversion, or not gathered by salvation.

6. Saints glorified, shall retain their intelligence and some kind of sensation, as they shall intuitively see God, "know as they are known,"* discern spiritual mysteries more clearly than ever. So they shall have some kind of sense and feeling, from whence come love, joy, delight; for the soul loses not the exercise of its essential faculties, for want of bodily organs. These operations of the soul in the flesh, are but imperfect shadows of intelligence and volition above, and so of the excellent sense and affections of love and joy, which we now cannot clearly conceive of here below. See this fully treated in Mr. Baxter's "Dying Thoughts," page 201.

7. The saints in heaven will know one another. The disciples knew Moses and Elias; and those that never saw one another's faces in this world shall meet together with great content: and this shall be no small part of their happiness, when they shall say, there stand holy Enoch, righteous Noah, grieving Lot, believing Abraham, upright David, patient Job, penitent Peter, zealous Paul, the beloved, amiable disciple John, victorious champions, and my glorious companions for ever; and we together are perfected and glorified: O happy day! blessed meeting!

8. The multitudes enjoying God in heaven, will be no diminution of their joy. Those thousands of eyes beholding the sun, do not diminish its light; the king is not less dignified for his courtiers beholding him; the King of heaven can give content to all the celestial inhabitants; all the saints shall bathe in this delightful

* Matt. v. 8. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

river, and drink “abundantly of the fountain of life;”^{*} nor will the different degrees of glory create discontent or envy in such as have less, for every vessel shall be as full as it can hold. The celestial courtiers want nothing, God shall be all in all;† it is thought, that such as had more grace, and had done God more service here, shall shine brighter than others, from Dan. xii. 3. 1 Cor. xv. 41. But yet there shall be no emulation, nay, they will rather rejoice in each other’s graces and glory.

9. That in heaven there will be a mutual and reciprocal exchange of gifts and graces. And this will be no small part of their comfort; O what embraces! what endearedness of affection! what inlettings into each other’s hearts! As the sun shineth on the stars, so the stars shine on each other; God doth abundantly irradiate their souls, and they comfort one another’s; not but that there is enough in God to delight them, but this is in some respect accumulative. The saints above will look on each other’s grace as if it were their own; yea, there will be a mutual aptitude and disposition to serve each other, and contribute to each other’s felicity.

10. The sweet harmony of spirits will be inconceivable melody in heaven, far beyond the music of the spheres. Those blessed inhabitants shall be filled with the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace,‡ then they shall indeed speak among themselves, in “psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord,” Eph. v. 18, 19. Then they shall with one mind and one mouth glorify God;|| not one jarring string in the heavenly concert; their hearts will be centred on God, and their lines tending

^{*} Psal. xvi. 11. xxxvi. 9.

† 1 Cor. xv. 28.

‡ Gal. v. 22.

|| Rom. xv. 6.

towards each other. O blessed day, when there will be no jars or wranglings, but Luther and Calvin will sweetly agree, when Melancthon and Zuinglius will eagerly unite to celebrate the praises of our common Lord. O delightful and blessed day!

CHAP. VIII.

REPREHENSION AND CONVICTION OF CARELESS AND GRACIOUS SOULS.

THE subject tends to produce conviction in such as are regardless of religion, and in pious persons.

First, Among those who are unconverted and regardless of religion.

Must there be a gathering together of saints, and only saints, what then will become of the wicked? they are not to be gathered with saints, they cared not for their company here, and they shall not have their society in the other world.

1. Wicked men shall be banished from among the saints, this is no small punishment. "He shall set the sheep on the right hand, and the goats on the left," Matt. xxv. 32, 33; "He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." In this world they were mingled together, in the same kingdom, city, house, assembly, and none was able to distinguish them; mere professors of religion were taken to be as devout as the best, and they took themselves to be as good as any; but now they shall be detected, and the rottenness of their hearts shall be laid open before themselves, angels, and men, "and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh," so says the

evangelical prophet, Isa. lxvi. 24. This will be none of the least of wicked men's punishment to see those whom they had scorned, slighted, and censured, as not worthy of human society, to ascend, and sit down with "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; and the children of the kingdom," those church-members "to be cast out into outer darkness," Matt. viii. 11, 12. O sad parting, never to meet again! How will the wicked wish they had lived in prisons, poverty, and wretched straits in this world, if only they might now go along with them into glory! O that we had spent our time in prayer, reading, meditation, conference, and works of mortification, as these holy souls did, then had we been happy, as they are; but now we see our loss; we thought your life madness, but now we are convinced of our folly, and the wisdom of your choice.

2. These poor graceless souls must be for ever banished from the eternal God, the fountain of all happiness. They bade God depart, "depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways," Job xxi. 14. If not in so many words, yet virtually by their works; and now God will say, "Depart from me, ye cursed," Matt. xxv. 41,—the most dreadful word in the bible, the most overwhelming sentence that can come out of the mouth of God, or can be heard by the ears of men. The enjoyment of God is the saints' heaven, banishment from God is the wicked's hell; yea, the very hell of hells, the only venom, sting, and poison of that infernal lake. They that are not gathered to God, are separated from God; and once banished, and for ever banished; they cannot be removed from his avenging justice, but from his comforting love; "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and

from the glory of his power," 2 Thess. i. 9. The pain of loss is greater than the pain of sense. O dreadful case! Now poor sinners will be banished from the beatific presence, and shall never more see God or Christ to their comfort. O wretched state! sinners shall then know what the loss of God meaneth. They gathered themselves together under ordinances, but desired not God's presence in ordinances; they know not what communion with God means, but they shall know what separation from God means. Where love ended, wrath begins, fury comes in the room of mercy; "Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver," Psal. l. 22.

3. Wicked men shall be bound up together in bundles, and cast into the fire of hell; so saith the text, Matt. xiii. 30, "In the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, gather ye together, first, the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them." And why in bundles? will this be any ease to them in torments? They are wont to say, here, Neighbours' fare is good fare; but it will be otherwise there, the sight of each other will increase their torment, where they shall reflect upon their guilt together, how they tempted others, and were tempted by others to sin; Thou wast one instrument to bring me into this place of torment. O that I had never known thee! Now merry companions will be torturing company; their sweet meat must have sour sauce. This, this is the dreadful consequence of their mad frolics. It is thought, that this was the reason why the rich man was loth that his five brethren should come to him in hell; not from love to them, for there is no such charity in the realms of woe, but self-love, lest their presence should aggravate his torments. Hence is the "gnashing of teeth" also mentioned,* for

* Luke xvi. 23. Matt. xiii. 50. .

spleen and spite both against themselves, and against each other; as communion advanceth the saint's glory above, so the company of old sinners aggravates the misery of the wicked in hell.

4. It will greatly aggravate wicked men's torment to consider, that this was their own doing. "Their destruction is of themselves;"* they can blame none but themselves though they had many incentives and temptations. Neither the devil nor wicked men could ever push them into hell against their will: God saith, "He wills not the death of a sinner." Jesus Christ expressed his earnest desire for their salvation by his death; the Spirit came with his kind suggestions and impulses; pious ministers and christian friends prayed for them, and took pains with them to save them, so that our Lord himself saith, Matt. xxiii. 37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not?" There was God's gathering time of mercy, but that is past; now there is a gathering time of wrath, when the "chaff must be burnt in unquenchable fire." They might have been happy, but would not. "They observed lying vanities, and forsook their own mercies;"† now there is no remedy. They chose the things "wherein he delighted not," and now "he will choose their delusions," Isa. lxvi. 3, 4. Alas, poor sinners choose the devil's drudgery here, and God gives them up into his hands, to be tormented for ever; and as Christ will gather up his saints, whom he purchased, so the devil will gather up all his slaves, not one shall escape him; the wicked are gathered by death to their master, and to their proper place, as it is said of Judas, "That he went to his own place;"‡ that is, hell: "for

* Hos. xiii. 9. † Matt. iii. 12. Jonah ii. 8. ‡ Acts i. 25.

the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God," Psal. ix. 17. O, what a vast assembly will that be! millions, millions of souls descend down into that place of torment! "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat," Matt. vii. 13. O tremble, lest you be found among the greater number of the sons of men.

Remember, all mankind have their faces hell-wards, when they are born: "The wicked are estranged from the womb, they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies—There is none righteous, no not one; we are altogether become unprofitable,"* without a saving turn we are all marching hell-ward, and must be gathered together, and, like faggots, piled up in that infernal region, but especially such as have improved the stock of original corruption in a course of profane swearing, rioting, drunkenness, mocking of religion, ridiculing preciseness, condemning the righteous, and justifying the wicked. How can such as these expect to be gathered with the saints in the other world, whom they cannot endure in this? Surely the pious and wicked go contrary ways, when they go off the stage of this world into an eternal state.

Secondly, As the state of wicked, graceless persons is sad and hopeless, if they continue such, so also professed Christians, yea, real saints are in some things faulty, and blame-worthy.

1. Shall there be a gathering together at last, then how unaccountable are those distances, animosities, and heart-burnings among Christians? There is utterly a fault among us. How contrary is this to Christian love, so often recommended by Christ and his apostles? Yea, our Lord hath made it the cha-

* Rom. iii. 10—12.

racteristic of his disciples "to love one another," John xiii. 35. It was wont to be said of the primitive Christians by heathens, see how they love one another! But alas, brotherly love doth not continue! It hath been declared, to the scandal of our noble profession, "That there are contentions among us."* Further, it hath been said, that where strictest professors fall out, they are most implacable; drunkards will sooner be friends than these puritans. God forbid it should be true; God forbid that there should be "debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, tumults, swellings."† Alas, that such unbecoming fruits of the flesh should be found among us! There hath been too much of this evil spirit; O let us take heed, "lest if we bite and devour one another, we be consumed one by another," Gal. v. 15. These are the devil's artillery, whereby he fights, and too often prevails to do abundance of mischief, and hinder much good; "For where envy and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work."‡ How can you think of the day of meeting one another in heaven with such peevish spirits? Will you perpetuate your quarrels into another world? Are you children of peace that thus quarrel? For shame, lay aside your differences, or lay aside your profession of this gospel of peace.

2. If the saints be gathered at last, why do they not keep close together in this world? What unaccountable separations do men make from each other upon small occasions? This duty of christian intercourse has been practised by all the saints in all ages; the primitive Christians continued stedfastly in the "Apostles' doctrine and fellowship," Acts ii. 42. As soon as Paul was converted, he assayed "to join himself to the disciples," and others "consorted with Paul and

* 1 Cor. i. 11.

† 2 Cor. xii. 20.

‡ James iii. 16.

Silas.”—“The Philippians were in the fellowship of the gospel from the first day of their conversion.”* Like will adhere to like: it is natural for a child of God to hold close communion with his Father’s children. How comes it to pass, then, that some that profess themselves Christians keep at a distance? Alas, have you the same name, nature, and divine image, and do you not care for their company? How will you like to live with them for ever in heaven, that love not their society on earth? How comes it to pass that you keep off? It is possible some do it out of modesty, they may think they are not worthy to associate with them; these are but few. Others out of singularity, retiredness; they can find none good enough, to whom they think fit to vouchsafe intimate familiarity. Others have a pique against such and such Christians, or against the whole party, and most hold off from supine negligence, carelessness, and oscitancy; most men are unconcerned about their edification. How unwilling are some Christians to be drawn to the communion of saints? If it be an article in their creed, it is no part of their practice, as though they had never subscribed to it; yea, there are some, that were once forward for embracing opportunities of christian communion, that are now fallen off, like those Hebrews that believed, of whom the apostle saith, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is,” Heb. x. 25. The Donatists of old, and the sectaries of late, have made dreadful rents and schisms in the church; the more holy Christians are, the more catholic spirits they have. They are most likely to be sensual, that needlessly “separate themselves, not having the Spirit,” Jude, 19, however they may boast themselves to be more full of

* Acts ix. 26. xvii. 4. Phil. i. 5.

the Spirit than others they separate from. Well, sirs, consider what you do, how you injure yourselves, weaken your brethren's hands, sadden their hearts, yea, you weaken the interests of religion hereby. What, friends, shall one heaven hold you, and cannot one church hold you? Do you look for comfort at Christ's second coming among his saints, and will you not keep "by the footsteps of the flock?" The Lord awaken you.

3. Some Christians make nothing of offending the saints of God, whom they should not offend; that is an awful expression, Matt. xviii. 6, "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones, which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." I confess this is spoken of open and violent persecutors, whom our Lord will banish among the pushing goats. But even Christians are too apt to offend one another; sometimes by provoking words, sometimes by offensive behaviour, doing what in consequence of which, (however it seem indifferent to us,) a "brother stumbleth, or is offended, or made weak," Rom. xiv. 21. Unadvised walking may hinder much good, occasion much evil, at least may make sad the hearts of those whose hearts God would not have made sad. With what comfort or confidence will you look in the faces of those whom you have justly offended? An eminent divine saith,* if it be my weakness, I have much ado to think but some shame with confusion will accompany me, when I first meet any there, that I have been unkind to, or wronged, or that will know my faults better than here they did, and that I shall ask them forgiveness, which will be soon granted, being

* Mr. Baxter in a Letter prefixed to Mr. Burgess's book on Christian Commemoration.

forgiven by Christ. However matters will go then, it becomes all the saints to be very cautious, lest they should encroach on the holiness and comfort of their fellow members on earth, and to say with Paul, 1 Cor. viii. 13, "Wherefore if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Happy are they that neither give offence carelessly, nor take offence causelessly.

4. Yet still there is a great, if not greater fault, of good people, and that is, to be too familiar with wicked men, to comply too far with sinners, to the dishonour of God, scandal of religion, and wronging of their own consciences. Paul writes, and writes again, "not to keep company with fornicators;"* the word is very emphatical, *συναναμίγυσθαι*, not to be mingled with them by intimate familiarity, as streams of water mix together; but Christians must be like oil, that will not mix with water; especially they must not be familiar with scandalous professors of the true religion, or such as be disorderly persons, idle, busy-bodies, disobedient to the word; sound, close-walking Christians must "note a man of this description, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed," 2 Thess. iii. 11, 14. Brand such a one as infamous, discover a strangeness in your carriage to him, *ἵνα ἐντραπή*, that he may turn into himself, and consider what in him may be the cause of this your alienation from him. Such a recognition may become a means of his repentance; whereas if you still smile upon him, as if you saw nothing amiss in him, you do but harden him in sin. Yet there is something worse in your sinful compliance, you contract guilt to your own souls, and are in danger of being infected by others, and so partake of their sins,

* 1 Cor. v. 9, 11.

and of their plagues. How often doth God give this call, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord—what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but reprove them rather," Eph. v. 11. How often doth David bid wicked men depart from him? and if they will not be gone, he will flee from them as from a pest house; Psal. xxvi. 4, 5, "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked." And then he prays, ver. 9, "Gather not my soul with sinners." O friends, tremble to be found among wicked men in the gathering day.

CHAP. IX.

ON THE QUESTION, WHETHER WE SHALL BE GATHERED WITH SAINTS?

ANOTHER thing suggested, is to ascertain, whether we be the persons that shall be gathered to Christ with the rest of his saints in that solemn day of his appearing.

1. You may know whether you be of that number or not; assurance is possible, and attainable; God's children have obtained it, 2 Cor. v. 1, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We can be well content to forego this tottering cottage, because we are

* Rev. xviii. 4. 2 Cor. vi. 14, 17.

well assured of a celestial palace ; there we shall lodge with God, Christ, angels, and glorified spirits for ever.

2. Nor is this assurance communicated by divine revelation only, but may be obtained in the diligent use of God's appointed means, hearing the word, prayer, meditation, exciting and exercising of grace, holy warfare, and victory over temptations and corruptions, walking close with God, and particularly by a practical syllogism, where the word of God is the major, conscience the minor, and the Spirit makes the conclusion. Thus, such whose eyes are opened, who are turned from "darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, shall have an inheritance among them that are sanctified," Acts xxvi. 18. Next, conscience brings in the minor, I have found my heart and life thus changed by conversion; then the Holy Spirit brings in the inference or conclusion, therefore I do groundedly hope, I shall obtain the inheritance of glory with the rest of the saints. This is called the witnessing of the Spirit "with our spirits that we are the children of God," Rom. viii. 16.

3. Therefore it is the duty of all Christians to endeavour after it, we are commanded to "give diligence to make our calling and election sure:" we "desire," saith the apostle, "that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end." Such as look not after assurance conscientiously, render their spiritual state suspicious ; for it is the nature of grace to put the possessor forwards to perfection. The sincere Christian will be "perfecting holiness in the fear of God," and press forward to enjoy more of God's presence. "Let us," saith the apostle, "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."*

4. And O the advantage and benefit that God's chil-

* 2 Pet. i. 10. Heb. vi. 11. 2 Cor. vii. 1. Heb. x. 22.

dren have by a well-grounded assurance of their salvation; it will raise your hearts in praise of God, and transport your spirits to love and delight in him. This drops sweetness into all worldly enjoyments; it cheers up the heart in sufferings, Heb. x. 34; fortifies the soul against temptations; excites the Christian to all acts of new obedience; gives contentment in every condition; strengthens against fears of death, and is a certain prelude and forerunner of heaven. O happy soul that can say, God is my father, saints my elder brothers, and I shall meet them all in glory, and sing praises with them to God and the Lamb for evermore.

But how shall a person know that he shall be one of those that shall be gathered together to Christ, in that solemn day?

In reply, I desire that you will faithfully answer these seven questions:

1. Have you been gathered to Christ by converting grace? "To him," that is, to Shiloh, "shall the gathering of the people be," Gen. xlix. 10. Hath the Spirit of God in the word convinced you of your distance from God, prevailed with you to enter into solemn covenant with him? Alas, by nature we are as sheep going astray,* prodigals in a far country, have neither skill nor will to return to God, but Christ the good shepherd calleth "his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out, they know his voice and follow him," John x. 3, 4. Formerly, saith the returning sinner, I heard but the voice of man, now methinks I hear the voice of God rending my heart, discovering those concealed lusts which no mortal can know of, the very secrets of my heart are made manifest; then you must "fall down on your face and worship God, and must report

* Psalm cxix. 176.

that God is there" in such an ordinance, "of a truth," 1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25. What concussions and shakings of soul have you found to unsettle you from your carnal peace and security? Hath the Lord "hewed you by his prophets, and slain you with the words of his mouth?" What convictions of your lost condition? What tremblings, when the Lord roareth as a lion? Are you of those that tremble at the word of the Lord,* yet it doth not drive you from him, but to him? I can be safe no where but under the shadow of his wings. Come "let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten," Jer. 1. 5. I will bind this slippery heart to the Lord, with the strongest and straitest ties: I will not only say it with my mouth, but "subscribe it with my hand; yea, and swear myself to be the Lord's, and his only." Some indeed swear by the name of the Lord, but "not in truth, nor in righteousness;"† but the sincere Christian is most afraid of hypocrisy, longs after sincerity, approves his heart to God, resolves to resort to his standard, fight his battles, and be on his side for ever. Let flesh and blood, and all the devils in hell say what they can to the contrary, is this your peremptory resolution?

2. Have you separated from sinners, 2 Cor. vi. 17, "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you:" for, "what communion hath light with darkness?" As men cannot carry their vain companions to heaven, so not into the church state. No unclean thing or person can enter the gates of this holy city; for without are dogs.‡ Saints may not deny

* Hos. vi. 5. xi. 10, 11. Isa. lxvi. 5.

† Isa. xlv. 5. xlv. 23. xlviii. 1. lxxv. 16.

‡ 2 Cor. vi. 14. Rev. xxi. 27. xxii. 15.

civil converse with the worst of men in a neighbourhood or near relations, 1 Cor. v. 10. But in two respects, the apostle denies society with gross sinners: First, there should not be too much or needless familiarity with them, so as to be mingled with them; as water and oil will not mix, Christians must not, will not be intimate as cronies with dissolute persons: and, secondly, in a special manner with such as are pretended Christians, and belie their profession by scandalous actions: these of all others we must keep at a distance from, as a part of their punishment to bring them to shame, and so to repentance.* If you act as Christians, you will let a person of this description see a strangeness in you towards him, that he may turn into himself by self-reflection, recognize his disorder, or seek where to hide himself. But that is not all, for a godly person hath a kind of aversion to wilful sinners, and avoids them as afraid of being infected by them, as Joseph kept himself from his mistress; and as Solomon adviseth, Prov. v. 8, 9. By familiar converse you may encourage them in sin, and prejudice yourselves: hence all pious persons have been afraid to associate with sinners, so David, Psal. xxvi. 4, "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers;" for, in their company I shall get either guilt or grief; if I act as they, I shall be guilty, if not, I shall be grieved; the best is, to meddle as little as I can with them, for God's honour, and my own peace. I will resolve with old Jacob, Gen. xlix. 6, "O my soul come not into their secret;" I dare not touch the rope, lest I hear the bell; I will "abstain from the appearance of evil;" and hate the garment spotted by the flesh."†

3. Have you associated yourselves with them that

* 2 Thess. iii. 14.

† 1 Thess. v. 22. Jude, 23.

fear God? Pious persons were holy David's intimate friends," Psal. xvi. 3; the saints were in his account the "excellent of the earth, in whom was all his delight; a companion," saith he, "am I to all them that fear thee;"* I have wise senators, and valiant soldiers, but what are these to me, if they be not truly religious? one Jonathan is better than many Joabs, one Hushai better than a thousand Ahithophels; I love them that fear God with a peculiar affection, yea, though they should be severe upon me if I offend, I will not only patiently bear it, but thankfully own them as my benefactors. "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness—Faithful are the wounds of a friend."† I will love Nathan the better whilst I live, for his faithfulness: let my soul be united to saints. I will live with them on earth with whom I would sing praises in heaven. Communion of saints is not only an article in my creed, but a main point of practice, and next to communion with God, my highest privilege. These, these will I converse familiarly with; I will confer with them about the things of God, pray and praise God with them, sit down with them at the holy supper, and walk hand in hand with them in my journey heaven-wards. There is a holy union of all saints, which yet is not natural or corporal, political or even personal, but yet it is real; and this union is either mystical, as members of the same mystical body, Eph. v. 30, or ecclesiastical. Converts are said to be added to the church, and to have mutual external fellowship, Acts ii. 41, 42. Thus Paul when converted, "assayed to join himself to the disciples," Acts ix. 26; and others consorted with Paul and Silas,‡ and indeed it is natural for a child of God to desire, yea and

* Psal. cxix. 63.

† Psal. cxli. 5. Prov. xxvii. 6.

‡ Acts xvii. 4.

delight in the society of the saints ; hence the apostle mentions the Philippians' "fellowship in the gospel, from the first day until now,"* mark it, it was early and permanent. Good men know not how to go to heaven alone ; they must go forth by the footsteps of the flock, and are like a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot :† so amiable, profitable, and pleasant is Christian society.

4. Do you lay to heart the scatterings of Christians? 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." This scattering is either by persecution or dissension. First, if enemies prevail and break up the saints' solemn meetings, God's poor children lay it deeply to heart ; hence such lamentable complaints and expostulations from them, Psal. lxxiv. 3, "Lift up thy feet unto the perpetual desolations, even all that the enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary," Isa. lxiv. 9—12. This was one ingredient of Judah's lamentation, that the ways of Zion mourn, and God's people did mourn with her, Lam. i. 4—7. Such sympathy indicates the spirit of religion, and moves God's heart, and possibly in this world they may be gathered, at any rate in the other, Isa. lxvi. 10, "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem and be glad with her, all ye that love her, rejoice for joy with her all ye that mourn for her ;" Sion's friends shall partake of Sion's comforts. Secondly, Such as grieve for the divisions of the church within herself, Judg. v. 15, 16, "For the divisions of Reuben, there were great thoughts of heart, great searchings of heart." Oh, the sad contentions and animosities that have risen up in the church in all ages, with which the pious and peaceable members thereof have been grievously afflicted ! sometimes per-

* Phil. i. 5.

† Song. i. 8, 9.

sonal, sometimes doctrinal differences have rent the bowels thereof, and rent the hearts of public, uniting spirits, and they have almost despaired of seeing an end of them in this world, till they arrive in the place where Luther and Calvin are made perfect friends, and all the saints shall be of one mind. Mourners for these breaches shall be perfectly cured and comforted, Isa. li. 11, "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head, they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."

5. Do you follow the army of martyrs in bearing your cross, and preparedness to suffer for Christ? This way have all the saints gone to heaven, this is the established, enacted law of Christ.* "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me," Matt xvi. 24. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."† Heaven is taken by storm, and the gracious soul is resolved to go through storms; for persecution is the common, constant lot of all the saints; "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."‡ But the Christian is not appalled with, nor ashamed of, the cross of Christ; nay, "he takes pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake," 2 Cor. xii. 10; he even glories in the cross, and in the marks of the Lord Jesus,|| as much as an old soldier in his wounds received in the wars; as the poor woman in the book of martyrs thought it a piece of honour and happiness, that her foot was put in the same hole of the stocks wherein Mr. Philpot's had been before. So Christians

* Hâc itur ad astra. † Acts xiv. 22. ‡ 2 Tim. iii. 12.

|| Gal. vi. 14, 17.

rejoice to follow that blessed army of martyrs to heaven, not merely by an apish imitation from a good conceit they have of them, but “having the same spirit of faith,”* they endure opposition; whatever it may cost the believer, onwards he will proceed, though he die in the conflict; he sees a crown awaiting him, and so gathers strength by every effort; yea, by every foil, as it was said of Rome,† that every battle, even every slaughter of men made her more courageous. So it is with the conflicting soul, none of these things that startle others, move him, but animate him with more courage in his christian warfare, and voyage through this boisterous sea to the haven of rest.‡ Is it thus with you?

6. Do you daily make proficiency in grace? Are you marching on in your christian course, adding daily some cubits to your spiritual stature? There is no standing still in heaven’s road, not to go forward, is to go backward. Paul saith, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Nothing would satisfy him on this side perfection: he longs after that degree of grace at which he shall attain in the resurrection. The sincere Christian grows brighter and better, as the shining light, “that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” Where there is truth, there will be growth. Grace is like a grain of mustard-seed; the Christian never thinks he hath grown enough, he is still “perfecting holiness in the fear of God,” getting ground daily on the body of death. This is their duty, this is their property, this is what the apostle earnestly prays for, 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13, “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards all men,” &c. I would, saith the saint, be holier than the

* 2 Cor. iv. 13. † Roma cladibus animosior. ‡ Acts xx. 24.

holiest saint on earth, but judge myself less than the least of all saints.* O that I were perfectly free from sin! O that my blossoms of grace were ripe fruit! O that I could increase with the increase of God! Let my faith grow exceedingly to full assurance;† let my love rise to delight in God, my repentance be more evangelical, my hope more fixed, my fear more filial, my obedience more unreserved, and all my graces more lively, and my whole man more conformable to Christ, the perfect pattern of holiness. O that I could “go from strength to strength, till in Zion I appear before God,” Psal. lxxxiv. 7.

7. What blessed instinct inclines you heaven-wards? Heavy things move downwards, light things upwards; every thing moves towards its centre. The church is compared “to pillars of smoke,” still mounting towards its proper element. So the Christian is ἀνωθεν γεγενημένος, “born from above,” and naturally inclines to things above.‡ Grace resembles God, it expands the soul’s faculties, and makes it altogether unsatisfied with sublunary things. Even a heathen Seneca could say, “I am born to higher things than to these trifles; || my thoughts are carried quite above visible objects, mortal things cannot fill an immortal soul, especially touched with a coal from the altar, which raiseth sparks upwards to the fountain of light and love. Our Lord gives this as a certain, το τεκμήριον, or token of a soul that is either prepared for this or for another world; Matt. vi. 21, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” The workings of the heart are an infallible demonstration of a Christian’s state. Is the rational, habitual motion, and tendency of your

* Phil. iii. 11, 14. Prov. iv. 18. 2 Cor. vii. 1. Eph. iii. 8.

† Col. ii. 19. 2 Thess. i. 3. ‡ Cant. iii. 6. John iii. 3.

|| Major sum et ad majora natus.

hearts God-wards, heaven-wards? Have you a strong, impetuous movement and bent of soul towards things above? Are you best pleased when your hearts are in a frame for devotion? Do you take it ill, and resent with some regret and indignation that which obstructs your soul's progress? Have you a strong impulse heaven-wards, by the restless tendency of desire, and by the acquiescing affection of delight? Are you never so well as when you are conversant about heavenly objects? It is the blessed apostle's character of a saint, Col. iii. 1, "If you then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." There, there is a Christian's life, his love, and delight; thither he is mounting as on eagles' wings, and is never satisfied till he be swallowed up in the divine embraces.* He is glad of communion with saints below, more glad of communion with God in his ordinances, but still most restless till he be wrapt up in the full enjoyment of God above; for our Lord hath said, Luke xvii. 37, "Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together." The saints are united to Christ by faith, as members to the head, and have an innate tendency towards him, and cannot be satisfied without a full enjoyment of him, and that will never be, till the soul get above this drossy, reeling earth into the regions above. Is this your frame? are these your aims? are your movements heavenwards, though, alas, too often interrupted, to the grief of your hearts? Your souls are now espoused to Christ your husband, and you earnestly long for the completion of the nuptials, "that you may be presented to your heavenly husband as chaste virgins."†

* Isaiah xl. 31.

† 2 Cor. xi. 2.

CHAP. X.

COUNSEL GIVEN TO ALL TO SEEK AFTER THIS BLESSED GATHERING AT LAST.

EXHORTATION may be addressed to *sinner*s and to *saint*s.

1. To sinners. A word or two to those who are yet in "the gall of bitterness, and bonds of iniquity," secured with chains for the prince of darkness, "led captive by him at his pleasure."* Suffer yourselves to be gathered unto Christ; what would poor ministers give that they might prevail with you? How doth our Lord spread his arms to embrace you? After all your wanderings and extravagances, the Father of the prodigal would run towards the returning prodigal, fall on your neck, kiss you, and make you kindly welcome; and pious Christians would not envy your reception, but delight in your society, as not diminishing but increasing their felicity. "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth," saith our Lord; again, there is "joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."† Glad are the saints of such consorts; glad are the holy angels of such babes to attend upon; glad would poor ministers be, if your souls were savingly converted and gathered to Christ: but if you still stand out, you have neither part nor lot in this matter, but must be exiles, banished and "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power," 2 Thess. i. 7—9. As meanly as you think of God's children now, parting from them will be doleful in the great day. Now be wise for your precious souls.

* Acts viii. 23. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

† Luke xv. 7, 10.

(1.) There is yet a possibility that you may be converted and saved: "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation;"* to-morrow, it may be past, and never return again. You are yet alive, many are past hope, past help, thousands are dead and lost since you deserved to be in hell; you are yet monuments of mercy.

(2.) The spirit is yet striving with you, poor ministers are studying for you, pouring out their souls to God for you, longing after you, crying out, Why will you die? Why will you refuse this blessed call of God? Be it known to you, God will not always be insulted, "His spirit shall not always strive."†

(3.) If ever your souls be converted and saved, while God is the efficient cause, you yourselves must be instruments; for God works morally, so as to preserve men's nature and the principles thereof; if ever you repent, the work is yours, though the power to work is from God, Phil. ii. 12, 13. Saith a great divine, "The duty is ours, the grace is his; God is the efficient, man the agent."‡

(4.) Your duty is then to fall down on your knees, and beg of God a disposition suited to the grace of God, and fitted for this day of gathering; Lord, I am now going to hear thy word, O come with power from on high, open my heart as thou didst the heart of Lydia: melt my heart like wax, then set thy stamp upon me: "Cast down my vain imaginations—and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."|| Square my soul to be a temple of the Holy Ghost. Put spiritual life into my soul, and let

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

† Gen. vi. 3.

‡ Omne opus humanum est virium nostrarum opus, et vires nullæ sunt nobis nisi à Deo liberè donatæ.—*Baxter's Myth. Theol. Part 3, page 46.*

|| Acts xvi. 14. 2 Cor. x. 5.

me be one of those lively stones which are built up a spiritual house. Put thy hand in "by the hole of the door of my heart, and make my bowels move towards thee."* Let the power of thy grace be such a hidden, prevailing, uncontrollable efficacy as may win my soul to thee: all I can do is nothing, unless the Spirit prevail. If thou wilt work who can let it? if thou work not, all I do is in vain. O Lord, let me not perish with the infidel world, "Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men, but in the midst of thy congregation let me bless the Lord."†

2. But the parties I have to deal with, more directly are Christians, real saints, who are gathered to Christ, and hope to be gathered to him at last with the rest of God's people; to such as these I will give these few instructions, and to all professors.

(1.) Be sincere; be really what you seem to be by profession. It will be a dreadful disappointment to pass for saints, and be found among them, and not be of them; for it is said, Rom. ix. 6, "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel," that is, those that are of the stock of Israel are not all of the same spirit; some goats may be found among the sheep till the separating day; some may "have a name to live and be dead."‡ All is not gold that glitters, shining lamps, and oil in the vessels, are different things. It will be a dreadful thing when the master of the feast comes to view his guests, and finds one not having on a wedding garment, and thus expostulates with him, "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" Alas, he was speechless and cast into outer darkness. O what "weeping and gnashing of teeth!" Matt. xxii. 11—13. O beware of a mere show and semblance of religion. Tremble, lest when you are weighed in the

* 1 Pet. ii. 5. Song v. 4. † Psal. xxvi. 9, 12. ‡ Rev. iii. 1.

balances you be found wanting, lest your works be not perfect before God,* *πεπληρωμένα*, filled up with the necessary essentials that constitute a Christian. Sirs, a day is coming when your inside will be turned out, to the open view of all; when God will bring to “light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the heart,” 1 Cor. iv. 5. See then that your hearts be sound in God’s statutes that you may not be ashamed. Be sincere, and then you “will be without offence in the day of Christ;”† be upright in heart and uniform in life; keep a conscience void of offence: walk with God, and you shall rest with God.

(2.) Gather yourselves together in solemn exercises of religion; especially in cases of public calamity and common danger, so God calls to Israel, Zeph ii. 1, 2, “Gather yourselves together, yea, gather yourselves together, O nation not desired, before the decree bring forth.” Be unanimous and harmonious in fasting and praying. How often doth God call his people of old, “to sanctify a fast, to call a solemn assembly, to gather the elders;”‡ there is great reason for it, all have sinned, all must be humbled, all are concerned. Persons may be helpful one to another, “a threefold cord is not easily broken.”|| God sometimes expects unanimous votes, which make a great sound in his ears. Let Christians do as the children of Israel and Judah, go together “to God weeping and seeking the Lord their God, covenanting with God,” as in Jer. l. 4, 5. Yea, in ordinary duties of prayer, conference, and reading, let them strengthen one another’s hands in God; “Provoke each other to love and to good works.§ Sing God’s praises together. O what an emblem of heaven is this communion of saints! Many combustibles kindled

* Rev. iii. 2.

† Psal. cxix. 80. Phil. i. 10.

‡ Joel i. 14. ii. 16.

|| Eccl. iv. 9—12.

§ Heb. x. 24.

make a great blaze ; grapes put together ripen one another. Is communion of saints good in heaven, and is it not good here ? Are not some Christians ignorant, and want informing ? Are not some dead, and want quickening ; hard, and want softening ; wandering, and want reclaiming ? Are not some staggering, and want settling ? Are not some weak, and should not we lift “ up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees ? ” * Get together here as you hope to come together hereafter.

(3.) Agree affectionately. Let not Christians fall out by the way, when they hope to meet in the end. Away with discords and divisions, if any occasions of difference fall out, (as it is likely there will) rest not till you seek and obtain reconciliation. If thou hast any thing against thy brother, be thou faithful in admonishing, if it be his fault, to bring him to repentance, keep not malice burning in thy heart ; avenge not yourselves, express brotherly kindness to him. “ Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good,” study Rom. xii. 18—21. “ If thou remember that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift,” Matt. v. 23, 24. God will rather tarry for his due than thou shouldst neglect thy duty ; if thou be conscious to thyself that he hath just reason to be offended with thee, humble thyself, confess thy fault to God and him ; if thou be not conscious that thou hast done him wrong, go to him and know the reason of his strangeness to thee, and endeavour to pacify him ; do not fall out with any brother, but “ live in peace, that the God of love and peace may be with you.” † O beware of quarrels and animosities ; study the wisdom which is

* Heb. xii. 12.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

“from above, that is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated :”* you must agree in the end, now affectionately agree ; for reproof to the world, for the credit of religion, for your own comfort live peaceably ; cut not asunder the veins and sinews of the mystical body of Christ ; study 1 Cor. i. 10, Phil. ii. 1, 2.

(4.) Travail over sinners for their conversion. Do your utmost, endeavour to bring in souls to God, that there may be more at that great day to be gathered together to Christ. This is your present duty, this will be your future joy ; this is ministers’ proper work, and every Christian’s concern. I have heard of a private Christian that used to follow persons to their shops, ploughs, and discourse with them about soul-affairs, and thereby was an instrument to convert forty souls to Christ. O what an honour would this be ! doubtless, private Christians if wise, serious, and zealous, might do much good this way, and yet keep their places, Jude, 22, 23, “Of some have compassion, making a difference, others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.” Alas, sirs, how can you find in your hearts to see relations or any miserable sinners dropping into the fire of hell, and not speak one word to stop them ? O dreadful cruelty ! are you not some way accessory to that man’s death who is going to cut his own throat, when you neglect to lay hands on him ? Consider this, and be not merciless to souls ; advise, admonish, rebuke, entreat them for Christ’s sake, for their own sakes to pity themselves, and not leap into the pit of destruction ; who knows what good you may do ? if you be but instrumental in converting one poor sinner “from the error of his way, you save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins,” James v. 20.

* James iii. 17.

And O what joy on both sides will there be at your next meeting before the throne !

(5.) Moderately lament and profitably improve the death of christian friends. They are gathered to Christ and the rest of their brethren ; they are safely removed out of danger, they would be loth to be back again in this sinful, sorrowful world. You may lawfully mourn your loss, but envy not your friends' gain ; "Sorrow not even as others who have no hope," 1 Thess. iv. 13 ; as if they were lost, or as if you should never meet again, for the dead in Christ and survivors shall be ever with the Lord, ver. 15, 17 ; it is but a short absence, there shall be a joyful meeting ; a little recess shall be followed with everlasting converse. David would not mourn for his dead child, for, saith he, "I shall go to him but he shall not return to me ;" but he lamented sore for Absalom, whom he was afraid he was never to see again with comfort.* Those that die in the Lord are not lost but reserved ; their bodies sleep in Jesus, and their souls rest in the bosom of their dear Lord ; they are with him in paradise, and say, "weep not for us but weep for yourselves ;"† imitate our example, worship the same God that we do, live as citizens of heaven, let your affections be with ours, hold communion with us ; this I have treated of, in my book on "Heavenly Converse."

(6.) Make ready to follow those crowned saints. They are gone above, we are below ; they pray for the filling up of their number, let us pray that we may be "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," Col. i. 12. The language of Jesus Christ and all the saints is, "be ye therefore ready also ;"‡ be dressing yourselves for that marriage day ; "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and have put on their fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteous-

* 2 Sam. xii. 23. xviii. 33. † Luke xxiii. 28. ‡ Luke xii. 40.

ness of saints, Rev. xix, 7—9; δικαίωμα, righteousnesses both inherent and imputed. Both are necessary for their several ends and uses: whether this refer to the day of Antichrist's fall, or to the resurrection, it is true in both. There are great and good things "which God hath prepared for them that love him,"* freedom from sin and sorrows, perfection of peace and joy, immediate communion with God, fulness of grace and eternal happiness. Wherefore, "beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless," 2 Pet. iii. 14; watching, warring, wrestling, working, well doing, waiting till your change come, with your loins girt, your lamps lighted, burning and shining with splendour, and you "yourselves like unto men that wait for your Lord."†

(7.) Be longing for that blessed day, when your souls shall be gathered among them, with our blessed Lord. Paul saith, "he desired to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."‡ It is good to be with saints here, but it is far better, infinitely better to be with them in heaven, where the king makes the court, and the courtiers are all crowned kings. Is there not great reason the saints should cry out with Monica, Austin's mother, What do I here? or with Calvin, How long, Lord?|| O when shall my poor imprisoned soul be set at liberty from this body of death? When shall I mount up above the stars, into those celestial regions? O the groanings of my soul under this body of death and distance from God; yea, "I groan earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with a house which is from heaven."§ When will my dear Lord break down these clay-walls, demolish this cage, and let this soul fly up into the heavens, where it shall be

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

† Luke xii. 35, 36.

‡ Phil. i. 23.

|| Quid hic facio?

Usque quo, Domine?

§ 2 Cor. v. 1—3.

perfected? How “long shall I dwell in Meshech, and sojourn in the tents of Kedar.”* I am weary of sin, and distance from my dear Lord, most of my godly friends are gone, when shall I follow after? “Why is his chariot so long in coming, why tarry the wheels of his chariot? make haste my beloved, and be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.”† Why doth my soul thus linger and lag behind my old companions? Such, and such are gone with whom I took sweet counsel in familiar conference about the things of God, and our heavenly country; many with whom I have prayed, and praised God, with whom I have sat down at the Lord’s table, now they are drinking wine new in my Father’s kingdom, and why am I left thus far behind, worshipping afar off? Lord, come thou down to me, or take me up to thee, reach out thy hand, pluck me out of this low dungeon, and set me, where thou hast promised such as have followed thee in the regeneration, upon thrones, yea thou hast promised “that such as overcome shall sit with thee in thy throne.”‡ The preferment is too high for such a worthless worm, such a polluted sinner as I am, but thy promise is sure to be performed; I depend upon it, I long for such a day; some, yea thousands have taken possession; I am one of thy redeemed ones, thou hast given me the earnest of thy Spirit, and some foretastes and prelibations of glory. O for a full harvest! I reach out my arms towards thee, and hope at last to enjoy thy immediate presence; “The Spirit and the bride say, come; and let him that heareth say, come; he which testifieth these things saith, surely, I come quickly; my soul echoes, Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus.”||

* Psal. cxx. 5.

† Judg. v. 28. Cant. viii. 14.

‡ Matt. ix. 25. Rev. iii. 21.

|| Rev. xxii. 17, 20.

CHAP. VII.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO GOD'S CHILDREN IN VARIOUS CASES, DERIVED FROM THIS SUBJECT.

THE last use is intended to convey consolation, or encouragement to the people of God, because there shall be such a blessed gathering together.

1. Because the saints of God, that have lived in all ages, shall then meet and know and enjoy each other with mutual content. It is worth observing, that Plato brings in Socrates comforting himself with the hopes that upon his removal hence, he should be with Orpheus and Musæus, with Hesiod and Homer; that he should even be greatly pleased with the society of Palamedes and Ajax: but O how much more satisfaction shall translated saints find in the society of those celestial inhabitants, of whom they have so often read, and heard with delight; when they shall say, there stands holy Enoch, that walked with God, and was translated body and soul to heaven; there stands Nôah, that just and perfect man, the father and founder of a new world; there stands Abraham, the father of the faithful, and friend of God; there stands just Lot; wrestling Jacob; the beloved Joseph, more glorious now than in Pharaoh's court; there stands meek Moses, the Jews' lawgiver, once king in Jeshurun, that conversed with God face to face; there stands Aaron, the saint of God, far more glorious now than in his priestly garments in the holy of holies; there appears pious Samuel, patient Job, zealous Josiah, David, the man after God's own heart. Behold a troop comes up of old and new testament saints, all the prophets, apostles, ministers, martyrs, confessors, and saints in all ages;

who will make a splendid show, next to the infinite God, and our glorious Redeemer. If Augustine judged it a fine sight, and worth wishing for, to see Rome flourishing, to hear Paul preaching, and to behold Christ in the flesh;* much more will it be a transporting sight to behold our glorified Redeemer surrounded with myriads of blessed souls. This will be a delectable vision indeed.

2. Saints that have enjoyed sweet communion together in this world, shall enjoy sweeter and perpetual communion above; they that have kept days of fasting and prayer, days of thanksgiving and conference, that have sat under the same preaching, have sung psalms together, have sat down together at the holy supper, and feasted upon the fruits of Christ's meritorious sacrifice, shall now drink this wine new with him, in his Father's kingdom. O what communication of experience, of what they met in their passage through this wilderness into their celestial Canaan. How will they echo to each other and say, "We sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."† It was sweet then, it is sweeter now: O the peculiar goodness of distinguishing grace! Why did God choose us rather than others to be objects of his transcendent love! We were fed with manna in the wilderness, now we are come into the land of promise, we have royal dainties, and drink abundantly of these rivers of pleasures, and bathe our souls in this boundless sea of satisfying delights; then they will individually sing with a louder note than ever, "Come, and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."‡ I

* Romam in flore, Paulum in ore, Christum in corpore.

† Song ii. 3.

‡ Psal. lxi. 16.

was with my dear Lord in such a secret place, now I declare his goodness in the heights of Zion.

3. Saints that parted sorrowfully with their relations by death, now meet them again to part no more. Death brought a cloud over our natural and christian friends. They disappeared, and we saw them no more; but now we are met again in a better place than in our houses, or temples made with hands. We once took mutual delight in each other, but that was only a shadow, a faint resemblance of what we now enjoy; the husband and wife "were heirs together of the grace of life,"* now they are possessors together of the fulness of that grace in glory. We prayed, wept, discoursed together; we loved each other in the flesh, but now our spark is become a flame; we love at another rate. The godly child will say, this is my tender-hearted mother, my prudent, pious father, that shed many a tear for me. The parent will say, this, my child cost me many times a sad heart, many a bitter groan, he is the son of my vows; then the child of my hopes, now the child of my joys; his miscarriages cost me dear, his happiness raises my spirits; he caused me to make many an errand to the throne of grace, he now elevates my spirit into an ecstasy of joy. My prayers are fully heard, my happiness is completed in the enjoyment of God with my dear relations.

4. Souls fully refined from the dregs of passion and corruption, will then without such alloys enjoy each other. Alas, we cannot discourse together here, but some piece of vanity interposeth itself: our discourses are oft impertinent, sometimes unsavory, sometimes giving and often taking offence. Alas, what discords, distances, and dissensions are there among Christians; even Paul and Barnabas may part in ill humour. Alas,

* 1 Pet. iii. 7.

what animosities and heart burnings are to be found here in this lower world even among the saints ! That we may heavily sigh and say, how comes it to pass that such angry, diabolical passions should rise in heavenly hearts ?* But now those flames are quenched, now they all unite in harmonious melody, singing the song of Moses, and of the Lamb ; now they are perfect, “ of good comfort, of one mind, they live in peace, and the God of love and peace is with them,”† and they are with God ; they shall never quarrel more. O the delectable melody of this palm-bearing company ! far beyond the music of the spheres ; not one jarring string in all that blessed concert ; they have left behind them all their cudgels at the entrance of this temple of peace ; their hearts are centred in God ; Luther and Calvin are here perfectly agreed, never to contend more.

5. Saints shall be perfectly freed from converse with vile persons in this polluted world. Here the righteous and wicked are mixed ; it is impossible to avoid some civil converse with carnal neighbours, for “ then must we needs go out of the world ;”‡ even notorious blasphemers, idolaters, covetous, who fret and vex the hearts of believers. But in heaven there are none such, no unclean thing enters there ; the pious soul shall never be vexed with unruly company more. There is a day when the saints and none but saints shall be gathered together. There shall “ be no more the Canaanite,” or hypocrite, “ in the house of the Lord of hosts.”|| Not a profane Esau, or a scoffing Ishmael in that household of God, among all those innumerable saints. These have left the mad world on earth sinning, or in hell suffering for ever.

* Tantæne animis cœlestibus iræ.

† 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

‡ 1 Cor. v. 10.

|| Zech. xiv. 21.

6. Godly ministers and their gracious converts shall meet together with joy. O what reciprocal joy, and transcendent satisfaction will they experience in each other, “when both he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.”* O, saith the glorified saint, yonder is my spiritual father, under whose ministry I have many a time sat with trembling, alarmed by convictions piercing my conscience, when the law hath thundered wrath against me. The same hand hath closed the wound and applied the plaister of a gospel-promise to my bleeding soul. Many melting, heart-searching truths have these ears heard from his mouth that have come warm to my heart. Blessed be God that ever I saw his face or heard his voice: the minister will be surprised with a transport of joy when he shall see his spiritual children, begotten in the bonds of the gospel, over whom he hath wept many a tear, travailed with cares and fears, and for whom he hath put up many affectionate prayers. Now he shall see, and say his labour was not in vain in the Lord; of these he will say, “what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming; for ye are our glory and joy, 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

7. Christians that have been scattered by persecution, shall now quietly meet and part no more. How will they with comfort reflect on the solemn assemblies sorrowfully broken up by officers and unruly bailiffs, their names taken, their persons dragged before magistrates, their houses rifled, and themselves hurried to prison; now those days are over and gone, no danger of conventicles or unlawful assemblies in that upper region, they shall worship God on a hill, in the mountain of the height of Israel: they shall no more be prosecuted by murdering or scattering acts, these shall

* John iv. 36.

now be out of date, they shall no more hear the voice of the oppressor ; there were many such days as those in the apostles' times, great persecutions against the church, so " that they were all scattered abroad"* through foreign regions. But now the storms are blown over, the clouds scattered, and the glorified saints shall never be disturbed by the sons of violence any more. They shall recount those past troubles with songs of praise.

8. The saints of God that have been confined to prisons, shall be set at liberty and enjoy sweet content together. The Lord made their very prisons sweet by mutual communion, but heaven will be sweeter. The imprisoned bird never sings so sweetly in the cage as at liberty. O blessed enlargement ! Now they are delivered, with the rest of the creation, " into the glorious liberty of the children of God." They walk abroad at liberty at another rate than ever before. How will they with joy and triumph recount their wandering about in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth ?† Sometimes thrust into dark and filthy dungeons, with felons and malefactors, yea, condemned, tortured, and executed, but now they have obtained a better resurrection. O happy deliverance ! These shall have their proper mansions in their Father's house, and the celestial palace will resound sweet echoes of their triumphant praises, they shall not now, with Paul and Silas, sing in the stocks, but above where they shall be advanced together.‡

9. The saints that have providentially parted one from another upon any occasion, shall meet again and part no more. When Paul was to be bound at Jerusalem, and the disciples understood it, they were distressed and lamented ; but Paul said, " what mean ye

* Acts viii. 1. † Rom. viii. 21. Heb. xi. 38. ‡ Acts xvi. 24, 25.

to weep and to break my heart?" Their weeping breaks his heart; but especially, saith the text, they sorrowed most of all, for the words that he spake, "that they should see his face no more."* And this is the case of many christian friends, but the relief is, they shall see each other's faces again in the mansions above; their faces will then shine as the sun, and their enjoyment will exceed the bounds of any capacity in this lower world. They parted but for a season, that they should "receive each other for ever,"† when the gracious God hath received them into everlasting habitations.

10. The saints that divided and could not agree to walk together in one church upon earth, shall be perfectly reconciled above, and then shall mutually embrace each other; they shall all speak the same thing, and never have the least reflecting speech or thought against one another. Possibly in this world the contention or paroxym between a "Paul and Barnabas may be so sharp, that they may depart asunder one from another."‡ As all God's people are necessarily scattered into distinct societies; though uniting in spirit in the bonds of peace, yet good persons of various persuasions, some being for greater latitude, others for stricter bonds, or being of different principles in smaller matters, or through prejudice, may in some cases refuse to hold communion occasionally one with another; but in heaven they shall be all of one mind and one heart, and all dissensions and divisions will be laid aside; O what perfect love, sweet harmony, and joyful delight will there be in the persons and graces of each other! there will be no saying then, I am of this opinion, or of this party, or a member of this church and not of another; but they shall attain the unity of

* Acts xxi. 11, 13. xx. 38. † Philemon, 15. ‡ Acts xv. 39.

the faith, and be cordially associated, members of the church triumphant.

11. Christians that had their natural infirmities, shall leave them behind them, and their united spirits shall be made perfect. What rough-hewn natures have some pious souls? How unsociable are some which proves a great affliction to themselves and all about them, still quarrelsome and discontented, nothing pleaseth them, and sometimes they cannot help it, though they strive and fight and pray against it, it still recurs and returns, and creates much vexation; but upon this blessed gathering together, "the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain, when the glory of the Lord shall be revealed."* O happy day, when there will be no envy or discontent, but the saints shall rejoice in each others' graces and comfort as their own, and be accordant with each other's spirits. Though some stars shall outshine others in lustre and glory, yet every vessel shall be full both of grace and comfort, and not an angry look or peevish word shall be found there to all eternity.

12. The saints that here consoled themselves and one another in their personal afflictions, shall leave their sorrows behind them, and all the occasions and grounds thereof, and unanimously thank God for complete immunity from all; some are sick, some are pained, some are pinched with poverty, others are tormented with wicked children and bad relations; some have troubles of conscience under darkness, and hidings of God's face, some assaulted with hellish suggestions, and satanical temptations, some are deeply melancholy, and making sad complaints. Now we are required "to bear one another's burdens;" and Paul saith, "Who is weak and I am not weak? who is offended and I

* Isaiah xl. 4, 5.

burn not ?”* Grace in the heart commands sympathy with others ; but that perfect state dischargeth all compassion. They that mourned together shall rejoice together, not a sigh or groan shall ever proceed from a glorified spirit.

13. The saints shall have no more to do with difficult and self-denying duties. There are many personal duties that occasion some cost, and it becomes a Christian before hand “to sit down and count the cost,”† to mortify some particular lusts, to maintain a strict watch over heart and life, to worship God in the spirit, exercise every grace, maintain constant communion with God ; these will cause a soul much attention and industry, and though these are sweet when practised, “for wisdom’s ways are pleasantness,”‡ yet because of the corruption of our hearts, and averseness to any thing that is good, they become difficult ; then the duties of relations are difficult, of parents to children, of masters to servants, and of Christians one to another, mutual inspection, admonition, giving and taking reproofs faithfully and humbly. Christians find these duties hard and grievous to flesh and blood. But the more spiritual any man grows, the more easy they grow ; the more love is in our hearts to God, the less are his commandments grievous.|| Now in heaven love will be perfected ; and holy souls will be in their element while they are serving God and doing the work of that place ; but the more “you can sing in the ways of the Lord,” the more loudly will you sing in the height of Zion.§

14. The saints that have attended ordinances with many defects and imperfections will leave them all behind them, and attend the Lord without the least de-

* Gal. vi. 2. 2 Cor. xi. 29. † Luke xiv. 28. ‡ Prov. iii. 17.

|| 1 John v. 3. § Psal. cxxxviii. 5. Jer. xxxi. 12.

fect, distraction or imperfection. The best of God's children have a weight hanging on them, and a "sin that too easily besets them,"* and impedes their motion and obstructs their ascent upwards; but these shackles shall be removed with the body, never a wandering thought more to all eternity. Here we not unfrequently weaken, rather than strengthen the hands one of another;† bodily infirmities often render the best services wearisome, because the holiest believers have but a measure of affection; hence it was that three of Christ's choicest disciples slept while he was in his agony, for though the "spirit was willing, yet the flesh was weak."‡ Alas, Aaron and Hur must hold up Moses's hands here, the best at some seasons may be out of frame for duty; but in heaven the saints shall join hearts and hands without weariness or distraction in singing the high praises of God in that heavenly choir, and none shall fail his brother, or fall short of duty.

15. Saints of the meanest stature and standing here, shall be complete, and commence the highest degree of grace in glory. I say not, that all the saints shall have equal degrees of glory; the scripture saith, at the resurrection, "one star differeth from another star in glory."|| It is true, all these heavenly luminaries shall be perfectly arranged in one constellation. But good divines think, that as there will be degrees of torment in hell, so also of joys in heaven: as the vessels are larger to contain more, or as men have honoured God more here below, yet the humblest saints will be completely happy; "For they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many unto righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever," Dan. xii. 3. Weak Christians shall no more complain of defects,

* Heb. xii. 1. † Heb. xii. 12. ‡ Matt. xxvi. 36, 40, 41.
 || 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42.

but "he that is feeble in that day shall be as David, and the house of David as God, as the angel of the Lord before them;" there will no more be thence an infant of days. The meanest Christian will in some respects be equal with the angels in heaven. Children in grace shall be grown up to be perfect men, "to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."*

16. Saints at that day shall be raised above the revilings, calumnies, and slanders of a malicious world, and be advanced to the highest honour. In this world every one can throw dirt on God's children, and account them the vilest of men, not worthy to live upon earth, and cry as the Jews against Paul, "away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live;" but what saith God of such; "Of whom the world was not worthy."† No nicknames shall follow them to heaven, they shall not be there called puritans, fanatics, schismatics, or fools, possibly they may even be honoured among men when dead and raised to glory; "The memory of the just is blessed."‡ The inhabitants of the world above shall honour them, though sometimes they thought and spoke slightly of them, even the wicked who are shut up in hell shall think honourably of them, as the rich man who considered once poor Lazarus a fit ambassador to send to his rich brethren on earth; it may also be that wretched hypocrites on earth will build "the tombs of deceased prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,"|| in honour of those whom they, or such as they were, did once abuse and revile on earth; they will call the dead, saints and canonize them. Thus God often turns the scales and rolls away the reproach of his servants.

* Zech. xii. 8. Isa. lxxv. 20. Matt. xxii. 30. Eph. iv. 13.

† Acts xxii. 22. Heb. xi. 38. ‡ Prov. x. 7, 14.

|| Luke xvi. 27, 28. Matt. xxiii. 29.

17. Saints that have exercised charity and hospitality, and such as received their bounty, will embrace each other with mutual pleasure. Our Lord saith, "Whosoever gives but a cup of cold water to a little one in the name of a disciple," though he may be mistaken, "verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward," Matt. x. 42. O! will the poor beggar say, there is my kind benefactor; the debtor will there own his creditor, who "forgave him all when he had nothing to pay;"* well, saith the free hearted disbursers, I do not repent it, since I am so richly rewarded, this recompence is above my expectations, and contrary to my deserts; strange that I should receive so much for laying out so little, this is above Isaac's reaping an hundred fold. How comfortable will that language of our Lord be, when he shall say as in Matt. xxv. 34—40, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you," &c. Behold my representatives, in relieving of whom you relieved me; I took as done to my person what you did to my members, and you shall be glorified together.

18. Saints that have wantèd many things in this world, when they meet above shall want nothing. In this world the body is full of wants, we want necessities to supply nature, we want food to nourish us, clothes to cover us, physic to cure us, houses to shelter us, sleep to refresh us, yet these only supply particular wants, and men ordinarily have dependance one upon another for supplies; but when God's children ascend above, though they shall have sweet communion with one another, yet their happiness will chiefly depend on the vision and fruition of God. "With him is the fountain of life, in his light they see light, in his presence is ful-

* Matt. xviii. 26, 27.

ness of joy.”* The sun doth dart its beams through the whole universe; God’s presence, not the saints’, makes heaven; the king makes the court, not courtiers; nothing can satisfy the capacious soul but God. “I shall be satisfied,” saith David, “when I awake with thy likeness:”† that and nothing else gives content. Angels and glorified spirits, as creatures, must say, it is not in us to satisfy you; God alone can: now, and never till now, the soul saith, I have enough, I need no more: I have not only tasted, but drunk deep of this river of pleasures, yea, bathed my soul in this blessed ocean of delights: nor do I become sated with these, but fresh springs of joy yield me perpetual contentment.

19. All saints pass through the valley of the shadow of death to the glory that shall be revealed: none exempted but Enoch and Elias, and those that shall be found alive at the last day. It is no strange thing, “for it is appointed to men once to die.”‡ It is the common lot of mankind, even of the best. The sting of death is gone, it is but a trap-door to let us into heaven. Thousands are gone before us; they are not lost, but reserved; we shall meet them again. O who would be afraid of death, when Jesus Christ hath perfumed the grave for us? Well may a graceless soul be afraid to die, because he knows not what company he shall have in the other world; suspecting, however, that he may have to fare with devils and lost souls; but the “righteous hath hope in his death,”|| and sees Jesus Christ standing with a crown on his head, and another in his hand, saying, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”§

* Psal. xxxvi. 9. xvi. 11.

† Psal. xvii. 15.

‡ Heb. ix. 27.

|| Prov. xiv. 32.

§ Rev. ii. 10.

Why should we then fear the king of terrors, who is disarmed, he may hiss, but cannot sting us ; he may kill us, but cannot hurt us.* See, yonder glorified assembly of the spirits of just men made perfect have conquered death, and are set upon splendid thrones.

20. This blessed society of departed souls shall continue through the ages of eternity. In this world they met and parted again, there were many intermissions in their sweet communion : but now they shall for ever dwell in the house of the Lord, “and sing praises to the Lamb for ever ; such as overcome shall be pillars in the temple of God, and shall go no more out.”† They shall never be banished out of this heavenly paradise. This word ever, evermore, everlasting, puts new life into the glorious songs of praise, and daily revives their spirits. After ten thousands of millions of ages, the joy shall be as fresh as at their first entrance. That river is still running, “in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”‡ Mortality is written upon all sublunary things ; eternity gives weight to what is spiritual ; there “shall be no night there,” no clouds, no eclipses of that glory, “for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.”|| It is recorded of Diagoras, that when he saw his three sons crowned in one day, as victors, at the Olympic games, he died away while he was embracing them for joy. But though the saints shall be in a continual ecstasy and transport of joy, in beholding their children in Christ, and their godly christian friends, yet their hearts shall not break, but be enlarged with joy, and their joy perpetuated for evermore.

O what a day will that be, when all the sons of the second Adam shall meet together, and so many spirits

* 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57. † Rev. iii. 12. ‡ Psal. xvi. 11. || Rev. xxii. 5.

purified from the sordid dregs of sin and suffering, shall combine their harmonious music and melody in praising our dear Lord, whose glorious perfections we could never sufficiently extol! What a brave choir will that make! not a discordant string among them all; but as one eye moves, the other corresponds; when one string is touched, the other sounds; such a blending harmony will there be of well-tuned praises in that heavenly chorus. Ignatius thinks the sun, moon, and stars made a choir about the star that appeared at Christ's incarnation: O then what a halcyon day will that be, "when the morning stars shall sing together, and the sons of God shall shout for joy!"* O what a harmonious melody in perfect symphony! What mutual love and delight in each other! Yea, they shall love one another the better, for the perfect love they have to God: and bathing their souls in that fathomless ocean of divine love.

It is true, the infinite God is ultimately and objectively the saints' proper delight both here and in heaven; but glorified bodies united to those blessed souls, and the blissful society of angels and saints, will be no small accessions to the saint's happiness. As there will be no hypocrite there to cool their charity, so there will not be missing the humblest member of Christ. The weak Christian that cried out, "my lameness, my lameness," shall then be strong. The dark soul that rarely had a glimpse of God, or a sealing of the Spirit, shall walk for ever in the light of God's countenance. The grieved saint shall be now in an ecstasy of joy: not a gracious soul shall be missing, not the least grace wanting, not a duty lost, all secret prayers, tears, groans, shall come to light and be rewarded, their tears were bottled, their prayers record-

* Job xxxviii. 7.

ed, and shall now be produced.* Not an act of charity, though the left hand knew not what the right hand did, much less others, but it shall be brought to light before angels and men, with high approbation and commendation.

O who would not be preparing for such a day? Who would not long for it, breathe after it, and freely welcome it? Let all the children of the "bride-chamber make themselves ready, let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning."† Be waking and watchful, attend his movements, be glad of his approaches, and joyfully welcome the bridegroom's coming with all his holy angels and glorified spirits, descending in the clouds to fetch you home into those celestial mansions to be for ever with the Lord. Be not afraid, when he saith, surely I come quickly; let the redeemed of the Lord echo, Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus, Amen, so be it.

* Psal. lvi. 8.

† Luke xii. 35.