

porary estate, not for that wherein we are to be as the angels of God in heaven, where each one hath a subordinate self-sufficiency, and needs not the meet helps which the exigency of this state makes so useful. And therefore the reason as well as the authority of such precepts, is most entirely to be subscribed to, that because the time is short, they that have wives be as though they had none; they that rejoice (in having them) as if they rejoiced not; they that weep (in losing them) as though they wept not. So our affections will correspond to the objects, which are of the same make; for the fashion of the world passeth away. And it were a gloomy thought to consider all as passing and vanishing, if we did not seriously believe, that it vanishes to make way for another, that shall never vanish, and that shall shortly enter in its perfect glory, and fill up the whole stage. Scaffolds are taken down, when the eternal building is finished.

TO A GENTLEWOMAN, ON THE LOSS OF A
BELOVED DAUGHTER.

Dear and Honour'd Madam,

DID you think two or three months ago, such a trial was so near? Such sad futurities God in mercy to us, hides from us, that we may not afflict ourselves, before he afflicts us: and that when he intends we should suffer that particular affliction but once, namely, When it comes, we may not impose so hardly upon ourselves, as to suffer it a thousand times over before it comes. Sufficient is the day, &c. If he should have made us all prophets, in reference to all the events of our time, we should bring all the evils of every future day, into every former day; as if the evil of the day were not enough for the day.

But though he gives us not certain predictions of such evils, lest he should torment us, he gives forewarnings lest he should surprise us. He hath told us we must all once die, and not when: that life is a vapour; that all flesh is grass; that the beauty or glory of it is but as the flower of grass; withering things! He hath asserted his own dominion over lives, and over the spirits of all flesh as the God of them, to lodge and dislodge them, where and as he pleases. And who are we, that we should grudge him that dominion? or so much as wish we could have wrested that part of his empire out of his hands? But when he afflicts, it is good to consider, what it is for? It comes not out of the dust, though it may reduce us or ours thither. And if our utmost search cannot find out a particular cause, (wherein we should take heed of being too indulgent and partial to ourselves, but should beg that what we know not he would teach us) yet we should however more earnestly endeavour to improve the affliction to the general end, which we may

be sure he aims at ; to withdraw our minds from this present world, and state of things ; to take heed of being peremptory in laying any designs that must be measured by time, and be subject to the uncertainties of it ; to determine nothing but with that reserve, If God will, we shall do this or that, (James 4. 15.) to have our minds ingulphed and swallowed up, not of the stream of time, but of the ocean of eternity ; to be easily taken off from any purpose, the scene whereof must be laid on this earth, or lower world ; to have our hearts more entirely and more strongly set upon God, so as to be able to say, Whom have I in heaven or earth besides thee ? that the true end may be gain, though such a comfort be lost, and the particular offending cause cannot be found.

We may err, in thinking some such particular offence must be fastened upon. If it clearly can, it ought : if not, it is better forbear judging than misjudge. Possibly chastening for a particular sin may not be in God's design : it is not always. We may be sure it never is his principal design in taking away one relative from another. He made all things (principally) for himself ; he made us but secondarily for one another. If his principal design in making such a creature was not to please me, his principal design in taking it away was not to displease or afflict me. He hath his own greater and higher end concerning his own creature, to glorify himself upon it, and by it, in a greater world than this. Many afflictions are for trial ; and that in such a case is an awful thought.

The jealous God hath me now under trial, how I can bear, how I can submit, how I can reverence his hand, how I can behave myself towards him when he afflicts ; whether I will venture to contend with him, or be sullen and morose towards him ; because he hath bereaved me of a child I delighted in, whether I better loved him or my child. The trial may be manifold ; of my faith, of my patience, of my fear of him, of my love to him : and I may add, it may be intended for a trial of gratitude, and a mighty trial that is. We are required, in every thing to give thanks. And Job did it, and said, "Blessed be the name of the Lord," when with all his substance he took away all his children at once : The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken. The injunction, "In every thing give thanks," signifies there is in every thing some matter of praise. I know not so immediately what was in this case : but if there was what I have heard, great indications of early piety ; if there were grounds to hope there was a work of regeneration wrought, there is infinitely more matter of thanksgiving than complaint. What had the life of a child been worth without this ?

when better never to have been born ! It is a far greater thing if he have taken her as his own child, than if he had left her to you, only as yours. If you have faith to look into the unseen world, and behold her taken into the society of angels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect, how much more hath God done for her and you, than if he had left her to your care and provision in this wretched world ? We are told there is joy in heaven for the conversion of a sinner : much more for the glorification of a convert ! That joy ought to swallow up in very great part your sorrow. The good Lord frame your spirit suitably to these things, in whom I am

Your truly respectful servant (very sensible of your case)

Love Lane, Aldermanbury,
London, Sept. 29, 1694.

J. HOWE.

THE TWO FOLLOWING ARE TO A NEW MARRIED
COUPLE.

(Who were persons of distinction,) that were written on the same sheet of paper, that was directed to the Lady with whom Mr. HOWE had been long acquainted.

Most Honoured Sir,

I Thankfully acknowledge the favour of your welcome lines, which ought to be most entirely so, both upon the account of the author, and the matter of them. For though my opportunity for so desirable an acquaintance hath been but little as to the circumstance, it hath been much as to the substance of what I know of you, in ways that gave me greatest assurance, before I had the happiness of oral converse with you. Nor could any thing be more grateful to me, than to read you from your own hand so related, and so well pleased (as I doubt not you will be daily more and more) with your relation, and the other accessory correlates, with whom God hath cast your lot.

I believe you have much reason to bless God (who orders all things to the best advantage to such as sincerely give themselves up to his conduct) that he led you not into such a condition and state of life as he now at length hath brought you into, before you were well acquainted with the rules and duties of it, better than to need help from such a one as I. But among the many other precepts that concern that case, I dare adventure to recommend those of 1. Cor. 7, 29, 30, 31 : and pursuantly thereto, to offer to your thoughts, that this can be but a partial temporary felicity, and so far only so at all, as it is enjoyed only as mediate, and subservient to the full and final felicity which we are professedly seeking and waiting for: so far ought it to be, to oppose it, or let it be an obstruction thereto. Which is the nature of all good things that have only the goodness of the means, and not of the end, that their goodness is variable,