

LETTERS.

TO A FRIEND ON THE LOSS OF AN EXCELLENT WIFE.

I Seriously lament your new affliction, whereof I lately had the surprising account. And I should be the more concerned for it, if I did not consider it hath befallen one, who can with judgment estimate and suffer it. He hath enough to relieve him against the ungrateful events which our present state is liable to, who is serious in the belief of God's universal government over this world, and that there is another. The former of these is a principle much abused by some; which no more proves it false, than the gospel, out of which some have the mischievous skill to extract a deadly savour. It is our great privilege, for which we ought to be thankful, that by such arguments whereby we can most certainly demonstrate to ourselves, that there is a God, we can as certainly prove that he is not an Epicurean God; unto which imaginary idol only that could belong, to be disturbed by being concerned about human affairs. But if he knew the true nature of God better, who came forth from him into our world, on purpose to make him known, we are sufficiently assured, not a hair can fall from our head without him, much less so considerable a part of ourselves.

This is not the state wherein things are to be unexceptionably well. But we have cause as things are, to acknowledge, and adore the wisdom and goodness of providence, that the wickedness of the world hath not in so many thousand years quite confounded families and all human society long ago: but that as wise counsel did first settle the institution of those lesser societies, God hath from age to age renewed the impression of that part among others of the law of nature, by which men are prompted as by instinct to preserve them; besides the positive precept he hath given, setting out to each relative, the duty whereby order is to be preserved in them. And when we know his government extends so low, how gladly ought we to submit ourselves to it, and allow him to determine how long we should enjoy such relatives, as well as that there should be any such. For we know that they were appointed but for this tem-

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