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J. O. Johnson

And they shall walk with robes white for they are worthy

BAXTER'S

CONVERSION WITH GOD
IN
SOLITUDE.



D. G. Johnson Eng^r

NEW-YORK, - C. WELLS,

1833

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CONVERSE WITH GOD

IN SOLITUDE.

BY THE REV. RICHARD BAXTER.

ABRIDGED BY BENJAMIN FAWCET, M. A.

NEW YORK—C. WELLS.

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P R E F A C E.

IF multitudes, who glory in their christian name, were not willingly without God in the world, there would not every where be found such melancholy proofs of aversion to sacred retirement. Every moment of time, and every capacity of nature, would not so studiously be consecrated to the low caresses of fellow worms. Nor would the natural, the unavoidable, and therefore common disappointments resulting from mortal friendship, be received with such horrible surprise or be felt with such exquisite pain; like the man that cried out, when his idols of silver and gold were stolen from him, They have taken away my gods, and what have I more?

Mr. Henry observes, where it is said of our Lord, He went up into a mountain apart to pray, "They are not Christ's followers that do not care for being alone; that cannot enjoy themselves in solitude, when they have none else to converse with, none else to enjoy but God and their own hearts."

Oh that all hearts may be so visited with the grace and Spirit of Jesus, as in this instance to make it their highest ambition to breathe his temper, and imitate his example ! Then the multitudes, who have so long and ardently sought their heaven in vain, amongst the tumults of business, or the thoughtless circles of mirth and gayety, will seek and find it in the recesses of devout retirement. Then will the flames of devotion, wherever they are now ascending, ascend yet higher, burn more constant, pure and fervent, and produce more lively foretastes of heavenly joy. That this small but heavenly tract may, through a divine blessing, contribute to answer such desirable purposes, is the sole end of its appearance in the present form.

B. F.

CONVERSE WITH GOD.

Behold the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the father is with me.—JOHN xvi. 32.

CHAPTER I.

FRIENDS FORSAKING US IN OUR DISTRESS.

SECT. I. The connexion of the text with the context. Sect. II. A general plan of the work. Sect. III. 1. Why Christ suffered all his disciples to forsake him. Sect. IV.—VI. 2. How we may see ourselves forsaken by our friends. Sect. VII. 3. What an aggravated affliction it is to be forsaken by our friends. Sect. VIII.—X. 4. Considerations to reconcile us to such an aggravated affliction. Sect. XI. The chapter concludes with pointing out the happy tendency of such considerations.

SECT. I. CHRIST thought fit to foretel his disciples how they would

manifest their infirmity in forsaking him. This he did, more fully to convince them that “ he knew what was in man,” and that he voluntarily submitted to his being forsaken. Thus man did least for Christ, when Christ was doing most for man ; even making atonement for man’s reconciliation to God, and preparing the most effectual and expensive remedy for man’s recovery. Christ foretold them of the consequence of their infirmity, to humble them, that they might not think too highly of themselves for having so freely confessed to him, “ Now we are sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee ; by this we believe that thou camest forth from

God." (ver. 30,) Immediately "Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone, and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." Though Christ would have his servants know his graces in them, he would also have them know their own corruptions and infirmities. We are apt to judge of what we shall do hereafter, by what we feel at present. When we feel the stirring of some corruption, we are ready to think ourselves destitute of the contrary grace: And when we feel the exercise of faith, or love, we are ready to think we shall never more feel the contrary corruptions.

But Christ would keep us both humble and watchful, by acquainting us with the mutability and inconstancy of our minds. When it goes well with us, we forget the time is coming when it may go worse. We may say to ourselves, as Christ to his disciples, "Do we now believe? It is well. But the time may be coming, in which we may be shook by our remaining unbelief. Do we now rejoice in the love of God? The time may be coming when we may think ourselves forsaken of God, and that he treats us as enemies. Do we now pray with fervour? The time may come, when we shall seem to ourselves to be prayerless ; or, at least, to pray in vain." What Christ here prophesied of his

disciples, exactly came to pass. In the garden, when he was sweating blood in prayer, they were sleeping. Though "the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak." They "could not watch with him one hour." When he was apprehended, "then all the disciples forsook him, and fled."

SECT. II. In the text there are three things that deserve our distinct consideration. First, Christ was forsaken by his own disciples, and left alone. Secondly, when the disciples left Christ, they were scattered every one to his own. They returned to their old habitations, acquaintance, and employments, as if their hopes and hearts had been almost broken, and all their labour lost in following

Christ so long. Yet the root of faith and love, which still remained, caused them to inquire farther of the issue, and to meet together in secret to converse with each other about these things. Thirdly, when Christ was forsaken of his disciples, and left alone, yet he was not forsaken of his Father, nor so left alone as to be separated from him, or from his love. Each of these leading sentiments of the text will be more particularly illustrated, while in this chapter we consider the case of friends forsaking us in our distress ; and (Chap. 2.) of friends taken from us by death : Then (Chap. 3.) what it is to have the presence of God with us in solitude : and (Ch. 4.) why the presence of God in soli

tude is desirable : To which some concluding directions will be added (Chap. 5.) to show how the presence of God in solitude is attainable. The case of friends forsaking us in our distress, makes it proper to inquire, Why Christ suffered all his disciples to forsake him ; How we may see ourselves forsaken by our friends ; and what an aggravated affliction it is to be so forsaken ; besides offering some considerations, to reconcile us to such an aggravated affliction.

Sect. III. 1. It may seem strange to us, that Christ would suffer all his disciples to forsake him in all his extremity. And, I doubt not, it will seem strange to us, when in our extremity, and even in our sufferings for

Christ, we shall find ourselves forsaken by those we highly valued, and with whom we were most intimate. Providence may permit this, for such reasons as these. Christ, while suffering for sin, permitted the power and odiousness of sin to break forth, that it might be known he suffered not in vain. He permitted his followers to desert him; and thereby discover their secret unbelief, selfishness, and unthankfulness, that they might know the death of Christ was as necessary for them, as for others; that the disease was universal, and therefore needed a universal remedy. It is not Christ's intent to make his servants seem better than they are, either to themselves or others; or to honour

himself by his hiding their faults: but to magnify his pardoning and healing grace, by means of those sins, which he pardons and heals. Hereby, he brings his followers to the fuller knowledge of themselves. He shows them that, which ought all their days to keep them humble, and watchful, and at a distance from presumption and self-confidence. When we have confessed Christ, or done him any considerable service, we are apt, with the disciples, to say "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" As if they had rather been givers to Christ, than receivers from him. But when Peter forswears him, and the rest fly from him, and afterwards reflect on their

ingratitude and cowardice ; then they better discern their weakness, and where their dependence ought to be. He also, by this means, teaches them what they would have been, if God had totally left them to themselves. When our faults have hurt us, and made us ashamed, we shall be thankful for recovering grace, and not boast, as if we had “ made ourselves to differ from others.” Our Lord might also design to have no support from man in his sufferings. It was part of his voluntary humiliation, to be deprived of all earthly comforts, and to bear affliction even from those few that lately were faithful servants. Thus no man could challenge to himself the honour of contributing in

any degree, to the redemption of the world; no, not so much as by encouraging the Redeemer. In this way Christ might render the witness of his disciples to him of greater authority. When all their doubts were dissipated, they would be received, as the most impartial witness, by a doubting world. And thus Christ would also teach us, that the best of men are not entirely to be trusted. Paul lived in a time when Christians were more self denying and steadfast than they now are, yet he says, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me."

Sect. IV. 2. Christians expect to be conformed to your Lord in this part of his humiliation. Are your

friends yet friendly to you? Do not promise yourselves an unchanging constancy in them. Are they yet useful to you? Expect the time when they cannot help you. Are they your comforters, and is their company your delight? Be ready for the time, when they may become your sharpest scourges and heart piercing griefs; at least, "when you shall say, We have no pleasure in them." Have any, or all, of them already failed you? What wonder? Are they not men, and sinners? Reprove yourselves for your unwarrantable expectations, and learn to know what man is. Expect some of your friends whom you have thought sincere, to prove very unfaithful. Are you better than Da-

vid, who had an Ahithophel ; Or than Paul, who had a Demas ? Or than Christ, who had a Judas ? “ Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.” If pride, and vain glory, and sensuality are unmortified, such persons are not to be trusted. For wealth, honour, or worldly interest, they will part with God and salvation ; and much more with their best friends on earth. With Job, you may have occasion to complain. “ He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in my house, and my maids, count me for a stranger : I am an

alien in their sight. I called my servant, and he gave me no answer. I entreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's sake of my own body. Yea, young children despised me; I arose and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me; and they whom I loved, are turned against me." You may be obliged, as well as David, to say, "Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." Those that have been most acquainted with the secrets of your soul, may be your betrayers. They whom you have laid under the strongest obligations, may prove your

most inveterate enemies. Many faithful ministers of Christ have preached and prayed, and wept for their people's souls; and after all have been reproached and persecuted. Like the patient, that being cured of a mortal disease, sued his physician at law, for making him sick with medicines. Paul was accounted an enemy by the Gallatians, because he told them the truth. Ungrateful truth makes the faithfulest preachers most ungrateful. "I heard the defaming of many," says Jeremiah; "fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall

take our revenge on him." Thus must the servants of Christ be used, in conformity to their suffering head.

Sect. V. Some that are sincere, and whose hearts are with you, may, by temptation, be drawn to disown you. When malice is slandering you, timorous friendship may perhaps be silent, and afraid to take your part. If Peter's fear can deny his suffering Lord, wonder not that faint-hearted friends disown us, who give them too much occasion to do so. Why may not we be obliged to say as David did, "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sores, and my kinsmen stand afar off." Many things may occasion sincere friends to fall out. Paul and Barnabas may

grow so hot as to separate from each other. Easily can Satan, if permitted, set the tinder on fire, which he finds in the gentlest dispositions. There are no friends so near and dear, whom the infirmities of passion may not either alienate from, or render an affliction to each other. Clashing interests may very much interrupt friendship. See this in the contentions of Abraham and Lot ; of Isaac and Ishmael ; of Jacob and Esau ; of Laban and Jacob ; of Leah and Rachel ; of Joseph and his brethren : of Saul and David ; and Ziba, Mephibosheth and David ; with many others. It is rare to meet with a Jonathan that will affectionately love unto death, the man who is appointed

to deprive him of a kingdom. He that can say, "I suffer by another," or, "I am a loser by him," thinks he has a licence for his unfriendly thoughts and actions. When you can gratify the desires of the covetous, ambitious, and selfish, or so cure their distempered minds, as to fill them with perfect charity, then all the world will be your friends. The same may be said of difference in opinions. If your friend is proud, it is wonderful how he will slight you, and withdraw his love, because you are not of his mind. If he be zealous, he is easily tempted to think it a part of his duty to God to disown you, or grow negligent of your friendship, because your differing from him is, as he thinks,

either an evidence of your neglecting God, or of your contradicting the truth of God. When all your friends have the same intellectual complexion and temperature, and their understanding is of the same size with your own, then you may hope for an uninterrupted friendship. Some of your friends may, in their own apprehensions, get above you in wisdom, wealth, or honour. Upon this, you will grow unsuitable to them. They will pity your weakness in not seeing the truth, which is so clear to their eye; or your simplicity, for hindering your own preferment; and therefore will converse, for the future, with those of their own distinguished rank. Some will think they have

now discovered your foibles. And indeed our defects are so many, and our infirmities so great, that the more men know us, the more we deserve their pity or reproof. But this will not excuse that neglect of friendship and virtue, which is owing to the pride of those, who probably overlook much greater failings in themselves. Some are so changeable, that the same friends will not please them long. Their love is a flower that quickly withers. Novelty must feed their slippery affections. Perhaps they think they have got better friends. Either they have met with those that are more suitable, or that may be more useful, as having more learning wealth, or power. Some may think

it is their duty to be shy of you under sufferings. Though they must not desert Christ, they think, for their own preservation, they may forsake a fellow mortal. But they forget their Lord's interesting declaration. "In as much as ye did it, or did it not, to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it, or did it not to me."

Sect. 6. Some of our friends, to cover their own unfaithfulness, will plead that they forsake you for your faults. Thus, by pretending zeal for God they make a duty of their sin. There are few crimes in the world that are not hypocritically called by names of piety and virtue. Some may really mistake your case, and think you suffer as evil doers. So

when God had taken away Job's children, riches, and health ; his friends would take away the reputation and comfort of his integrity ; and, under pretence of bringing him to repentance, they charge him with what he was never guilty of. Censorious, false accusing friends, cut deeper than malicious, slandering enemies. Even your most self-denying acts of obedience to God, may be so misunderstood by your real friends, as to be turned to your rebuke ; like David's "dancing before the ark." Thus friends may do the work of enemies, yea of satan himself, "the accuser of the brethren ;" and may wrong you much more than open adversaries could have done. But suppose you

are chargeable with some real crime ; in that case to expect your friend should befriend your sins, or behave to you as if you were innocent, would but show your ignorance of the nature and usefulness of true friendship, and that there is too much friendship yet subsisting between you and your sins. Even the friends that are most faithful to you may be utterly incapable of affording you any real service. The greatest and best of men are but "miserable comforters." They may mourn over your sickness and pains, without any tendency to heal or ease them.— Their ignorance may increase your misery, by attempting your relief. They may exasperate your oppressors.

while they think to speak that which may set you free from oppression. Their friendly mistakes may resemble Peter's, when he gave that carnal counsel to his Lord, "Be it far from thee, Lord ; this suffering shall not be unto thee." Also when he rashly drew his sword against the officers that came to apprehend Jesus. Love and good meaning will not prevent the mischiefs of ignorance and error. Your best friends may not only be unable to relieve you, but their sufferings may greatly add to your grief. While your troubles become theirs, theirs will become yours, and your own stock of sorrows be thereby increased. And though your friends are both sincere and serviceable, yet

they must continue with you but a little while. Perhaps God will take away your dearest friends, and leave you in the midst of many enemies. If you have but one, perhaps God will separate that one from you, either by death, or in some remote situation. "The godly man ceaseth, the faithful fail from among the children of men."

Sect. VII. 3. To be forsaken of our friends, in such circumstances as have been mentioned, is a greatly aggravated affliction. They usually forsake us in our greatest sufferings and straits, when we have the greatest need of them; especially at a dying hour, when all other worldly comforts fail. As we must leave our

houses, lands, and wealth, so must we, for the present, leave our friends. Often they fail us, when we are most faithful in our duty. And perhaps they are persons of whom we deserved best, and from whom we might have expected most. Which of us must not say with David, "All men are liars;" that is, deceitful, either through unfaithfulness or insufficiency; that either will forsake us, or cannot help us in time of need.

Sec. VIII. 4. In order to reconcile our minds to such an aggravated affliction, let us attend to the following considerations. As for instance; consider how this affliction sets the creature at a due distance from the Creator. All sufficiency, immutability,

and perfect faithfulness, are proper to Jehovah. Glorious as the sun is, we wonder not at its setting, or being eclipsed; and why should we wonder to have a friend, a pious friend, fail us for a time, and in the hour of our distress? Some friends will not, but all may, if God leave them to their own weakness. Man is not your rock. He has no stability but what is derived, dependent, and uncertain. Learn, therefore, to rest on God alone, and lean not too confidently on any mortal. Consider what a useful discovery this affliction makes of the common infirmity of man. If any of God's servants live in constant holiness, without any stumbling in their way, it tempts some self-accusing soul to think itself alto-

gether graceless. But when we read of Peter's cursing and swearing that he knew not Jesus; and how he and Barnabas were carried away with dissimulation; and of David's unkindness to Mephibosheth, the seed of Jonathan; and of his vile treachery to Uriah, a faithful and deserving subject; we are less offended at the unfaithfulness of our friends, and are taught to compassionate their frailty; and also are not so hopeless, when we ourselves have failed to God or man. Consider how this affliction manifests the meanness and carnality of our self-love. We should not discern this sin in its root, if we did not see and taste it in its fruits. When you have tasted the

fruits of your friends' remaining worldliness, selfishness, and carnal fears ; then you will better know the odiousness of these vices, which thus break through all obligations to God and you, in a direct contradiction to the light of conscience, and the operations of divine grace.

Sect IX. Consider this affliction as a good remedy against over-loving your friends. In loving God, we are in no danger of excess, and therefore have no need of any thing to quench it. In loving saints, as saints, and purely for Christ's sake, we are not apt to exceed. Yet our understanding may mistake, by thinking saints have more holiness than they really have ; and we are very apt to mix a

selfish love, with that which is holy ; and not merely to love a christian as a christian, but to over-love him, because he is our friend. The christian that has no special love to us, we are apt to undervalue ; but one that entirely loves us, we love above his proper worth. And if we love any more for loving us, than for loving Christ, no wonder we are thus afflicted, to cure us of our selfish love. O how highly do we think of their judgments, graces, and conduct, that highly esteem us ; when greater excellences in another are scarcely observed ! If we exalt our friends too high in our esteem, it is a sign that God must cast them down. As their love to us was the snare, so their unthank-

fulness to us is the fittest remedy. God is very jealous of our hearts, while they inordinately love and value any of his creatures, and will rebuke our excess ; though the opposite extreme is also odious, to be void of natural, friendly, or social affections. God cannot take it well to see us dote upon dust and frailty like ourselves, at the same time that all his attractive goodness causes such languid love to him, that we ourselves can scarcely feel it. If therefore he cures us, by permitting our friends to show us how little they deserve such excessive love, when God himself has so little of our love ; it is because he is so tender of his own glory, and merciful to his servants' souls. Con-

sider also how this affliction leads us to observe and honour the wonderful patience of God. When our friends forsake us in our distress, especially if we suffer for Christ, it is God they injure more than us ; and if he bear with them, and forgive them upon repentance, why should not we do so who are much less injured ? The vile ingratitude of sinners should make us reflect, “ How great and wonderful is the patience of God, which bears with those that abuse him, to whom they are infinitely obliged ! And how great is that mercy, which hath borne with, and pardoned greater wrongs done by myself to God, than men have ever done to me ! ” When David remembered his sin, by which God

was provoked to raise up that son against him, of whom he had been too fond, it made him easily bear the curses and reproaches of Shimei. It will make us bear abuse from others to remember how ill we have behaved towards God, and consequently how ill we have deserved at his hands.

Sect. X. Consider how this affliction puts us upon our guard, that the love of our friends may not hinder us, when we are called to suffer or die. When we over-love them, it tears our hearts to leave them; and strongly tempts us to betray the cause of Christ. It is so hard a thing to be willing to die, that it is a mercy to have any thing removed, that makes

us unwilling. The excessive love of friends, is not the least of those impediments. O how loath are many a one to die, when they think of parting with wife, or husband, or children, or other dear friends ! And if any unkindness happens to arise between such friends, then we are ready to say, "It is time to leave the world when my dearest friends thus forsake me !" This helps us to remember our dearest everlasting Friend, and to grieve that we have been no truer to him, who would not have forsaken us in our extremity. Sometimes it makes us so weary of the world, that with Elijah we say, "Now, O Lord, take away my life." Thus the unkindness of friends is a greater help to loosen

us from the world, and often proves a great mercy to a departing soul : and indeed fortifies us against other temptations arising from friendship. When an intimate friend has grown strange and soon after turned away from every appearance of serious religion, I have known others convinced thereby of the mercy of God, in making their friend's desertion the means of their own preservation. When husbands have done this, and at the same time have behaved inhumanly to their wives, I have often observed, how the poor women have been kept from following them in their apostacy ; into which other women have been drawn, whose husbands behave more kindly. Therefore I must still

say, we are undone, if we had the disposing of ourselves. We should never be willing to have our friends forsake us ; yet God has thereby kept many souls from being undone for ever. Once more, consider that our having too much comfort in any creature, is very unsuitable to our present state. The work of mortification much consists in having our enjoyments so far annihilated, that they may have no power to draw our hearts from God, or detain us from our duty. And the more excellent and lovely any enjoyment appears to us, the less it is dead to us, or we to it ; and the more will it be able to hinder and ensnare us.

Sect. XI. If you seriously consider these things, you will admire the wis-

dom of God in leaving you under this kind of trial, in weaning you from every created enjoyment, and teaching you by his providence, as well as by his words, to "Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils ; for wherein is he to be accounted of?" You will not wonder, that they who live in other sins, should be guilty of this unfaithfulness to friends. Their obligations to you are nothing in comparison with their great and manifold obligations with to God. You know you have more injured God yourselves, then any man ever injured you ; and if God bear with you, have you not great reason to bear with others ? Are you not more prone to aggravate the wrong which others do to you,

than that which you do to them ; Nay, you have been much more injurious to yourselves, than ever others have been to you. Near as you are to yourselves, yet all your enemies on earth, or in hell, have not done you half the hurt, that you have done to yourselves. “ Have I forfeited my own salvation, and deserved everlasting wrath, and sold myself and my Saviour for so base a thing as sinful pleasure, and shall I ever wonder that another man does me some temporal hurt ? Was my friend so near, or so much obliged me, as myself ? O sinful soul, let thy own rather than thy friend’s treachery and neglects, be the matter of thy wonder, thy displeasure, and complaint. And let

thy conformity to Jesus Christ, be thy holy ambition and delight ; not as thy suffering nor as it is caused by men's sin ; but as it is thy fellowship in the sufferings of thy Lord, and caused by his love." Our conformity to, and fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, in any remarkable degree, is the lot of his best servants, and the highest of their attainments in the present state ; and is therefore, neither to be expected with dread, nor borne with impatience but with holy joy. And if it be so with suffering for Christ in general, it must be so with this particular sort of suffering ; even to be forsaken of our nearest and dearest friends when we are most abused by our enemies.

CHAPTER II.

FRIENDS TAKEN FROM US BY DEATH.

Sect. I. The disciples forsook their Lord for want of self-denial. Sect. II. The great evil of selfishness. Sect. III—VIII. 1. Consolations for such as mourn the death of their friends. Sect. IX—XI. and 2. For such as doubt whether heaven itself will renew the friendship they have lost. Sect. XII, XIII. or 3. Doubt whether the friendship that is renewed in heaven will be so much the more endearing.

SECT. I. We are next to consider, why the disciples forsook their Lord, and what they had recourse to when they left him. The text says, "ye shall be scattered every man to his own." Self-denial was not perfect in

them, and therefore selfishness prevailed in the hour of temptation. They had therefore forsaken all for Christ. They had left parents and families, estates and trades, to be his disciples. But though they believed him to be the Christ, yet they dreamed of a visible kingdom, and were animated by carnal expectations of being great men upon earth, under Christ as a temporal prince. And therefore when they saw him in the hands of his enemies, under the most ignominious treatment, they concluded that their hopes were now disappointed and in their sudden fright seemed to repent their having followed him. They now begun to think that they have lives of their own to save, and

families of their own to mind, and business of their own to do. They that had forsook their private interest and affairs, and were gathered together for the sake of living in communion with Jesus Christ and one another now return to their particular callings and are “scattered every man to his own.”

Sect. II. Selfishness is the great enemy of all societies, of all fidelity and friendship. There is no trusting any person in whom self is predominant. And where it does not reign the remainders of it make men walk uneven and unsteadily, both towards God and each other. They will certainly deny God and their friends in a time of trial, who are not able to

deny themselves. Or rather, he that is prevailingly selfish was never a real friend to any. He has always some interest of his own, which his friends must needs contradict, or are insufficient to satisfy. His houses, lands or money, his children, reputation, or something which he calls his own, will frequently be the matter of contention ; and for the sake of these things, which are so near to him, he will cast off his nearest friend. Contract no special friendship with a selfish man. Put no confidence in him, whatever friendship he may profess. He is so confined to himself that he has no true love to spare for others. If he seem to love a friend, it is not as a friend, but as a servant, or

at best as a benefactor. He loves you for himself, as he loves his money, his horse or house ; because you may be serviceable to him. When you have no more capacity to serve him, he has no more love for you.

Sect. III. Here it may be proper to offer some advice to such as are lamenting the death of their dearest friends ; and doubting whether heaven itself will renew such friendship, or so much as need it ; or, if such friendship be renewed in heaven, whether the enjoyment of it will be so much the more endearing.

Sect. IV. 1. They that are lamenting the death of their dearest friends, may find some relief from the following considerations. Let it be granted

that you mourn the loss, not of a false friend, but of one of the most sincere, faithful and intimate. Consider, Who deprived you of your friends? Was it not God? Did not he that gave him to you take him from you? Did not his Lord and owner call him home? Can God do any thing unjust? May he not do what he pleases with his own? Was there any defect of wisdom or goodness, of justice or mercy, in God's disposal of your friend? Or will you ever have rest, but in submitting to the divine good pleasure? If your friend had lived as long as you would have had him, you know not what sin he might have fallen into. God could indeed have preserved him from sin; but he preserves by the use

of means ; and sometimes sees that death is the best means for preservation. Had God permitted your friend to have fallen into some scandalous sin, might it not have been much worse than death to him and you? So faithful a friend might have been shaken, like Peter, and have denied his Lord ; and thereby have appeared as odious in your eyes, as he had ever been amiable. You know not what unkindness to yourself, your dearest friend might have been guilty of. Alas ! there is greater frailty and inconstancy in man than you are aware of. How often have the hearts of parents been broken by undutiful children, whom in infancy, they would much more easily have follow-

ed to the grave? Which of us see not reason to distrust ourselves? And why should we promise ourselves more from another than from ourselves? Had your friend lived longer, you know not what great calamity might have befallen him.—When the righteous seem to perish, and merciful men are taken away, they are taken away from the evil to come. How many deaths have I lamented, as unseasonable in my view; but Providence has soon taught me, that their longer life would have increased their misery? If your friend had survived, what comfort would he have found on earth, in seeing and hearing such sins, as vexed a righteous Lot from day to-day;

and perhaps himself at the same time under personal afflictions, temptations, and reproaches ? What was the world to your friend, while he did enjoy it ? Was it not a place of toil and trouble, of envy and vexation, of enmity and poison ; of successive cares, and fears, and griefs ; and especially of sin ? Did he not groan under the burden of a sinful nature ; of a distempered, tempted, troubled heart ; of languishings and weakness in every grace ; of the rebukes of God, the wounds of conscience, and the malice of a wicked world ? Did you not often join in a prayer with him, to obtain deliverance from every burden, and will you now grieve that he has received the answer of prayer ? Is the

world a place of rest, or of trouble, to yourself ; and would you have your friend also to be as far from rest ? If your present circumstances are at all easy and peaceful, you little know what storms are near ; or how soon you may see the days, hear the tidings, feel the pains, and bear the burdens which may oblige you to desire death, and confess that a life on earth is no felicity.

Sect. V. Do you think it is for the hurt or good of your friend that he is removed from hence ? It cannot be for his hurt, unless he be in hell. And if he be in hell, he was no fit person for you to take much pleasure in upon earth. He might have been a fit object of your compassion, but not

of your complacency. How can you be undone for want of such company as God will not endure in his sight ? And if your friend is in heaven, you should regard his good as well as your own, and not wish him from thence. If love teaches us to “mourn with them that mourn, and to rejoice with them that rejoice,” can it be an act of rational love to mourn for them that are possessed of the highest everlasting joys ?

Sect. VI. God will not honour himself merely by one servant, but by many. God best knows when his work is done. When our friends have finished what God intended them to do, is it not time for them to be gone, and for others to take their

places ? God will have a succession of his servants in the world. If David had not died, there had been no Solomon, nor Jehoshaphat, nor Hezekiah, nor Josiah, to honour God in the same throne. You must not have all your mercies conveyed to you merely by one instrument. God will not have you confine your love only to one of his servants. Therefore when one has done his part for your welfare, God will send you other mercies by another hand ; and it is fit he should choose the messenger who bestows the gift. If you resolve to have all your mercies in one channel, or refuse to have any more mercies, your case deserves not compassion, but correction. Does your esteem for

your friend centre in him, in yourself, or in God ? If in God ; why are you troubled to have God dispose of him according to his unerring wisdom ? If in your friend ; he is now made perfect, and therefore more lovely, and more fit for your joyful complacency. If in yourself only ; it is just in God to take him from you to teach you to prefer God before yourself, and to know better the nature of true friendship, and that your own felicity absolutely depends upon God alone.

Sect. VII. Did you get good by your friend while he was with you ? If you only loved him, and made but little use of him for your spiritual profit, God in justice took him from

you. Your friend was given you, as your candle, to work by the light of it; as your raiment, to wear it; as your food, to feed upon it. Did you receive his counsel, and hearken to his reproofs, and pray and converse with him, so as to elevate your thoughts to God, and inflame your breast with sacred love?

Sect. VIII. And are you not too forgetful where you yourself now are, and where you must shortly be forever? Where would you have your friend, but where you must be yourself? If he had stayed here a thousand years, how little of that time could you have had his company? When you are almost leaving the world yourself, would you not send your treas-

ure before you ! How soon shall you go from hence to God, where you shall find your friend, whom you lamented as if he had been lost, and there shall dwell with him for ever ? O foolish mourner ! Would you not have your friend at home ; at his home and your's ; with his Father and your Father, his God and your God ? Can you miss him so much for a day, when you have the prospect of living with him to all eternity ?

Sect. IX. 2. Notwithstanding what has been suggested, some may doubt whether heaven itself will renew the friendship they have lost. To scatter such a distressing apprehension, let the following reasons, for expecting your friendship to revive again in

heaven, be attended to. You cannot justly think that the knowledge of glorified saints shall be more imperfect, than their knowledge was while they were upon earth. We shall know much more, but not less than before. Heaven exceeds earth in knowledge, as much as it does in joy. The angels in heaven have now a distinct knowledge of the least believers on earth, and rejoice in their conversion, and are styled by Christ their angels : Therefore when we shall be equal to the angels, we shall certainly know our nearest friends, who will have their share with us in that glory. Abraham knew the rich man in hell, and the rich man knew Abraham and Lazarus : Therefore we

shall have as distinct a knowledge. The two disciples knew Moses and Elijah in the mount, whom, they had never seen before : Much more shall we be made to know the saints in heaven. Our present knowledge shall be done away in heaven, only in regard to its imperfections ; or, when that which is perfect is come ; just as we put away childish things, when we become men. The change is from seeing through a glass, to seeing face to face ; and from knowing in part, to knowing even as we also are known.

Sect. X. And though God be all in all in heaven, yet we shall there, not only know, but love and rejoice in fellow creatures. For Christ, in his

glorified human nature, is a creature ; and as such, will no doubt be known and loved by all his members, without any diminution of the glory of his divine nature. The several members of the body of Christ will, in heaven, be so nearly related to each other, that they must know and love each other, and not be unconcerned in each other's felicity. The future triumphant state of the church is often described in scripture, as a kingdom, the city of God, the new Jerusalem ; each of which implies a society. The saints themselves are called kings ; and it is said of them, that they "shall judge the world, and shall judge angels ;" they must therefore have a distinct knowledge of the persons

and things, which are to be subjected to their judgment. As one part of the saints' happiness, they are to "come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven ;" and therefore shall not only know those great patriarchs, but shall take peculiar delight in their presence and converse. Besides, love to saints, as well as to God, is a grace that never faileth.

Sect. XI. God can make use of glorified creatures, in subordination to himself, so as to be no diminution to his own all sufficiency. Nor must we conceive of heaven itself as if it had no use for fellow creatures, nor any comfort in them. Though flesh

and blood shall not enter into that kingdom, but our bodies shall be spiritual; yet, at the resurrection, God shall give to every soul its own body and a body distinct from the soul; which must therefore have a felicity suited to a glorified body. And though it is said of knowing Christ after the flesh, now henceforth know we him no more, it can only mean, that a carnal knowledge shall be turned into a spiritual. Thus the excellence of our knowledge of Christ in heaven, resembles the glory of our heavenly bodies, which shall be made to shine forth, as the sun in the kingdom of our Father.

Sect. XII. 3. And if any should still doubt, whether the friendship that

is renewed in heaven, will be so much the more endearing, let such take the following answer. If you should have all your happiness immediately and solely in God, you will sustain no loss. Or if you should have as much happiness in other friends, whom you never knew before, that will not diminish your enjoyment of your former friends. But most probably your love to glorified saints will distinctly regard them, both for their holiness, and for their relation to you. As holiness is the chief excellence, no doubt you will love those most, that will have most of God and glory, though you never knew them upon earth. And amongst those whom you knew upon earth, you will cer-

tainly love them best, whom God made use of for your greatest good, and who were the instruments of your conversion and salvation. It is manifest that our benefactors shall have our peculiar regard in heaven; because we shall therefore ever remember, love, and praise "him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God." And therefore we shall also remember others with love and thankfulness, in just subordination to Christ, and in proportion as they were our friends for Jesus' sake.

SECT. XIII. The never failing nature of love is a principal motive to kindle and increase it. Thus God

draws us to every holy duty, by showing us the excellence of that duty, and it is no small excellence to say, that it never fails. They therefore that think they shall have no personal knowledge of each other, nor personal love to each other, in heaven, take the most effectual course to destroy in their souls all holy love to those especially that are of the household of faith. I am not able to love much, where I foresee I am not to love long. I cannot love an inn, so well as my own house ; because I am sooner to leave it. I must love my Bible, better than books of law, or physic ; because it leads to eternity. I must love holiness in myself and others better than food and raiment, or riches and hon-

ours, or beauty and pleasures; because that must be loved for ever; while the love of these is as transitory as the things themselves. I must confess, as the experience of my own soul, that the expectation of loving my friends in heaven, principally kindles my love to them on earth. If I thought I should never know them, and consequently never love them, after this life is ended, I should in reason number them with temporal things, and love them as such, at the same time allowing for the excellent nature of grace. But I now delightfully converse with my godly friends, in a firm persuasion that I shall converse with them for ever; and I take comfort in those of them that are dead

or absent, as believing that I shall shortly meet them in heaven, and love them, I hope, with a heavenly love, as the heirs of heaven, even with a love that shall there be perfected, and more fully and for ever exercised.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH US IN SOLITUDE.

Sect. I. What the presence of God is. Sect. II. How God is present with us. Sect. III. He is with us, 1, as a gracious Father; Sect. IV. 2, to do us good; Sect. V. and 3, to converse with us. Sect. VI. Like Christ we shall live upon God when forsaken by men. Sect. VII. When are we necessarily called into solitude. Sect. VIII. When is solitude sinful. Sect. IX.—XI. Considerations to prevent voluntary and unnecessary solitude.

SECT. I. To the reasons already assigned for bearing the loss of friends this may be added, that it gives us the loudest call to retire from all the world, and to converse with God himself, and affords us some assistance in such di-

vine converse. But this brings us to the third part of the text, where our Lord says, "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." He that is with the King, is not alone, though forsaken by all others. He on whom the sun shines is not without light, though all his candles are put out. If God be our God, he is our all. And if God be our all, we shall not, while he is with us, find the want of creatures. For, He is with us, who is every where, and therefore is never from us. He is with us, who is Almighty, and therefore we need not fear what man can do unto us. He can deliver us, when and how he pleases, from every danger and distress. He is with us, who is infinitely

wise, to preserve us even from our own folly, as well as from our enemy's subtlety. He knows what to do with us, in what paths to lead us, and what condition is best for us. He is with us, who is infinitely good ; alone fit to be the perpetual delight of our souls. There is nothing in him to disaffect, or discourage us. We may love him, without fear of over loving. He is with us, who is intimately related to us. He most dearly loves us, and will never withhold any thing from us that is for our real good.

Sect. II. This is He that is with us, when all have left us. But as to the manner how he is with us, let us more particularly observe ; He is with us, by his gracious fatherly presence ;

sufficiently to do us good ; and entertain us with his holy converse.

Sect. III. 1. God is with us by his gracious fatherly presence ; and not merely as he is every where, by his essential presence. We are in his family, attending on him, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters. As his children, we are ever with him, and all that he hath is ours ; that *all* that is fit to be communicated to us. When we awake, we should still be with him. When we go abroad, we should behave as always before him. Our life and works should be a walking with God.

Sect. IV. 2. God is always with us sufficiently to do us good. Though we have none else to care for us ; yet

he will never cast us out of his care, but bids us cast all our care upon him, and promises that he will care for us. Though we have none else to provide for us, our heavenly Father knoweth all the things we need, and will make the best provision. Though we have none else to defend us, he is our sure defence ; the rock to which we fly, and upon which we are surely built. He gathers us to himself, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings. And while love is thus protecting us, we may well say, the Father is with us. Though we have none else to support us when we are weak ; yet his grace is sufficient for us ; for his strength is made perfect in weakness. Though we have

none to teach us, and resolve our doubts; yet the Master of assemblies is with us, and will guide us into all truth. Though we have none else to comfort us in darkness and distress; yet, like Hagar in the wilderness, we shall have reason to say, “Thou God seest us.” Though all our friends, like Job’s, turn our enemies, and add affliction to our affliction; yet he says, “hitherto shall ye come, but no further, and here shall your proud waves be stayed.” Though we say with David, “We looked on our right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know us; refuge failed us; no man cared for our souls; yet we may add, as he does, “O Lord, thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land

of the living." Though like David we also complain, "Our enemies speak evil of us, whisper together against us, and desire our hurt; yet we may share his consolation and say, "Thou, Lord, upholdest us in our integrity, and settest us before thy face for ever." Though friends be far off; yet "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." Thus God is with us when men are against us, or far from us. His people find by happy experience that they are not alone. "His hand is with them to keep them from evil, that it may not grieve them, but work together for their good." He is "their hiding-place, to preserve them from trouble; surely the floods of

great waters shall not come nigh unto them ; he shall compass them about with songs of deliverance.

Sect. V. 3. God is also with us, to entertain us with his holy converse. Wherever our friends are, God is still at hand to be the most profitable, honourable, and delightful subject of our meditations. There is enough in him to employ all the faculties of our souls. A person in a well furnished library, or indeed in the various volume of the visible creation, may excellently engage his thoughts many years together ; but all would be nothing, unless God was the sense of books and creatures, and the substance of all these noble studies. He that is alone, and has only God him-

self to study, need never want matter for his meditation. Nor need he want matter of discourse, who has God to talk of; though he has not the name of any other friend to mention. He has no want, either of work, or pleasure, who can spend his solitary hours in the believing contemplations of eternal love, and of all the divine attributes and works. What delightful converse then, may a serious Christian have with God, alone ! He is always present, always at leisure to be spoke with, always easy of access ! He has no interest that will clash with our happiness ! He never mistakes our meaning, or our character ! If we converse with men, their passions and interests, their

errors and weaknesses, render the trouble so great, and the benefit so small, that many have become thereby weary of the world, and have spent the rest of their time in deserts. In proportion, indeed, as any thing of God appears in men, their converse is excellent and delightful. But there is so much of vanity and sin in all of us, as exceedingly darkens our light, and damps the pleasure, and blasts the profit of mutual converse. How often have I been delighted in God, when I have found most deceit and darkness in the world ! How often has he comforted me, when it was not in man to do it ! How often has he relieved and delivered me, when all other help failed me ! Looking to him,

has been my stay and rest, when the creature has been a bruised reed, or as a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.

Sect. VI. As followers of Christ, let us endeavour to imitate him in this, to live upon God, when men forsake us; and to be persuaded, that while God is with us, we are not alone, nor forsaken. Not that we are therefore to undervalue our useful friends, nor be unthankful for so great a blessing as a goodly friend, nor be negligent in improving the company and help of such. Two are better than one. The communion of saints is a mercy highly to be esteemed; and the undervaluing of it, is at least a sign of declension in the spiritual life. Nor are we, on any pretence, to slight our

friends, and disoblige them, or neglect any duty that we owe them, or any means necessary to the regular continuance of their friendship. Nor must we, without cause, retire from human society into solitude. To be weary of conversing with men, is often connected with a weariness of our duty. A voluntary retirement into solitude, when God does not call or drive us thither, is but retiring from the place or work which God has appointed us; and consequently a retiring rather from God, than to God. Like some idle servants that think they should not work so hard, because it is but worldly business; and think their masters deal not religiously by them, unless they allow them to

neglect their labour, that they may spend more time in serving God : as if it were not serving God to be faithful to their masters' service.

Sect. VII. It must be acknowledged that very holy persons have lived in a state of retirement from human converse. There are several circumstances in which this may become a duty. As for instance : When persecution leaves us no opportunity of serving or honouring God in any other situation. When natural infirmity, or any other accident, renders a person less serviceable to God and his church in society, than in solitude. When a person has committed a sin of such a scandalous nature, that though he be truly penitent for it, no

particular church can be satisfied to receive him into full communion. When some peculiar temptations can after frequent trials, be no otherwise effectually resisted but by refraining from human converse. Also, when a person by age or sickness, finds himself so near to death, that his actual preparations for it will be greatly promoted by solitude.

Sect. VIII. But when retirement from human converse has no such necessary call, it usually proceeds from some vicious distemper ; perhaps from cowardice, when the soldiers of Christ, for fear of suffering, hide their heads instead of confessing him before men. Or from indolence and weariness of duty, when slothful and unprofita-

ble servants hide their Lord's talents. For it is easier to run away from our work, than it is to do it ; and to go out of the reach of ignorance, malice, contradiction, and ungodliness, than to encounter and conquer them by the word of truth, and a life of holiness ; and to hide ourselves in some wilderness or cell, whilst others are fighting the battles of the Lord. Or it may be owing to mere impatience. When we cannot bear the frowns, and scoffs, and violence of the ungodly, we fly from such trials, which we ought to overcome by patience. Or it may proceed from humour and discontent with our condition. Many retire from human converse to gratify their peevish resentment, expecting to

find that in privacy, which they could not in public, nor is to be found any where on earth. Sometimes it proceeds from melancholy, which is vexed in company, and indulges its own sickly imagination, by living, like the man possessed, amongst the tombs. And sometimes it proceeds from pride and self-ignorance. If we think much better of ourselves than of others, we shall despise their converse. On the contrary, we should consider what proud, worldly, selfish, and disordered hearts we are like to carry with us into solitude, and that the nearest enemy is the worst, and the nearest trouble the greatest.

Sect. IX. Thus many are led into solitude by their infirmities or vices ;

and if they live where popish vanity may seduce them, they will perhaps imagine, that they are serving God, and entering into perfection, when they are but obeying their sinful inclinations. The duties of a public life are undoubtedly more in number, greater in weight, and of more excellent tendency to the honour of God, and the good of society, than the duties of retirement. "A good man," says Seneca, "is a common good. Nor can any thing be a common good except every one has some share in it." Therefore, to prevent the evil of voluntary and unnecessary solitude, let the following considerations be attended to. As for instance: While you do good but to few, and

live almost to yourselves, you are too little promoting the honour of the Redeemer and his kingdom in the world, and too little subserving the design of his death and resurrection. You will live in the greatest deficiency of the grace of charity, and therefore in a low and very undesirable state. You will want the communion of saints, the benefit of public ordinances, and the edifying gifts and graces of others. In proportion to your doing so little good to others you will have the least comfort yourselves. They have usually the most peace and comfort in themselves that are the most profitable to others. "You must live for others, if you would live yourself," says Seneca;

“ for we can never be properly said to live well, when all our attention is fixed upon ourselves.” O the delight that there is in doing good to many ! None know it that have not tried it. Not because such delight is owing to merit, but to the pleasing of God, and to the sweet and amiable nature of goodness itself, and to the efficacy of divine promise, and because we receive by communicating, and because charity makes all the good we do to another, to be to us as our own.

Sect. X. Considering also, how dark and partial we are, and how heedless we are of ourselves, and with what difficulty we get or maintain acquaintance with our hearts, we so much the more need the eye of others.

Even an enemy's eye may be useful, though malicious; and may do us good, while it intends evil. "An evil," says Barnard, "which none sees, none reproves; and where there is no fear of being reprov'd the tempter will be the more bold and sin will be practised with less hesitation." It is hard to know the spots in our own faces, when we have neither glass nor beholder to acquaint us with them. "Solitude," says Chrysostom, "is the cover of all vices." In company this cover is laid aside, and vice being more naked, is more ashamed. Beholders occasion the shame, which solitude is not acquainted with; and it is a piece of impenitency, not to be ashamed of sin. And we are for the

most part so weak and sickly, that we are unable to subsist without the help of others. God has left some impotency, insufficiency, and necessity upon all, which should keep all men sociable and make them acknowledge their need of others, and be thankful for their assistance, and be ready to do the good to others, which they would have others do to them.

Sect. XI. In privacy, pride will have great advantage, and repentance great disadvantage. "Any person," as Cassianus observes, "may think himself patient and humble, as long as he keeps out of company, but his depraved nature will soon appear, whenever it meets with any provocation." We cannot easily know what

sin or grace is in us, if we have not such trials as are not to be found in solitude. Flying from the observation and judgment of others, is a kind of self-accusation; as if we confessed ourselves to be so bad, that we cannot stand the trial of the light. "A good conscience," says Seneca, "appears to the multitude; but a bad conscience is perplexed with anxious thoughts, even in solitude. If what you do, be truly good, let all men know it: If it be wicked, it is in vain to conceal it from others, while you know it yourself. And if you despise this single witness, how great is your misery!" Solitude is too much like death to be desirable. He that does good is alive; but he is dead

that is useless. "He," says Seneca, lives indeed, who is "serviceable to many. Numbers feel that he has life; while they that lie hid in stupid inactivity, even anticipate their own death. And it is the most culpable death, and therefore the worst, to have life, and not to use it. Once more consider, that the nearest resemblance to heaven is a life of holy communion. In the heavenly Jerusalem none shall be solitary but all the members shall, in perfect harmony, love and praise their Maker and Redeemer.

CHAPTER IV.WHY THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN SOLITUDE IS
DESIRABLE.

Sect. I. Solitude is not to be feared, but improved.

Sect. II. Improvement of solitude panted after.

Sect. III. 4. If God is with us in solitude, we have 1, the maker, ruler and disposer of all things with us. Sect. V. 2, to whom we are absolutely devoted. Sect. VI. 3, who best loves us. Sect. VII. 4, whose love is more to us than the love of all the friends in the world. Sect. VIII. —IX. 5, with whom our greatest business lies. Sect. X. 6, with whom we may converse without reserve or interruption. Sect. XI. and 7, with whom we must live for ever.

Sect. I. If God calls us, into solitude, or if men forsake us, we may rejoice in this, that we are not alone, because the Father is with us. Fear

not such solitude, but be ready to improve it, if you be cast upon it. If God be your God, reconciled to you in Christ, and his spirit be in you, you are provided for solitude, and need not fear if all the world should cast you off. If you be banished, imprisoned, or left alone, it is but a relaxation from your greatest labours, a cessation of your sharpest conflicts, and your removal from a multitude of great temptations. Though you may not cowardly retreat, or run away, from the sight of danger; yet if God will dispense with you, and let you live in greater peace and safety, you have no cause to murmur. A fruit tree, that grows by the highway side, seldom keeps its fruit to

ripeness, within the reach of so many passengers. Even Seneca could say, "I never bring so good a temper out of company, as I took into it. What I had been regulating, is put out of order. What I had banished from my mind, gains admittance again. Thus I receive great hurt from having much company." How many vain and foolish words corrupt the minds of those that converse with an ungodly world ; while solitude is free from such temptations ! In solitude, you breathe not in so corrupt an air ; you hear not the speeches which offend piety, modesty, and charity ; not the complaints of the discontented ; nor the bitter words of the angry ; nor the wranglings of the contentious ; nor

the slanders and reproaches of the malicious ; nor the revilings of the ungodly cast upon the righteous ; nor how the erroneous artfully corrupt the minds of the unwary ; nor the distractions and clamours, too common in religious disputes ; nor are pained with the oaths and blasphemies of the wicked, the imprudences of the weak, the persecutions of enemies, or the falling out of friends. In your solitude with God, you will not see the cruelty of proud oppressors ; nor the prosperity of the wicked, to excite your envy ; nor the adversity of the righteous, to stir up your grief ; nor worldly pomp, to dazzle you ; nor fading beauty, to entice you ; nor wasting calamities, to afflict you. As

you lose the help of your gracious friends, so you are freed from the effects of their peevishness, and other manifold imperfections. In a word you are there half delivered from the vanity and vexations of the world. And were it not that you are yet undelivered from yourselves, and your own depraved hearts, what felicity would your solitude be !

Sect. II. Alas, we cannot outrun our own diseases ; we must carry with us into solitude the remains of our corrupted nature ; our dead and dull, our selfish and earthly, our impatient and discontented minds ; and what is worst of all, our lamentable weakness of faith and love, our strangeness to God and heaven, and backwardness

to the things of eternal life ! “ O that I could escape these, though I were in the hands of the most cruel enemies ! O that such a heart could be left behind ! To outrun it, how gladly would I quit house, and land, and honour, and all sensual delights ! O that I knew the place, where there is none of this darkness, nor disaffection, nor distance from God ! O that I could find it ! O that I might dwell there, though I should never more see the face of mortals, nor ever hear a human voice, nor ever taste the delights of flesh ! Alas, foolish soul, such a place there is, that has all this, and more than this ; but it is in paradise, not in the wilderness ; it is above with Christ, not here upon

earth ! And am I yet so loath to die ? Am I yet no more desirous of the blessed day, when I shall be unclothed of flesh and sin ? O death what an enemy art thou even to my soul, by frightening me from the presence of my Lord, and hindering my desires and willingness to be gone ? This is wronging me much more, than by laying my flesh to rot in darkness. Fain would I know God, and love and enjoy him more. But O this hurtful love of present life ! O this unreasonable fear of dying ! “ O wretched man that I am ! Who shall deliver me from this body of death ? ” From this carnal unbelieving heart, that can sometimes think more delightfully of a wilderness than of

heaven? That can seek after God in desert solitude, among birds, and beasts, and trees; and yet is so backward to be loosed from flesh, that I might find him, and enjoy him in the world of glory? Can I expect that heaven should come down to earth, and that the Lord of glory should remove his court, and either leave the retinue of his celestial courtiers, or bring them all down into this simple world, to satisfy my fleshly mind? Or can I expect the translation of Enoch, or the chariot of Elijah? Is it not enough that my Lord has conquered death, and sanctified the passage, and prepared the place of my perpetual abode? Well! Though a wilderness be not heaven, it shall

be sweet and welcome for the sake of heaven, if from thence I may but have a clearer prospect of heaven; and if, by retiring from the crowd and noise of folly, I may but be better disposed to converse above, and to use, alas, my too weak and languid faith, till it be exchanged for the beatific vision. May there but be more of God, readier access to him, more flaming love, more heart-comforting intimations in his favour, in a wilderness than in a city, in a prison than in a palace; let that wilderness be my city, and that prison my palace, as long as I abide on earth. If, in solitude, I may have Enoch's walk with God, I shall in due season have such a translation, as will bring me to the

same felicity which he enjoys; and in the mean time, as well as after, it is no disadvantage, if by mortal eyes I am seen no more. If the chariot of contemplation will, in solitude, raise me to more believing affectionate converse with heaven, than I could expect in tumults and temptations, it shall reconcile me to solitude, and make it my paradise on earth, till angels, instead of Elijah's chariot, shall convey me to the presence of my glorified Jesus."

Sect. III. Is it grievous to you to be alone, because you have been used to much company? Consider, that company may so abuse you, that it may be more grievous to you not to be alone. You will not wish for the

society of wasps and serpents ; and even bees have such stings, that their honey may be bought too dear. But can you say you are alone, while you are with God ? Is his presence nothing to you ? Does it not signify more than the company of all the men in the world ? There can be no want of man when we can speak with God. And were it not that God is here revealed to us in a glass, and that we are conversing with God in man, human converse would be of little worth. If you suggest that solitude is disconsolate to a sociable mind, think again, that the most desirable society is no solitude. If God be nothing to you, you are not a Christian, but an atheist. If God be God to you, he is

your all in all, and then should not his presence be instead of all? O that I might get one step nearer to God, though I receded many from all the world! O that I could find that place on earth, where a soul may have nearest access to him, and the fullest knowledge and enjoyment of him, though I never more saw the face of friends! On these terms I should cheerfully say, with my blessed Savior, "I am not alone because the Father is with me;" and not without having the best reasons to assign for saying so. For if God be with me, the maker, ruler and disposer of all things is with me; he is with me, to whom I am absolutely devoted; who loves me best; whose love is more to

me than the love of all my friends in the world ; with whom my greatest business lies ; with whom I may converse without reserve or interruption ; and with whom I must live for ever.

Sect. IV. 1. If God be with me, the maker, ruler, and disposer of all things is with me. So that in him all things are virtually with me. I have that in gold and jewels, which I seem to want in silver, lead, and dross. I can want no friend, if God vouchsafes to be my friend. I can enjoy no friend, if God be my enemy. If God be reconciled unto me, I need not fear the greatest enemy. I shall not miss the light of a candle, if I have this blessed sun. The creature is nothing but what it is from, and in God ; and as it discovers

him, and helps the soul to know him, serve him, or draw nearer to him. As it is the sinner's idolatry to thirst after the creature in the neglect of God, thereby making the world his God ; so it approaches to the same aggravated sin, when we lament the loss of creatures more than God's displeasure. If I am under the wrath of God, I have so much greater cause for lamentation than for the loss, or absence, or frowns of mortals, as should almost make me forget that there is such a thing as man to be regarded. But if God be my friend in Christ, I have so much to think of with delight and complacency of soul, as makes it extremely absurd inordinately to lament the absence of a worm, while I have his

love and presence, who is all in all. If God cannot content me, and be enough for me, how is he then my God? Or how shall he be my heaven and everlasting happiness?

Sect. V. 2. If God be with me, he is with me to whom I am absolutely devoted. I am wholly his, and have acknowledged his interest in me, and long ago disclaimed all usurpers, and penitently and unreservedly resigned myself to him. Where should I dwell but with him who is my owner, and with whom I have made the most solemn covenant that ever I made? With whom should a servant dwell, but with his master? Or a wife, but with her husband? Or children, but with their Father? I am nearer re-

lated to my God and Saviour than to any other relation in the world. I have renounced all the world, as it stands in competition or comparison with my God. How shall I “hate father and mother, brother and sister, and wife and children, for his sake,” if I cannot spare them, or be without them, to enjoy him? To hate them, is but to use them as men do hated things; that is, to cast them away with contempt, so far as they would alienate me from Christ, that I may cleave to him, and be satisfied in him alone. I am now married to Christ; and with whom should I delight to dwell, but with him who has taken me into so near a relation? “O my dear Lord, hide not thou thy face from an un-

kind, and unworthy sinner ! Let me but dwell with thee, and see thy face, and feel the gracious tokens of thy love ; and then, if thou seest it best for me, let me be cast off by all the world ; or, let all other friends be where they will, so that my soul may but be with thee ! For thy sake, I have agreed to forsake all, and I resolve by thy grace to stand to this agreement."

·Sect. VI. 3. If God be with me, he is with me who loves me best. The love of all the friends on earth is nothing to his love. How plainly hath he declared his love to me, in the strange condescension, the sufferings, death, and intercession of his dear Son ! In the communications of his

Spirit, the operations of his grace, and the near relations into which he has brought me ! In the course of his providences, by many and wonderful preservations and deliverances, and by the conduct of his wisdom through a life of mercies ! What love appears in his precious promises, and in the glorious provisions he has made for me with himself to all eternity ! “ O my Lord, I am ashamed that thy love is so much lost ; that it has no better return from an unkind, unthankful heart ; that I am no more delighted in thee, and swallowed up in the contemplation of thy love. I can contentedly let go all others, for the converse of some one bosom friend, as Jonathan was to David ; and can

I not much more be satisfied in thee alone ! All men delight most in the company of those that love them best ; when they seek satisfaction, it is not with the multitude, but in the converse of their dearest friends. And who, blessed God, should be so dear to me as thyself ? Did not my unthankful heart basely neglect thy love, I should never be so unsatisfied in thee, but should heartily say, ‘ Whom have I in heaven but thee ? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.’ Though not only my friends, but ‘ my flesh and my heart fail, yet thou, Lord, wilt be the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.’ Therefore how far soever I am from man, ‘ it is good for me

to draw near to thee.' O let me dwell there, where thou wilt not be strange, 'because thy loving kindness is better than life! In the multitude of my thoughts within me, let thy comforts delight my soul!' Let me dwell as in thy family, and when I awake, let me be still with thee! Let me go no whither, but where I am still following thee. Let me do nothing, but thy work; nor serve any other, but when I may truly call it a serving thee! Let me hear nothing but thy voice; and let me know thy voice, by whatever instrument thou shalt speak! Let me never see any thing but thyself, and the glass that represents thee, and the books in which I may read thy name! Whether in company or

in solitude, let 'me be continually with thee,' and so thou vouchsafe to 'hold me by my right hand, and guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to thy glory !' "

Sect. VII. 4. If God be with me, I shall be with him, whose love is more to me than the love of all the friends in the world. Their love may perhaps afford me some little comfort, as it flows from his ; but his love is that only upon which I live. His love gives me life and time, health and food, books and understanding, provision and the temperate use of it, friends and the blessings they communicate. Sun, earth, and air, are not so useful and necessary to me, as his love. The love of all my friends

cannot heal my sicknesses, nor pardon the smallest of my sins, nor assure me of God's forgiveness, nor restore the health of my soul, nor give lasting peace to my troubled conscience, nor banish the fears of death, nor secure my passage to everlasting life. Death will be death still, and danger will be danger still, when all my friends have done their best. But my God is an all-sufficient friend. He can prevent my sickness, or rebuke and cure it; or make it so good for me, that I shall thank him for it. He can blot out my transgressions, and forgive all my sins, and justify me when the world and my own conscience condemn me. He can teach me to believe, repent and pray; to hope,

suffer, and overcome. He can quiet my soul in the midst of trouble, and give me a well grounded everlasting peace, and a joy that no man can take from me. He can deliver me from all distempers and corruptions of my forward heart, and both ease and secure me in the painful war which is daily maintained in my own breast. He can make it as easy a thing to die, as to undress and go to bed. He can strip death of its terrible aspect, and with a mild and comfortable voice can preach to me the last and sweetest sermon, even what Jesus preached on the cross; "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." And is this the difference between the love of man and of God? And do I

yet lament the loss of man? And am I yet so backward to converse with God, and to be satisfied in his love alone? “Ah! my God, how justly mayst thou withhold that love, which I thus undervalue; and refuse that converse, which I have first refused? How justly mayest thou turn me over to man, to sinful man, whose converse I so much desire, till I have learned, by dear bought experience, the difference between an earthly and a heavenly friend!” Have I not often enough found what man is in a time of trial! Have I not been told it over and over, and told it to the quick, by deceitful and selfish friends; by proud and conceited friends; by passionate and quarrelsome friends; by

tender, faithful, but unable friends ? How often have I found that human friendship is a sweet addition to our wo ; a beloved calamity ; an affliction which nature will not be without ? Not because nature loves evil, nor is wholly deceived in its choice ; (for there is good in friendship, and delight in holy love ;) but because the good, which is here accompanied with so much evil, is the beginning of a more high and durable friendship, and points us to the blessed society and converse which we shall have with Christ in the heavenly Jerusalem. But how much better have I found the friendship of the all-sufficient God ! His love has not only pitied, but relieved me. He

has not only been afflicted, as it were, in my afflictions, but has seasonably, powerfully, and sweetly delivered me. My burdened mind has been eased by his love, which was but more burdened by the fruitless love of all my friends. Often have I come to man for help and comfort, and gone away as from an empty cistern, that had no water to cool my thirst; but God has been a present help. Could I get near him, I was sure of light, how great soever my former darkness; I was sure of warming, quickening life, how dead soever I had been before. All my misery was, that I could not get near him. . My guilty soul could not get satisfying acquaintance with him. My earthly heart lay dead, and would not

stir ; or, if by any celestial force it began a little to move towards him, it soon fell down again. My carnal mind was entangled in diverting vanities. Thus, have I been kept from communion with my God. Kept ! not by external violence ; not by bars, or bolts, or distance of place, or lowness of condition ; nor by any misrepresentation or reproaches of man ; but, alas ! by myself ; by the darkness, stupidity, and vile affections of a naughty heart. These, these have been the bars, and bolts, and jailers, to keep me from my God. Had it not been for these, I might have got nearer to him ; I might have walked and dwelt with him ; yea, “ dwelt in him and he in me ; ” nor have missed my

friends, nor felt my enemies. And is it my sinful distance from my God, that has been my loss, my wilderness, my wo? Is it a nearer admittance to the presence of his love that must be my recovery, and my joy, if ever I attain to joy? "O then, my soul, lay hold on Christ the reconciler, and in him, and by him, draw near to God. 'Cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils.' Love God in his saints, and delightfully converse with Christ in them, while thou hast opportunity. But remember thou livest not upon them, or on their love, but upon God; and therefore desire their company but for his; and if thou hast his, be content if thou hast not theirs. He wants not man,

that enjoys God. Collect all thy love, thoughts, and distress, which have been scattered and lost upon the creatures, and set them all on God himself, and press into his presence, and converse with him; and thou shalt find the mistake of thy present discontent, and thy sweet experience shall tell thee, thou hast made a happy change."

Sect. VIII. 5. If God be with me, he is with me with whom my greatest business lies. What company should I desire, but theirs, with whom I must do my daily necessary work? I have more to do with God, than with all the world; yea, more and greater business with him in one day than with all the world in all my life.

I have business with mortals about houses or lands, food, or raiment, labours or recreations, private or public peace ; but what are these to my business with God ? Indeed, with holy men I have holy business ; but it is only as they are messengers from God, and come to me on his business : But, even then, my business is much more with God than with them ; with him that sent them, than with his messengers. My business with God is so great, that if I had not a Mediator to encourage and assist me to do my work and procure my acceptance, the thoughts of it would overwhelm my soul. Therefore let man stand by ; I have to do with the eternal God, and with him I am to transact

in this little time the business of my endless life. I am to seek of God, through Christ, the pardon of all my great and grievous sins; and if I speed not, wo unto me that ever I was born! I have some hopes of pardon, but intermixed with many perplexing fears. I have evidences of grace, but they are exceedingly blotted. I want assurances that God is my reconciled Father, and that he will receive me to himself when the world forsakes me. I have many languishing graces to be strengthened; and, alas! what rooted, inveterate, vexatious corruptions to be cured! Can I look into my heart, into such an unbelieving and earthly heart, into such a proud and peevish

heart, into such a perplexed and trembling heart, and not discern how great my business is with God? Can I survey my sins, feel my wants, and sink under my weaknesses? Can I review my lost time, and all the grace I have ungratefully resisted, and all the mercies I have abused; or, can I look forward, and see how near my time is to an end? Can I think of the malice and diligence of Satan; the number, power, and policy, of my enemies; the many dangerous snares and temptations that are around me; and my own ignorance, weakness, and unwatchfulness, and not know that my greatest business is with God? Can I feel and lament my afflictions, and think my burden greater than I

can bear, and find that men cannot relieve me? Can I go mourning in the heaviness of my soul, and water my bed with tears, and fill the air with my groans, or feel my soul overwhelmed, and my words intercepted? Can I think of dying? Can I draw near to judgment? Can I contemplate heaven's everlasting joys, or, hell's everlasting pains, and not feel that my greatest business is with God? "O my soul, the case is easily resolved, with whom thou art most seriously to converse. Where shouldst thou be, but where thy business is, and business so important?" Alas! what have I to do with man? What can it do but make my head ache, to hear a deal of senseless chat, about

the words and thoughts of men, or their lands and titles, and a thousand impertinences, that only prove that the dreaming world is not awake? What pleasure is it to see the bustles of a bedlam world, and how they strive to prove or make themselves unhappy! How tedious and trifling are discourses even of the learned, when God is not the mark they aim at? Were it not that some converse with men promotes my converse with God, and that my master has placed me in society, and appointed me much of my work with others, and for others, and that much of his mercy is conveyed by others, man might stand by, and solitude would be better than the best of society, and

God alone should take me up. Nothing is so much my misery and shame, as that I have so little will and skill in the management of my grand business ; that my work is with God, and my heart no more with him. What might I not do in holy meditation or prayer one hour, if I were disposed, like one that has had so long a season, and so great a necessity for conversing with God ? A prayerless heart, a heart that flies away from God, is most inexcusable in such a one as I, that have so much important business with him. It is work that must be done, and if well done, will never be repented of. I have never returned from the presence of God, when I have really drawn

near to him, as I have from the company of mortals, repenting the loss of my time, and trembling for my discomposure contracted by their vain and earthly discourse. I often repent that I have prayed to him so coldly, and conversed with him so negligently, and served him so remissly ; but I never repent of the time, care, affections, or diligence, employed in his holy work. O that I had lived more with God, though I had been less with some that are eminent in the world, or even with the dearest of my friends ! How much more sweet would my life have been ! How much more blameless, regular, and pure ! How much more fruitful, and answerable to my obligations and professions !

How much more comfortable in the review ! How many falls, and wounds, and griefs might have been prevented ! O how much more pleasing is it now to my remembrance, to think of the hours in which I have lain at the divine footstool, though it were in tears and groans, than to think of the time I have spent in converse with the greatest, most learned, or nearest of my acquaintance !

Sect. IX. And as my greatest, so my daily business is also with God. He purposely leaves me under daily want and necessities, and the daily assault of enemies, and surprise of afflictions, that I may be daily driven to him. He loves to hear from me. He would have me to be no stranger

with him. I have business with him every hour, and need not want employment for all the faculties of my soul, if I know what it is to converse in heaven. Prayer and every devout thought, have an object so great and excellent, as ought to possess me wholly. Nothing of God must be treated lightly. His name must not be taken in vain. "He will be sanctified in them that come nigh him." He must be "loved with all the heart." His servants need not be weary for want of employment, nor through its trifling or unprofitable nature. Had I cities to build, or kingdoms to govern, I might more reasonably complain that my faculties are unemployed, than I can when I am to converse in

heaven. In other studies, the delight abates, when desire is gratified and knowledge attained ; but in God there is infinitely more to be known, when I seem to know him best. I am never satisfied with the easiness of knowing him, nor is there any uneasiness or unworthiness in him to abate my desires ; but I am drawn to him by his highest excellences, and drawn on to desire more and more, by the infinite light which I have not yet beheld, and by the infinite good which I have not yet enjoyed. If I am idle, or seem to want employment, when I am to contemplate all the works and mercies, all the relations and perfections of the Lord, surely it is for want of eyes to see, or heart inclined

to my business. If God be not enough to employ my soul, then all the persons and things on earth are not enough. And when I have infinite goodness to delight in, where my soul may freely let out itself, without any fear of exceeding love, how sweet should this employment be! Love is no more confined here, by the narrowness of the object, than knowledge. We can never love him in any proportion, either to his goodness or amiableness in himself, or to his love to us. What need have I then of any other company or business, when I have infinite goodness to delight in and to love, farther than such company or business may subserve this greatest work? "Come home, then O

my soul, to God. Converse in heaven. Turn away thine eyes from beholding vanity. Let not thy affections kindle upon straw or briers, that go out when they have made a flash or noise, and leave thee to cold or darkness. But come, and dwell upon celestial beauties, and make it thy daily and most diligent work to kindle thy affections on the infinite everlasting good; and thus they will never be extinguished for want of fuel: but the longer they burn, the greater will be the flame. Though while love is but a spark, thou canst not easily make it burn, and art complaining of thy cold and backward heart, that it is hardly warmed with the love of God; yet, when the whole

pile has took fire, and the flame ascends, then fire will breed fire, and love will produce love, and all the malice of hell itself shall never be able to suppress or quench it unto all eternity."

Sect. X. 6. If God be with me, he is with me with whom I may converse without reserve or interruption. It is great encouragement to my converse with God, that no misunderstanding, no malice of enemies, no past sin, nor present frailty ; no, nor the infinite distance of the most holy and glorious God, can hinder my access to him, or interrupt my leave and liberty of converse. If I converse with the poor, their wants afflict me, being greater than I can supply. If I would con-

verse with the great, it is not easy to get access, and less easy to have their favour, unless I purchase it at too dear a rate. How strangely and contemptuously do they look on their inferiors ! How must their word or smile be solicited ! How soon are they weary of you ! Especially if you would put them to any cost or trouble ! With how much labour and difficulty must you climb to see the top of one of those mountains ! And when you are there, you are but in a place of barrenness and have nothing to satisfy you for your pains, and may soon be glad to get far enough from them, and learn better to relish the accessible, calm, and fruitful valleys. How different from

this, is my soul's converse with God ! Company never hinders him from hearkening to my suit. He is infinite, and omnipotent, and all-sufficient, for every individual soul, as if he had no other to look after in the world. When he is taken up with the attendance and praises of his heavenly hosts, he is as free and as ready to attend and answer the prayers and sighs of a contrite soul, as if he had no nobler creature, nor higher service to regard. I am often unready to pray, but God is always ready to hear. I am unready to come to him, walk with him, and delight myself in him, but he is never unready to entertain me. Many a time my conscience would have driven me away, but

God has invited me to him, and rebuked my accusing and trembling conscience. Many a time I have called myself a prodigal, "a miserable sinner," when he has called me "his son," and reproved me for questioning his love. He has readily forgiven the sins, which I thought would have made my soul the fuel of hell. He has entertained me with joy, with music, and a feast, when I rather deserved to be cast out of doors. He has tenderly embraced me, when he might have said, "Depart from me, thou worker of iniquity, I know thee not." Little did I think he could ever forget the vanity and villany of my youth; when I had sinned against light; when I had resisted conscience; when

I had frequently and wilfully injured love ; I thought he would never have forgotten it ; but the greatness of his love and mercy, and the blood and intercession of his Son, have cancelled all. O how many mercies have I tasted, since I thought I had sinned away all mercies ! How patiently has he borne with me, since I thought he would never have put up with more ! And yet, except my sins, and the withdrawals of my heart, there has been nothing to interrupt our converse. Though he is God, and I a worm ; though he is in heaven, and I on earth ; yet he is near in all that I call upon him for. Though he has the praise of angels, he disdains not my sighs and tears.

Though he is perfectly loved by spirits made perfect, he despises not the little spark of my weak and languid love. Though I injure him by loving him no more ; though I often forget him, and have been out of the way, or refused to hear, when he has called, and have ungratefully rejected the entertainment of his love, and have unfaithfully associated myself with those whose company he forbid me ; yet he has not divorced me. O wonderful, that heaven will be familiar with earth, God with man, the most high with a worm, and the most holy with a vile sinner ! Man refuses me, when God entertains me. Those I never wronged reproach me ; and God, whom I have unspeakably in

jured, invites and entreats me, and condescends to me, as if he was obliged to serve me. Men abhor me, whom I have deserved well of; and God, from whom I deserve eternal torments, graciously accepts me. I upbraid myself with my sins, but he upbraids me not. I condemn myself for them, but he will not condemn me. He forgives me sooner than I can forgive myself. I have peace with him, before I can have peace in my own conscience. Draw near then, O my soul, to him who is willing to have thy company; who frowns thee not away, except when thou hast sinned, that thou mayest repent and be fitter for his converse. Draw near to him who will not wrong

thee, by crediting thine enemies' false reports, or by laying to thy charge things that thou knowest not; but will forgive the wrongs thou hast done, and justify thee from the sins which conscience lays to thy charge. Come to him, who invites thee to come, by his word and spirit, by his ministers and mercies, and who promises, that "those who come to him, he will in no wise cast out." Walk with him, who will hold thee by thy right hand. Speak to him who teacheth thee to speak, and understands and accepts thy stammering, and "helps thine infirmities," when thou "knowest not what to pray for as thou oughtest," and gives thee "groanings which cannot be uttered" by thy best chosen

words. Speak to him whom the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain ; but to this man will he look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at his word ; yea, “a broken and a contrite heart he will not despise.” Walk with him, who is never weary of the converse of the upright ; who is never angry with thee but for flying from him, or from drawing back, or being too strange, and refusing the kindness and felicity of his presence. The day is coming when the proudest of the sons of men would be glad of a kind look from him, with whom thou hast leave now to walk. How glad would those be of a father’s smile, or of any intimation of

hope and mercy from him, who now will not condescend to favour thee with their smiles, but delight to injure and abuse thee ! Draw near to him, therefore, on whom the whole creation depends, and whose favour the greatest mortals will at last cry for, when all their pomp and pleasure can purchase nothing. Walk with him, who is love itself, nor think him unwilling or unlovely nor let any artifices of the tempter drive thee from him. Having felt the storms abroad, methinks thou shouldst say, how safe, how sweet, how “good it is to draw near to God !” Once more,

Sect. XI. 7. If God be with me, he is with me with whom I must live for ever. My house or land, my

walks or books, or even my friends as clothed with flesh, are pleasures I must possess but a little while. "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more;" for his body in heaven is spiritual and glorious. And though when we come to Christ, we may converse with father or mother, with wife or children, as glorified saints; yet in the relation in which they now stand, we shall converse with them but a little while. For "the time is short: It remaineth that both they that have wives, be as though they had none.; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they re-

joiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it," or as though they use it not: "For the fashion of this world passeth away." Why then should I so much regard a converse of so short a continuance? Why should I be so familiar in my inn, and so fond of that familiarity, as to grieve at the thought of leaving it, and going to my glorious eternal home? Shall I love the company of a fellow traveller, or perhaps of one that is going to a contrary place, and not take more pleasure in remembering my home? O my soul, consider, "thou dost not dwell, but travel here. It is thy father's house, where thou must abide for ever.

Though he is invisible, he is every step of thy way nearer to thee than any mortal. Walk then, 'as seeing him who is invisible.' Hearken to him when he speaks. Obey his voice. Observe his way. Speak to him boldly, though humbly and reverently, as his child. Tell him what ails thee. Look upon all thy suffering as the demerit of thy sin. Confess thy folly and unkindness, crave his pardon, and remind him what and why his Son suffered. Treat with him about thy future converse. Desire his grace, and give up thyself to his conduct and care. Tell him the history of thy crimes, with penitential tears and groans. Tell him, also, that where sin has abound-

ed, his grace may now much more abound, and therefore be honoured the more. Tell him, that thou art most angry with that which offends him most, even thy disobedient unthankful heart ; that thou art weary of a heart that loves him no more ; and that it will never please thee, till it loves him better, and is more desirous to please him. Tell him of thy enemies, and entreat the protection of his love. Tell him of thy infirmities, and beg not only his tender forbearance, but his help ; sensible that ‘ without him thou canst do nothing ;’ and that ‘ strengthened by him thou canst do all things. When thou fallest, despair not, but crave his hand to raise thee up again

Especially speak to him of everlasting things, and thank him for his promises, and for thy hopes of what thou shalt be, and have, and do, among his saints for ever. Rejoice in those promised joys, even of seeing his glory and of loving and praising him better than thou canst now desire. Begin those praises. And as thou walkest with him, take pleasure in the mention of his perfections ; ‘ be thankful unto him, and bless his name.’ Delight thyself in considering what a God and portion all believers have ; whither this God is now conducting thee ; what he will do with thee ; and how he will employ thee for ever. Joyfully celebrate the glory of his works the righteousness of his judgments,

and the holiness of his ways. Let his praises elevate thy heart and voice. Turn away all slavish fears, all hurtful doubts and griefs, that would interrupt or spoil the melody. Thy Father loves even thy complaints and tears; and how much more thy praises and thanksgivings! If indeed he seem to chide or hide his face, because thou hast offended him; let the cloud that is gathered by thy folly come down in tears; yet fly not from him, but beg his pardon, and the privilege of a servant, though unworthy to be treated as a son; and thou wilt find that he is merciful and ready to forgive: only return, and keep closer for time to come. If the breach, through thy neglect, be gone so far,

that thou seemest to have lost thy God, and to be cast off and forsaken ; despair not yet, for he does but hide his face till thou repent. Be not regardless of his withdrawings, and of thy loss. Cry out, My Father, my Saviour, my God, why dost thou hide thy face ? Why hast thou forsaken me ? What shall I do here without thee ? O leave me not, lose me not in this howling wilderness ! Let me not be a prey to any ravenous beast, to sin and satan, to my foes and thine ! Tell him these are the lamentations of his child. Beg that thy childish follies may be pardoned ; and though he correct thee, that he will not forsake his child. If thou hast not words to pour out before him, at least

‘smite upon thy breast;’ and though thou art afraid or ashamed to ‘lift up so much as thine eyes unto heaven,’ yet look down and say, God be merciful to me a sinner; and it will tend to thy pardon and justification, and be a prayer which he cannot deny: Or if thou hast long called upon thy Father’s name, and hearest not his voice, and hast no return; inquire for him of them that know him, and are acquainted with his way; and ask the watchman where thou mayst find thy Lord. At length he will appear to thee, and first find thee, that thou mayest find him, and will show thee where thou didst lose him, by losing thyself. Seek him, and thou shalt find him. Wait, and he

will appear in kindness ; for he never fails nor forsakes those that wait for him. Thou art surer in his covenant love, than thou canst believe or apprehend. This kind of converse, O my soul, thou hast to maintain with thy God. Thou hast, also, the interest of all his afflicted servants to tell him of ; the concerns of his kingdom ; the fury of his enemies ; the dishonour they cast upon his name ; the advancement of his gospel and glory in the world. But still let his righteous judgment be remembered, and all be centered in his glorious, everlasting kingdom." Is it not much better thus to converse with him, whom I must be with for ever, about the place, the company, the work, and interest of my

perpetual abode, than to be taken up with strangers; and be hindered in any way by their impertinences ?

CHAPTER V.HOW THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN SOLITUDE IS
ATTAINABLE.

Sect. I. More reasons hinted at for desiring the presence of God in solitude. Sect. II.—III. In order to enjoy the presence of God in solitude, 1, be reconciled to him ; Sect. IV. 2, depend on Christ's mediation ; Sect. V. 3, get free from guilt ; Sect. VI. 4, cherish no idol in the heart ; Sect. VII—IX. 5, live by faith ; Sect. X. and 6, keep the heart with all keeping ; Sect. XI. The blessed God to be admired for his perfect suitableness to the desires of the soul. Sect. XII. The work concludes with ardent breathings after God.

SECT. I. Largely as I have pointed out, in the preceding chapter, the reasonableness of saying in solitude, "I am not alone, because the Father

is with me ;” yet I am sensible there are other weighty reasons to be assigned, which well deserve to engage our meditations ; though here I shall but briefly mention them. As for instance : Converse with God gives human converse all its excellence. Converse with man is only so far desirable as it tends to our converse with God. And therefore the end must be preferred before the means. All divine dispensations and ordinances are designed to assist our converse with God. It is the office of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit, and the usefulness of all the means of grace, and of all creatures, mercies, and afflictions, to reduce our straying souls to God, that we may con-

verse with him, and enjoy him. Converse with God is most suitable to those that are near death. It best prepares for death. It is the nearest resemblance to the work we are to do after death. We had rather, when death comes, be found conversing with God than with man. A dying man has principally to do with God; he is going to the judgment of God; and he must trust in his mercy. It therefore concerns us to draw near to God now, and be no strangers to him, lest strangeness at death should be our terror. God's willingness to converse with me, is the most wonderful condescension. Will he converse with such a worm, with such a vile sinner! And therefore, how inexcusa-

ble is my crime, if I refuse his company, and reject so great a mercy ! Even heaven itself is but our converse with God, and with his saints that are glorified. Consequently, our holy converse with God here, is the state that most resembles heaven, and best prepares for it, and indeed is all the heaven there is upon earth.

Sect. II. In order to assist you in attaining to this converse with God, let the following directions be carefully attended to. As for instance : be reconciled to God ; depend on the mediation of Christ ; get free from guilt ; cherish no idol in the heart ; live by faith ; and, keep the heart with all keeping. But, obvious as such directions are, there may be

great incapacity in some persons, to be much in solitary contemplations, arising from melancholy, or other infirmities. The confusion and hurry, which will be apt to prevail in retirement, make it proper for such persons to attend, for the most part, to those religious duties which are carried on by the help of others. Instead of well digested meditations in solitude, they must content themselves with a little time in secret prayer, and with short occasional meditations; and be so much the more in social reading and hearing, prayer and praise, till their better state of bodily health, and more vigorous spirits, shall fit them for the desirable improvement of their solitude.

Sect. III. 1. Make sure of your reconciliation to God in Christ, and of his being indeed your Father and friend. How "can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Can you take pleasure in dwelling with consuming fire? Or, in conversing with the most dreadful enemy? But that every doubting, or self-accusing soul may not find a pretence for flying from God, let such know and consider, that God does not cease to be a Father, whenever a fearful soul is drawn to question or deny it. Let them also know and consider, that in the offers of grace to all miserable sinners, and in the assured readiness of God to receive and embrace the truly penitent, there are such tidings as

ought exceedingly to rejoice a sinner ; and such abundant encouragements, as ought to draw the most guilty to seek unto God for mercy. It must be acknowledged, however, that the sweetest converse with God is for his children, and for those that have some assurance that they are his children. And perhaps you will say, that this is not easily attained ; how shall we know that God is our friend ? To this I answer, If you are unfeignedly friends to God, it is “because he first loved you.” Prefer him before all other friends, and before all the world’s wealth and vanity. Use him as your best friend, and abuse him not by disobedience or ingratitude. Own him, though at the dear-

est rate, whenever you are called to it. Desire his presence, and lament his absence. "Love him with all your heart." Think not hardly of him. Suspect him not. Misunderstand him not. Harken not to his enemies. Receive not any false reports against him. Take him to be really better for you than all the world. Thus do, and doubt not but you are friends with God, and God with you. In a word, be but heartily willing to be friends to God, and that God should be your chiefest friend, and you may be sure that it is so indeed, and that you are and have what you desire; and then how delightfully may you converse with God!

Sect. IV. 2. Depend entirely on

the mediation of Christ, the great Reconciler. Without him there is no coming near to God ; but “ in his beloved ” you shall “ be accepted.” Whatever fear of God’s displeasure shall surprise you, presently fly to Christ for safety. Whatever guilt shall look you in the face, commit yourself and your cause to Christ, and desire him to answer for you. When the doors of mercy seem to be shut against you, fly to him that “ has the keys,” and who at any time can open to you and let you in. Entreat him to answer for you to God, to your own conscience, and to all accusers. By him alone you may boldly and comfortably converse with God ; but out of him God will not know you.

Sect. V. 3. If you would have sweet communion with God, take heed of bringing into his presence any particular guilt. Christ himself never reconciled God to sin ; and the sinner and sin are so nearly related, that, notwithstanding the death of Christ, you shall feel that “ iniquity dwelleth not with God, but he hateth all workers of it, and the foolish shall not stand in his sight ;” and that if you will presume to sin because you are his children, “ be sure your sin will find you out.” O what fear, what shame, what self abhorrence and self-revenge, will guilt raise in a penitent soul, when it comes with the soul into the light of the presence of the Lord ! It will unavoidably abate

your boldness and your comfort. When you should be taking a sweet complacency in his reconciled face, and promised glory, you will be reproaching yourselves for your former sins, and be ready even to tear your flesh, to think that you should do as you have done, and use him as you would not have used a common friend, and that you have cast yourself upon his wrath. But a peaceful conscience, a soul "washed in innocency," will walk with God in "quietness and assurance," without those frowns and fears, which to others are a taste of hell.

Sect. V. 4. Be sure that you bring no idols in your hearts, when you come to converse with God.

Take heed of inordinate affection to any creature. Let all things else be as nothing to you, that you may have none to take up your thoughts but God ; and your minds may be farther separated from them than your bodies. Bring not into solitude, or contemplation, a proud, or wanton, or covetous mind. It is of much greater importance, what heart you bring, than what place you are in, or what business you are upon. A mind drowned in ambition, sensuality, or passion, will scarce find God any sooner in retirement, than in a crowd ; for God will not own nor be familiar with such a one, unless he is returning from those sins to God. “ What advantage is there,” says Seneca, “ in

the greatest rural silence, if passions rage within?" Bring not thy house, or land, or credit, or carnal friend, along with thee in thine heart, if thou wouldst walk in heaven, and converse with God.

Sect. VII. 5. Live still by faith. Let faith, as it were, lay heaven and earth together. Look not at God, as if he were afar off. "Set him always before you, even at your right hand. When you awake, be still with him." In the morning thank him for your rest, and yield up yourself to his conduct and service for the whole day. Go forth as with him, and doing his work. In every action, let the command of God, and the promise of heaven, be before your eyes, and up-

on your hearts. Live, as having incomparably more to do with God and heaven, than with all the world ; that, with Paul, you may say, “ To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” You must shut up the eye of sense, except in subordination to faith, and live by faith upon a God, a Christ, and a world that is unseen, if you would by experience know what it is to be above the brutish life of sensualists, and to converse with God. “ O Christian, if thou hadst rightly learned this blessed life, how high and noble would thy conversation be ! How easily wouldst thou spare, and how little wouldst thou miss, the favour of the greatest mortals, or the presence of any worldly comfort !

City or country would be much alike to thee; only that place and state would be best to thee, where thou hast the greatest help and freedom to converse with God. 'Thou wouldst say of human society, as Seneca, 'It is the same thing to me, whether I converse with a single friend, or with a multitude: I am satisfied with one, and with none.' Thus being taken up with God, thou mightest, in prison, live as at liberty; and in a wilderness as in a city; and in a place of banishment, as in thy native land; 'for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;' and every where thou mayest find him, and converse with him, and 'lift up holy hands' unto him. In every place thou art within

the sight of home, and heaven is in thine eye, and thou art conversing with that God, in whose converse the highest angels place their most transcendent felicity."

Sect. VIII. How little cause, then, have all the church's enemies to triumph, since they can never exclude a true believer from the presence of his God, nor banish him into such a place where he cannot "have his conversation in heaven!" The stones that were cast at holy Stephen, could not hinder him from "seeing the heavens opened, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." A Patmos allowed St. John to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Christ never so speedily and comfortably

owns his servants, as when the world disowns them, and abuses them for his sake, and hurls them about “as the offscourings of all things.” When “the Jews cast out the man” whom Christ had cured of his blindness, Jesus soon “found him.” Persecutors do but promote the “blessedness and exceeding joy” of sufferers for Christ, How little reason, then, have Christians to shun such sufferings, by any unlawful means; and to give so dear, as the hazard of their souls, for the sake of escaping the safety, honour, and happiness of martyrdom !

Sect. IX. Indeed, we judge not, we love and live not, as saints must do, if we judge not that to be the truest

liberty, and love it not as the best condition, in which we may most intimately converse with God. And O how much harder is it to walk with God in a court, in the midst of sensual delights, than in a prison or wilderness, where we have none to interrupt us, and nothing else to engage us ! Our prepossessed minds, our earthly hearts, our carnal affections, and the pleasures of a prosperous state, are the prisons and jailers of our souls. Were it not for these, how free should we be, though our bodies were confined to the straightest room ! He is at liberty, who can walk in heaven, and have access to God, and make use of all the creatures in the world, for promoting his heavenly conversation. And

he is the prisoner whose soul is chained to flesh and sense, and confined to his lands and houses, and feeds on the dust of worldly riches, or wallows in the filth of gluttony, drunkenness, or lust ; who is “ far from God,” and desires not to be near him ; who says to God, “ depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways ;” who loves his prison and his chains so well, that he refuses to be set free, and hates those, with the cruellest hatred, that endeavour his deliverance. He is the poor prisoner of Satan, who has not liberty to believe, nor love God, nor converse in heaven, nor seriously mind and seek the things that are most high and honourable ; who has no liberty to

pray, or meditate, or speak of things divine, or love the converse of those that do ; who is tied so hard to the drudgery of sin, that he cannot leave it for a month, a week, or a day, in order to delight himself in walking with God. But he who lives in the family of God, and is employed in attending on him, and in conversing with Christ, and with heavenly objects ; such a one has no reason to complain of his want of friends, or company, or accommodation, nor to be too impatient under any corporeal confinement.

Sect. X. 6. Lastly, keep your hearts with all keeping. Let nothing have entertainment there, which would abridge your liberty of conversing

with God. Fill not those hearts with worldly vanities, which are made and new made, to be the habitation of God. Desire not the company which would diminish your heavenly acquaintance and correspondence. Be not unfriendly, nor self-sufficient and self-conceited, but beware, lest under the ingenuous title of a friend, a special, prudent, faithful friend, you should entertain an idol, or an enemy to your love of God, or a competitor with your highest and best friend. It is not the specious title of a friend, that will save you from the thorns and briers of disappointment, even from greater troubles than ever you found from open enemies.

Sect. XI. O blessed be that high

and everlasting friend, who is every way suited to upright souls ! to their minds and memories, to their delight and love ; by unchangeable truth, inexhaustible goodness, unspotted light, dearest love, and firmest constancy ! Why has my darksighted and drowsy soul been so seldom with him ! Why has it so often, so slightly, so unthankfully passed by, and not observed him, nor hearkened to his kindest invitations ? What is all this vanity and vexation that has filled my memory, burdened my mind, and cheated and corrupted my affections ; while my dearest Lord has been days and nights so unworthily forgotten, so contemptuously neglected, or loved as if I loved him not ? O that those

lost and empty hours had been spent in the humblest converse with him, which have been dreamed away upon, I know not what !

Sect. XII. " O my God, how much wiser and happier had I been, had I rather chosen to mourn with thee, than to rejoice and sport with any other. O that I had rather wept with thee, than laughed with the creature ! For the time to come, let that be my friend, that most befriends my dark, and dull, and backward soul, in its heavenly conversation ! Or if there be none such on earth, let me be without earthly friends ! Oblot out every name from my corrupted heart, which hinders the deeper engraving of thy name ! Ah ! Lord, what a stone,

what a blind ungrateful thing, is a heart not touched with celestial love ! Yet, Lord, shall I not run to thee, when I have none else that will know me ? Shall I not draw near to thee, when all fly from me ? When daily experience cries out so loud, None but Christ, God or nothing, ah foolish heart, that hast not thought of it ! Where, Lord, is that place, that cave, or desert, where I might soonest find thee, and fullest enjoy thee ? Is it in the wilderness, that thou walkest, or in the crowd ; in the closet, or in the church ? Where is it that I might soonest meet with God ? But, alas, I now perceive I have a heart to find, before I am like to find my Lord ! O lifeless stony heart, that is dead

to him that gave it life, and to none but him ! Could I not love, or think, or feel at all, methinks I were less dead than now ; less dead, if dead, than now I am alive ! I had almost said, Lord, let me never love more, till I can love thee ; nor think more on any thing, till I can more willingly think of thee ! But I must suppress that wish ; for life will act ; and the motions of nature are necessary to those of grace. And therefore in the life of nature, and in the glimmerings of thy light, I will wait for more of the celestial life. My God, thou hast my consent ; it is here attested under my hand ; separate me from what and whom thou wilt, so that I may but be nearer to thee ! Let

me love thee more, and feel more of thy love, and then let me love or be beloved of the world, as little as thou wilt ! I thought self-love had been a more predominant thing ; but now I find repentance has its anger, its hatred, and its revenge. I am truly angry with my heart, that has so often and foolishly offended thee. Methinks I hate that heart, that is so cold and backward in thy love, and almost grudged it a dwelling in my breast. Alas, when love should be the life of prayer, the life of meditation, the life of sermons, and of holy conference, and my soul in them should long to meet thee, and delight to mention thee, I wander, Lord, I know not whither ! Or, I sit still, and wish, but

do not rise, and run, and follow thee ;
yea, I do not, what I seem to do ; all
is dead, all is dead for want of love !
I often cry, O where is that place, where
the quickening beams of heaven are
warmest, that my frozen soul might
seek it out ! But whither can I go, to
city or to solitude ? Alas, I find it is
not place that makes the difference !
I know that Christ is perfectly re-
plenished with life and light and love ;
and I hear him as our head and
treasure, proclaimed and offered to us
in thy gospel. 'This is thy reward, 'He
that hath the Son hath life.' O why
then is my barren soul so empty ! I
thought I had long ago consented to
thy offer ; and then according to thy
covenant, both light and life in him

are mine. And yet must I still be dark and dead? Ah, dearest Lord, I say not that I have too long waited; but if I continue thus to wait, wilt thou never find the time of love, and come and own thy panting, gasping worm? Wilt thou never dissipate these clouds, and shine upon this dead and darkened soul? Hath my night no day? Thrust me not from thee, O my God; for it is a hell to be thrust from thee! But surely the cause, could I find it, or rather could I cure it, is all at home. Surely it is my face that is turned from God, when I say, 'his face is turned from me.' And if 'my life,' while on earth, must be out of sight, and be hidden in the root, 'with Christ in God;' if all the

rest be reserved for that better world, and I must here have but these small beginnings, O make me more to love and long for thine appearing, and not to fear the time of my deliverance, or unbelievingly to linger in this Sodom, as one that would rather stay with sin, than come to thee ! Though sin has made me backward to the sight, let it not make me backward to receive the crown ; though it has made me a loiterer in thy work, let it not make me backward to receive that wages which thy love will give to our pardoned, poor, accepted services ! Though I have too often drawn back, when I should have come unto thee, and have walked with thee in thy ways of grace ; yet

heal that unbelief and disaffection, which would make me draw back, when thou callest me to possess thy glory ! Though the sickness and lameness of my soul have hindered me in my journey, yet let my painful fatigues help me in my desires to be delivered, and to be at home ; where, without the interposing nights of thy displeasure, I shall perfectly feel richest love, and walk with thy glorified saints, in the light of thy glory, triumphing in thy praise for evermore ! Amen."

MORNING PRAYER

FOR

A FAMILY.

O LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, assist us now to draw near unto thee with deep reverence and humility of mind. Deliver us from all wandering thoughts, and enable us to worship thee in such a manner as thou mayest hear our prayers and pour down thy blessing upon us.

O Lord God of Heaven, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, giver of every good and perfect gift, we thank thee for all thine unmerited mercies bestowed upon this family, and we pray

thee by thy grace to preserve every one of us from sinning against thee.

Defend us through this day by thy mighty power, save us from the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, put into our hearts good desires, and help us to fulfil all thy precepts and commandments. And since thou hast sent thy Son Jesus Christ into the world to die for our sins, and to become the Saviour of our souls, O Lord, give us grace, day by day, to thank thee for this unspeakable gift, and help us to remember that we are not our own, but are bought with a price, and make us willing therefore both to do and suffer all things to which thou mayest be pleased to call us ; teach us to be this day patient and humble,

and thankful, and contented with our lot, often lifting up our thoughts to heaven, having our chief desires fixed on a better world.

And make us holy in all manner of conversation as becometh the disciples of Jesus Christ ; make this household, we pray thee, to be a household that feareth God ; may we be delivered from the corruption that is in the world, and may we also dwell together in unity. May we put away from us all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and evil speaking, and all malice, and may we be kind one towards another, forgiving one another, even as we hope that God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us. And help us to know our several duties in

life that we may fulfil them. May we be upright and diligent, may we waste no time, and neglect no opportunity of doing good that is afforded us. May we be ready to every good work.

And teach us to be ever watchful and circumspect, and fearful of running into temptation, but if, at any time, we are overtaken with a fault, give us grace to confess it and repent of it, and to ask forgiveness both from God and man.

O Lord, pardon the many sins which in times past we have committed against thee. Forgive our forgetfulness of thee our God, and our many trespasses against our neighbours. Grant unto us all true repentance, and

help us day by day to grow in grace,
and in the knowledge of our Lord and
Saviour.

Our Father, &c.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ, and the love of God, and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with
us all evermore. Amen.

EVENING PRAYER

FOR

A FAMILY.

O LORD our heavenly Father, we beseech thee to hear the prayers which we are about to offer up unto thee; deliver us from all wandering thoughts, and help us to remember that we are now in the presence of that God unto whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid.

O God we pray thee to forgive the sins of the past day. We acknowledge that we have this day left undone many things which we ought to have done, and done many things

which we ought not to have done. We have trespassed against thee in thought, word, and deed, and though we have been encouraged by thy gospel to repent of our iniquities, and to serve God in newness of life, yet we have many times returned to those sins which we profess to have repented of, and we have fallen under thy just wrath and displeasure.

But we pray thee, O thou God of all grace and goodness, for the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ, to pardon all that is past, and to take us into thy favour this night, not weighing our merits, but forgiving our offences, and causing us to place our humble trust in thy mercy. Deliver us, we pray thee, from the troubles of a guilt-

ty conscience, now that we are about to lie down to rest. Save us, O Lord, from the dread of death, and from the terrors of the wrath to come. Grant unto us, if it please thee, a quiet night, and make us all to be at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the same time, we beseech thee not to suffer that we should deceive ourselves by any false hope, but give us grace, day by day, to examine ourselves with care and diligence, that we may discover all that is amiss in us. O Lord deliver us from continuing in any known sin. Save us from every secret iniquity ; may we each of us resolve before we go to rest this night, to forsake, by thy grace assisting us, every former transgres-

sion, and may we now devote ourselves entirely to thy service.

We further beseech thee to bless all our relations, friends, and connexions; take both them and us under thy protection this night. And have mercy on all those who are in pain, sickness, or any other adversity, do thou lighten their troubles and support them by thy heavenly grace.

And accept our thanks for all thy goodness vouchsafed unto us this day. Praised be the Lord for all his mercies, for the health and strength, and food and raiment, and comforts of every kind which we have enjoyed. But above all we desire to bless thy name for the gift of Jesus Christ, thy Son, for the instructions of thy sacred

word, and for the hope of everlasting life.—O Lord, grant unto us grace to receive these, and all thy blessings with a thankful heart, and let us show forth thy praise, not with our lips only but with our lives. Accept, we beseech thee, our imperfect supplications and prayers, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Saviour.

Our Father, &c.

May the Grace, &c.

THE END.

H. G. S





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