

PART III.

THE

CHRISTIAN'S CONVERSE WITH GOD :

OR,

THE INSUFFICIENCY AND UNCERTAINTY OF HUMAN FRIENDSHIP ;
 AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF SOLITUDE IN CONVERSE
 WITH GOD : WITH SOME OF THE AUTHOR'S
 BREATHINGS AFTER HIM.

JOHN xvi. 32.

Behold the hour cometh, yea, is 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.

HAVING treated of our conformity to Christ in sufferings, in general, I since came distinctly to treat of his particular sufferings in which we must be conformed to him: and having gone over many of those particulars, I am this day to handle the instance of 'Christ's being forsaken by his friends and followers.'

He thought meet to foretell them how they should manifest their infirmity and untrustiness in this temporary forsaking of him, that so he might more fully convince them, that he knew what was in man, and that he knew future contingencies, (or things to come, which seem most dependant on the will of man) and that he voluntarily submitted to his deserted state, and expected no support from creatures, but that man should then do least for Christ, when Christ was doing most for man: that man by an unthankful forsaking Christ, should then manifest his forsaken, deplorable state, when Christ was to make atonement for his reconciliation to God, and was preparing the most costly remedy for his recovery. He foretold them of the fruit which their infirmity would produce, to humble them that were apt to think

too highly of themselves for the late free confession they had made of Christ, when they had newly said, "Now we are sure that thou knowest all things: by this we are sure that thou comest forth from God." (John xvi. 30.)

He answereth them, "Do ye now believe? Behold the hour cometh," &c. Not that Christ would not have his servants know his graces in them, but he would also have them know the corruption that is latent, and the infirmity consistent with their grace. We are very apt to judge of all that is in us, and of all that we shall do hereafter, by what we feel at the present upon our hearts. As when we feel the stirring of some corruption, we are apt to think that there is nothing else, and hardly perceive the contrary grace, and are apt to think it will never be better with us: so when we feel the exercise of faith, desire or love, we are apt to overlook the contrary corruptions, and to think that we shall never feel more. But Christ would keep us both humble and vigilant, by acquainting us with the mutability and inconstancy of our minds. When it goes well with us, we forget that the time is coming when it may go worse. As Christ said to his disciples here in the case of believing, we may say to ourselves in that and other cases, 'Do we now believe?' It is well: but the time may be coming in which we may be brought to shake with the stirrings of our remaining unbelief, and shrewdly tempted to question the truth of Christianity itself, and of the holy Scriptures, and of the life to come. Do we now rejoice in the persuasions of the love of God? The time may be coming when we may think ourselves forsaken and undone, and think he will esteem and use us as his enemies. Do we now pray with fervour, and pour out our souls enlargedly to God? It is well; but the time may be coming when we shall seem to be as dumb and prayerless, and say, we cannot pray, or else we find no audience and acceptance of our prayers. Christ knoweth that in us which we little know by ourselves; and therefore may foreknow that we will commit such sins, or fall into such dangers, as we little fear.

What Christ here prophesieth to them, did afterwards all come to pass. As soon as ever danger and trouble did appear, they began to flag, and to shew how ill they could adhere unto him, or suffer with him, without his special corroborating grace. 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." (Matt. xxvi. 40, 41.) When he was apprehended, they shifted each man for himself, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled:" (ver. 56:) and as this is said to be "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled," (ver. 54, 56,) so it might be said to be, that this prediction of Christ himself might be fulfilled. Not that Scripture prophecies did cause the sin by which they were fulfilled; nor that God caused the sin, to fulfil his own predictions, but that God cannot be deceived who foretold in Scriptures long before that thus it would come to pass. When it is said that "thus it must be that the Scripture might be fulfilled," the meaning is not, that 'thus God will make it be,' or 'thus he causeth men to do,' that he may fulfil the Scriptures. It is not '*necessitas consequentis vel causata*,' that is inferred from predictions; but only '*necessitas consequentiæ*;' a logical necessity '*in ordine cognoscendi et dicendi*;' not a natural necessity '*in ordine essendi*:' not a necessity of the thing itself, as caused by the prediction or decree; but a necessity of the truth of this conclusion in arguing; 'such a thing will be, because God hath decreed, foreknown or foretold it:' or, 'whatever God foretelleth, must necessarily come to pass;' that is, will certainly come to pass: 'but this God hath foretold: therefore this will come to pass.'

Here are three observable points in the text, that are worthy our distinct consideration, though for brevity sake I shall handle them together.

1. That Christ was forsaken by his own disciples and left alone.

2. When the disciples left Christ, they were scattered every one to his own. They returned to their old habitations, and old acquaintance, and old employment, as if their hopes and hearts had been almost broken, and they had lost all their labour in following Christ so long. Yet the root of faith and love that still remained, caused them to inquire further of the end, and to come together in secret to confer about these matters.

3. When Christ was forsaken of his disciples and left alone, yet was he not forsaken of his Father, nor left so alone as to be separated from him or his love.

We are now to consider of this not only as a part of

Christ's humiliation, but also as a point in which we must expect to be conformed to him. It may possibly seem strange to us that Christ would suffer all his disciples to forsake him in his extremity ; and I doubt it will seem strange to us, when in our extremity, and our suffering for Christ (and perhaps for them) we shall find ourselves forsaken by those that we most highly valued, and had the greatest familiarity with. But there are many reasons of this permissive providence open to our observation.

1. No wonder, if when Christ was suffering for sin, he would even then permit the power and odiousness of sin to break forth, that it might be known he suffered not in vain. No wonder, if he permitted his followers to desert him, and shew the latent unbelief, and selfishness, and unthankfulness that remained in them, that so they might know that the death of Christ was as necessary for them as for others ; and the universality of the disease might shew the need that the remedy should be universal. And it is none of Christ's intent to make his servants to seem better than they are, to themselves, or others, or to honour himself by the hiding of their faults, but to magnify his pardoning and healing grace, by the means or occasion of their sins which he pardoneth and healeth.

2. Hereby he will bring his followers to the fuller knowledge of themselves, and shew them that which all their days should keep them humble, and watchful, and save them from presumption and trusting in themselves. When we have made any full confession of Christ, or done him any considerable service, we are apt to say with the disciples, "Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee : what shall we have ?" (Matt. xix. 27.) As if they had rather been givers to Christ than receivers from him ; and had highly merited at his hands. But when Peter forswearth him, and the rest shift for themselves, and when they come to themselves, after such cowardly and ungrateful dealings ; then they will better understand their weakness, and know on whom they must depend.

3. Hereby also they shall better understand what they would have been if God had left them to themselves, that so they may be thankful for grace received, and may not boast themselves against the miserable world, as if they had made themselves to differ, and had not received all that

grace by which they excel the common sort. When our falls have hurt us and shamed us, we shall know to whom we must be beholden to support us.

4. Christ would permit his disciples thus far to forsake him, because he would have no support from man, in his sufferings for man. This was part of his voluntary humiliation, to be deprived of all earthly comforts, and to bear affliction even from those few, that but lately were his faithful servants. That men, dealing like men, and sinners, while he was doing like God, and as a Saviour, no man might challenge to himself the honour of contributing to the redemption of the world, so much as by encouraging the Redeemer.

5. Christ did permit the faith and courage of his disciples thus far to fail, that their witness to him might be of the greater credit and authority, when his actual resurrection, and the communication of the Spirit, should compel them to believe. When all their doubts were dissipated, they that had doubted themselves, and yet were constrained to believe, would be received as the most impartial witnesses by the doubting world.

6. Lastly, by the desertion and dissipation of his disciples, Christ would teach us whenever we are called to follow him in suffering, what to expect from the best of men: even to know that of themselves they are untrusty, and may fail us: and therefore not to look for too much assistance or encouragement from them. Paul lived in a time when Christians were more self-denying and steadfast than they are now. And Paul was one that might better expect to be faithfully accompanied in his sufferings for Christ, than any of us: and yet he saith, "At my first answer no one stood with me, but all men forsook me:" (2 Tim. iv. 16:) and prayeth, that it be not laid to their charge. Thus you have seen some reasons why Christ consented to be left of all, and permitted his disciples to desert him in his sufferings.

Yet, note here, that it is but a partial, temporary forsaking that Christ permitteth; and not a total or final forsaking or apostacy. Though he will let them see that they are yet men, he will not leave them to be but as other men: nor will he quite cast them off, or suffer them to perish.

Nor is it all alike that thus forsake him. Peter doth not

do as Judas. The sincere may manifest their infirmity ; but the hypocrites will manifest their hypocrisy.

And accordingly in our sufferings, our familiars that were false-hearted (as being worldlings and carnal at the heart) may perhaps betray us, and set against us, or forsake the cause of Christ, and follow the way of gain and honour. When our tempted, shrinking friends, that yet may have some sincerity, may perhaps look strange at us, and seem not to know us, and may hide their heads and shew their fears ; and perhaps also begin to study some self-deceiving arguments and distinctions, and to stretch their consciences, and venture on some sin, because they are afraid to venture on affliction ; till Christ shall cast a gracious, rebuking, quickening aspect on them, and shame them for their sinful shame, and fear them from their sinful fears, and inflame their love to him by the motions of his love to them, and destroy the love that turned them from him : and then the same men that dishonourably failed Christ and us, and began to shrink, will turn back and reassume their arms, and by patient suffering overcome, and win the crown, as we have done before.

Use. Christians expect to be conformed to our Lord in this part of his humiliation also. Are your friends yet fast and friendly to you ? For all that expect that many of them, at least, should prove less friendly : and promise not yourselves an unchanged constancy in them. Are they yet useful to you ? Expect the time when they cannot help you. Are they your comforters and delight, and is their company much of your solace upon earth ? Be ready for the time when they may become your sharpest scourges, and most heart-piercing griefs, or at least when you shall say, " We have no pleasure in them." Have any of them, or all, already failed you ? What wonder ? Are they not men, and sinners ? To whom were they ever so constant as not to fail them ? Rebuke yourselves for your unwarrantable expectations from them : and learn hereafter to know what man is, and expect that friends should use you as followeth.

1. Some of them that you thought sincere, shall prove perhaps unfaithful and dissemblers, and upon fallings out, or matters of self-interest, may seek your ruin. Are you better than David, that had an Achitophel ? Or than Paul,

that had a Demas? Or than Christ, that had a Judas? Some will forsake God: what wonder then if they forsake you? "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." (Matt. xxiv. 12.) Where pride and vain-glory, and sensuality and worldliness are unmortified at the heart, there is no trustiness in such persons: for their wealth, or honour, or fleshly interest, they will part with God and their salvation; much more with their best deserving friends. Why may not you, as well as Job, have occasion to complain, "He hath put my brethren far from me, and my 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 maidens, 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 childrens' 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." (Job xix. 13—19.) Why may not you as well as David be put to say, "Yea mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me." (Psal. xli. 9.) Those that have been most acquainted with the secrets of your soul, and privy to your very thoughts, may be the persons that shall betray you, or grow strange to you. Those that you have most obliged by benefits, may prove your greatest enemies. You may find some of your friends like birds of prey, that hover about you for what they can get, and when they have caught it fly away. If you have given them all that you have, they will forsake you, and perhaps reproach you, because you have no more to give them. They are your friends more for what they yet expect from you, than for what they have already received. If you cannot still be helpful to them, or feed their covetous desires, or supply their wants, you are to them but as one that they had never known. Many a faithful minister of Christ hath studied, and preached, and prayed, and wept for their people's souls, and after all have been taken for their enemies, and used as such; yea even because they have done so much for them. Like the patient, that being cured of a mortal sickness, sued his physician at law for making him sick with

the physic. (But it is, indeed, our uncured patients only that are offended with us.) Paul was accounted an enemy to the Galatians, because he told them the truth. Ungrateful truth maketh the faithfullest preachers most ungrateful. It must seem no wonder to a preacher of the Gospel, when he hath entreated, prayed and wept night and day for miserable souls, and laid his hands as it were under their feet, in hopes of their conversion and salvation, to find them after all his bitterest enemies, and seeking his destruction, that could have laid down his life for their salvation. Jeremy seemed too impatient under this affliction, when he said, "Give heed to me, O Lord, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them. Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword," &c. (Jer. xviii. 19, 20.)

Thus may ingratitude afflict you, and kindness be requited with unkindness, and the greatest benefits be forgotten, and requited with the greatest wrongs. Your old familiars may be your foes; and you may be put to say as Jeremy, "For I heard the defaming of many: 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." (Jer. xx. 10.) Thus must the servants of Christ be used, in conformity to their suffering Head.

2. And some that are sincere, and whose hearts are with you, may yet be drawn by temptation to disown you. When malice is slandering you, timorous friendship may perhaps be silent, and afraid to justify you or take your part. When a Peter in such imbecility and fear can disown and deny his suffering Lord, what wonder if faint-hearted friends disown you, or me, that may give them too much occasion or pretence? Why may not you and I be put to say as David did, "My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore, and my kinsmen stand afar off. They that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long." (Psal. xxxviii. 11, 12.) They that in fearfulness will fail their

Maker and Redeemer; and hazard their salvation, may by a smaller temptation be drawn to fail such friends as we.

3. Moreover a hundred things may occasion fallings out even amongst unfeigned friends. Passions may cause inconvenient actions or expressions, and these may cause passions in their friends; and these may grow so high till friends do seem to one another to be like enemies. Paul and Barnabas may grow so hot, as to fall out to a parting. How easily can Satan set fire on the tinder which he findeth in the best and gentlest natures, if God permit him? No friends so near and dear, that passionate weaknesses may not either alienate or make a grief to one another. How apt are we to take unkindnesses at one another, and to be suspicious of our friends, or offended with them! And how apt to give occasion of such offence! How apt are we to censure one another, and to misinterpret the words and actions of our friends! And how apt to give occasion of such mistakes and cutting censures! And the more kindness we have found in, or expected from our friends, the more their real or supposed injuries will affect us. We are apt to say, 'Had it been a stranger, I could have borne it: but to be used thus by my bosom or familiar friend, goes near my heart.' And indeed, the unkindnesses of friends is no small affliction; the suffering going usually as near the heart, as the person that caused it was near it. Especially when our own weakness causeth us to forget the frailty and infirmities of man, and with what allowances and expectations we must choose and use our friends; and when we forget the love that remaineth in the midst of passions.

4. Also cross interests and unsuitableness may exceedingly interrupt the fastest friendship. Friendship is very much founded in suitableness, and maintained by it: and among mortals, there is no perfect suitableness to be found; but much unsuitableness still remaineth. That which pleaseth one, is displeasing to another. One liketh this place, and the other that: one liketh this habit, and the other that: one is for mirth, and the other for sadness: one for talk, and the other for silence: one for a public, and the other for a private life. And their personality or individuation having self-love as inseparable, will unavoidably cause a contrariety of interests. The creature is insufficient for us: if one have it, perhaps the other must want it: like a covering too nar-

row for the bed. Sometimes our reputations seem to stand cross, so that one man's is diminished by another's. And how apt is envy to create a grudge, and raise unfriendly jealousies and distastes! Sometimes the commodity of one is the discommodity of the other: and then *mine* and *thine* (which are contrary to the community of friendship) may divide, and alienate, and make two of those that seemed one. The instances of Abraham and Lot (upon the difference among their servants), and of Isaac and Ishmael, and of Jacob and Esau, and of Laban and Jacob, and of Leah and Rachael, and of Joseph and his brethren, and of Saul and David, and of Ziba, Mephibosheth and David, with many others, tell us this. It is rare to meet with a Jonathan, that will endearedly love that man to the death, who is appointed to deprive him of a kingdom. If one can but say, I suffer by him, or I am a loser by him, it seemeth enough to excuse unfriendly thoughts and actions. When you can gratify the desires of all covetous, ambitious, self-seeking persons in the world, or else cure their diseases, and possess their minds with perfect charity, then all the world will be your friends.

5. Cross opinions also are like to alienate many of your friends. This age hath over and over again given the world as full and sad demonstrations of the power of cross opinions to alienate friends, and make divisions, as most ages of the world have ever had. If your friend be proud, it is wonderful how he will slight you, and withdraw his love, if you be 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 if you differ from him, as taking you for one that disowneth the truth of God, and therefore one that God himself disowneth; or at least to grow cold in his affection toward you, and to decline from you, as he that thinks you do from God. As agreement in opinions doth strangely reconcile affections; so disagreement doth secretly and strangely alienate them: even before you are well aware, your friend hath lost possession of your hearts, because of an unavoidable diversity of apprehensions. When all your friends have the same intellectual complexion and temperature, and measure of understanding with yourselves, then you may have hope to escape the ruptures which unlikeness and differences of apprehensions might else cause.

6. Moreover, some of your friends may so far overgrow you in wisdom, or wealth, or honour, or worth in their own conceits, that they may begin to take you to be unsuitable for them, and unmeet for their further special friendship. Alas! poor man, they will pity thee that thou art no wiser, and that thou hast no greater light to change thy mind as fast as they, or that thou art so weak and ignorant as not to see what seems to them so clear a truth; or that thou art so simple to cast away thyself by crossing them that might prefer thee, or to fall under the displeasure of those that have power to raise or ruin thee: but if thou be so simple, thou mayest be the object of their lamentation, but art no familiar friend for them. They think it fittest to close and converse with those of their own rank and stature, and not with such shrubs and children, that may prove their trouble and dishonour.

7. And some of your friends will think that by a more thorough acquaintance with you, they have found out more of your infirmities or faults; and therefore have found that you are less amiable and valuable than at first they judged you. They will think that by distance, unacquaintedness, and an overhasty love and judgment, they were mistaken in you; and that now they see reason to repent of the love which they think was guilty of some errors and excess: when they come nearer you, and have had more trial of you, they will think they are fitter to judge of you than before: and indeed our defects are so many, and all our infirmities so great, that the more men know us, the more they may see in us that deserveth pity or reproof; and as pictures, we appear less beautiful at the nearest view: though this will not warrant the withdrawing of that love which is due to friends, and to virtue, even in the imperfect; nor will excuse that alienation, and decay of friendship that is caused by the pride of such as overlook perhaps much greater failings and weaknesses in themselves, which need forgiveness.

8. And perhaps some of your friends will grow weary of their friendship, having that infirmity of human nature, not to be much pleased with one thing long. Their love is a flower that quickly withereth; it is a short lived thing that soon groweth old. It must be novelty that must feed their love and their delight.

9. And perhaps they may have got some better friends

in their apprehensions, they may have so much interest as to take them up, and leave no room for ancient friends. It may be, they have met with those that are more suitable, or can be more useful to them: that have more learning, or wit, or wealth, or power, than you have, and therefore seem more worthy of their friendship.

10. And some of them may think when you are in a low and suffering state, and in danger of worse, that it is part of their duty of self-preservation to be strange to you (though in heart they wish you well). They will think they are not bound to hazard themselves upon the displeasure of superiors, to own or befriend you, or any other: though they must not desert Christ, they think they may desert a man for their own preservation.

To avoid both extremes, in such a case, men must both study to understand which way is most serviceable to Christ, and to his church, and withal, to be able to deny themselves, and also must study to understand what Christ meaneth in his final sentence, "In as much as you did it (or did it not) to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it (or did it not) to me." As, if it were to visit the contagious; we must neither cast away our lives to do no good, or for that which in value holdeth no proportion with them; nor yet must we deny to run any hazard when it is indeed our duty: so is it in our visiting those that suffer for the cause of Christ: (only here the owning them being the confessing of him, we need more seldom to fear being too forward).

11. And some of your friends may cover their unfaithfulness with the pretence of some fault that you have been guilty of, some error that you hold, or some unhandsome or culpable act that you have done, or some duty that you have left undone or failed in. For they think there is not a better shelter for their unfaithfulness, than to pretend for it the name and cause of God, and so to make a duty of their sin. Who would not justify them, if they can but prove, that God requireth them, and religion obligeth them, to forsake you for your faults? There are few crimes in the world that by some are not fathered on God (that most hateth them), as thinking no name can so much honour them. False friends therefore use this means as well as other hypocrites: and though God is love, and condemneth no-

thing more than uncharitableness and malice, yet these are commonly by false-hearted hypocrites, called by some pious, virtuous names, and God himself is entitled to them: so that few worldlings, ambitious persons or time-servers, but will confidently pretend religion for all their falsehood to their friends, or bloody cruelty to the servants of Christ, that comply not with their carnal interest.

12. Perhaps some of your friends may really mistake your case, and think that you suffer as evil doers, and instead of comforting you, may be your sharpest censurers. This is one of the most notable things set out to our observation in the book of Job: it was not the smallest part of his affliction, that when the hand of God was heavy upon him, and then if ever was the time for his friends to have been his comforters, and friends indeed, on the contrary they became his scourge, and by unjust accusations, and misinterpretations of the providence of God, did greatly add to his affliction! When God had taken away his children, wealth and health, his friends would take away the reputation and comfort of his integrity; and under pretence of bringing him to repentance, did charge him with that which he was never guilty of: they wounded his good name, and would have wounded his conscience, and deprived him of his inward peace: censorious, false accusing friends, do cut deeper than malicious, slandering enemies. It is no wonder, if strangers or enemies do misjudge and misreport our actions: but when your bosom friends, that should most intimately know you, and be the chief witnesses of your innocency against all others, shall in their jealousy, or envy, or peevishness, or falling out, be your chief reproaches and unjust accusers, as it makes it seem more credible to others, so it will come nearer to yourselves. And yet this is a thing that must be expected; yea, even your most self-denying acts of obedience to God, may be so misunderstood by godly men, and real friends, as by them to be taken for your great miscarriage, and turned to your rebuke: as David's dancing before the ark was by his wife; which yet did but make him resolve to be yet more vile. If you be cast into poverty, or disgrace, or prison, or banishment, for your necessary obedience to Christ, perhaps your friend or wife may become your accuser for this your greatest service, and say, This is your own doing: your rashness, or indis-

cretion, or self-conceitedness, or wilfulness hath brought it upon you. What need had you to say such words, or to do this or that? Why could not you have yielded in so small a matter? Perhaps your most costly and excellent obedience shall, by your nearest friends, be called the fruits of pride, or humour, or passion, or some corrupt affection, or at least of folly or inconsiderateness. When flesh and blood hath long been striving in you against your duty, and saying, Do not cast away thyself: O serve not God at so dear a rate! God doth not require thee to undo thyself; why shouldst thou not avoid so great inconveniences? When with much ado you have conquered all your carnal reasonings, and denied yourselves and your carnal interests, you must expect, even from some religious friends, to be accused for these very actions, and perhaps their accusations may fasten such a blot upon your names, as shall never be washed out till the day of judgment. By difference of interests, or apprehensions, and by unacquaintedness with your hearts, and actions, the righteousness of the righteous may be thus taken from him, and friends may do the work of enemies, yea, of Satan himself, the accuser of the brethren; and may prove as thorns in your bed, and gravel in your shoes, yea, in your eyes, and wrong you much more than open adversaries could have done. How it is like to go with that man's reputation, you may easily judge, whose friends are like Job's, and his enemies like David's, that lay snares before him, and diligently watch for matter of reproach; yet this may befall the best of men.

13. You may be permitted by God to fall into some real crime, and then your friends may possibly think it is their duty to disown you, so far as you have wronged God: when you provoke God to frown upon you, he may cause your friends to frown upon you: if you will fall out with him, and grow strange to him, no marvel if your truest friends fall out with you, and grow strange to you. They love you for your godliness, and for the sake of Christ; and therefore must abate their love, if you abate your godliness; and must, for the sake of Christ, be displeased with you for your sins. And if in such a case of real guilt, you should be displeased at their displeasure, and should expect that your friend should befriend your sin, or carry himself towards you in your guilt, as if you were innocent, you will but show

that you understand not the nature of true friendship, nor the use of a true friend ; and are yet yourselves too friendly to your sins.

14. Moreover, those few friends that are truest to you, may be utterly unable to relieve you in your distress, or to give you ease, or to do you any good. The case may be such that they can but pity you, and lament your sorrows, and weep over you : you may see in them that man is not as God, whose friendship can accomplish all the good that he desireth to his friends. The wisest, and greatest, and best of men, are silly comforters, and uneffectual helps. You may be sick, and pained, and grieved, and distressed, notwithstanding any thing that they can do for you ; nay, perhaps in their ignorance, they may increase your misery, while they desire your relief ; and by striving indirectly to help and ease you, may tie the knot faster and make you worse. They may provoke those more against you that oppress you, while they think they speak that which should tend to set you free : they may think to ease your troubled minds by such words as shall increase the troubled ; or to deliver you as Peter would have delivered Christ, and saved his Saviour, first by carnal counsel ; “ Be it far from thee, Lord ; this shall not be unto thee : ” (Matt. xvi. 22 :) And then by carnal unjust force, (by drawing his sword against the officers). Love and good meaning will not prevent the mischiefs of ignorance and mistake. If your friend cut your throat, while he thought to cut but a vein to cure your disease, it is not his friendly meaning that will save your lives. Many a thousand sick people are killed by their friends, that attend them, with an earnest desire of their life ; while they ignorantly give them that which is contrary to their disease, and will not be the less pernicious for the good meaning of the giver. Who have more tender affections than mothers to their children ? And yet a great part of the calamity of the world of sickness, and the misery of man’s life, proceedeth from the ignorant and erroneous indulgence of mothers to their children, who to please them, let them eat and drink what they will, and use them to excess and gluttony in their childhood, till nature be abused and mastered, and clogged with those superfluities and crudities, which are the dunghill matter of most of the following diseases of their lives.

I might here also remember you how your friends may themselves be overcome with a temptation, and then become the more dangerous tempters of you, by how much the greater their interest is in your affections. If they be infected with error, they are the likeliest persons to ensnare you; if they be tainted with covetousness or pride, there is none so likely to draw you to the same sin: and so your friends may be in effect your most deadly enemies, deceivers and destroyers.

15. And if you have friends that are never so firm and constant, they may prove (not only unable to relieve you, but) very additions to your grief. If they are afflicted in the participation of your sufferings, as your troubles are become theirs (without your ease), so their trouble for you will become yours, and so the stock of your sorrow will be increased. And they are mortals, and liable to distress as well as you. And therefore they are like to bear their share in several sorts of sufferings: and so friendship will make their sufferings to be yours: their sicknesses and pains, their fears and griefs, their wants and dangers, will all be yours. And the more they are your hearty friends, the more they will be yours. And so you will have as many additions to the proper burden of your griefs, as you have suffering friends: when you do but hear that they are dead, you say as Thomas, "Let us also go that we may die with him." (John xi. 16.) And having many such friends you will almost always have one or other of them in distress; and so be seldom free from sorrow; besides all that which is properly your own.

16. Lastly, If you have a friend that is both true and useful, yet you may be sure he must stay with you but a little while. "The godly men will cease, and the faithful fail from among the children of men; while men of lying, flattering lips, and double hearts survive, and the wicked walk on every side, while the vilest men are exalted." (Psal. xii. 1, 2. 8.) While swarms of false, malicious men are left round about you, perhaps God will take away your dearest friends. If among a multitude of unfaithful ones, you have but one that is your friend indeed, perhaps God will take away that one. He may be separated from you into another country; or taken away to God by death. Not that God doth grudge you the mercy of a faithful friend; but

that he would be your All, and would not have you hurt yourselves with too much affection to any creature, and for other reasons to be named anon.

And to be forsaken of your friends is not all your affliction: but to be forsaken is a great aggravation of it. 1. For they used to forsake us in our greatest sufferings and straits, when we have the greatest need of them.

2. They fail us most at a dying hour, when all other worldly comfort faileth: as we must leave our houses, lands and wealth, so must we for the present leave our friends: and as all the rest are silly comforters, when we have once received our citation to appear before the Lord, so also are our friends but silly comforters: they can weep over us, but they cannot, with all their care, delay the separating stroke of death, one day or hour.

Only by their prayers, and holy advice, remembering us of everlasting things, and provoking us in the work of preparation, they may prove to us friends indeed. And therefore we must value a holy, heavenly, faithful friend, as one of the greatest treasures upon earth. And while we take notice how, as men, they may forsake us, we must not deny but that, as saints, they are precious, and of singular use to us; and Christ useth by them to communicate his mercies; and if any creatures in the world may be blessings to us, it is holy persons, that have most of God in their hearts and lives.

3. And it is an aggravation of the cross, that they often fail us, when we are most faithful in our duty, and stumble most upon the most excellent acts of our obedience.

4. And those are the persons that oftentimes fail us, of whom we have deserved best, and from whom we might have expected most.

Review the experiences of the choicest servants that Christ hath had in the world, and you shall find enough to confirm you of the vanity of man, and the instability of the dearest friends. How highly was Athanasius esteemed; and yet at last deserted and banished by the famous Constantine himself! How excellent a man was Gregory Nazianzen, and highly valued in the church; and yet by reproach and discouragements driven away from his church at Constantinople whither he was chosen, and envied by the bishops round about him. How worthy a man was the eloquent

Chrysostom, and highly valued in the church; and yet how bitterly was he prosecuted by Hierom and Epiphanius; and banished, and died in a second banishment, by the provocation of factious, contentious bishops, and an empress impatient of his plain reproofs! What person more generally esteemed and honoured for learning, piety, and peaceableness, than Melancthon; and yet by the contentions of Illyricus and his party, he was made aweary of his life. As highly as Calvin was (deservedly) valued at Geneva, yet once in a popular lunacy and displeasure, they drove him out of their city, and in contempt of him some called their dogs by the name of Calvin; (though after they were glad to entreat him to return.) How much our Grindal and Abbot were esteemed, it appeareth by their advancement to the archbishopric of Canterbury; and yet who knoweth not that their eminent piety sufficed not to keep them from dejecting frowns! And if you say, that it is no wonder if with princes through interest, and with people through levity, it be thus; I might heap up instances of the like untrustiness of particular friends; but all history, and the experiences of the most, do so much abound with them, that I think it needless. Which of us must not say with David, that "All men are liars;" (Psal. cxvi;) that is, deceitful and untrusty; either through unfaithfulness, weakness or insufficiency; that either will forsake us, or cannot help us in time of need.

Was Christ forsaken in his extremity by his own disciples, to teach us what to expect, or bear? Think it not strange then to be conformed to your Lord, in this, as well as in other parts of his humiliation. Expect that men should prove deceitful: Not that you should entertain censorious suspicions of your particular friends: but remember in general that man is frail, and the best too selfish and uncertain; and that it is no wonder if those should prove your greatest grief, from whom you had the highest expectations. Are you better than Job, or David, or Christ? and are your friends more firm and unchangeable than theirs?

Consider, 1. That creatures must be set at a sufficient distance from their Creator. Allsufficiency, immutability and indefectible fidelity, are proper to Jehovah. As it is no wonder for the sun to set, or be eclipsed, as glorious a body as it is, so it is no wonder for a friend, a pious friend, to fail us, for a time, in the hour of our distress. There are some

that will not: but there is none but may, if God should leave them to their weakness. Man is not your rock: he hath no stability but what is derived, dependant, and uncertain, and defectible. Learn therefore to rest on God alone, and lean not too hard or confidently upon any mortal wight.

2. And God will have the common infirmity of man to be known, that so the weakest may not be utterly discouraged, nor take their weakness to be gracelessness, whilst they see that the strongest also have their infirmities, though not so great as theirs. If any of God's servants live in constant holiness and fidelity, without any shakings or stumbling in their way, it would tempt some self-accusing, troubled souls, to think that they were altogether graceless, because they are so far short of others. But when we read of a Peter's denying his master in so horrid a manner, with swearing and cursing, that he knew not the man, (Matt. xxvi. 74,) and of his dissimulation and not walking uprightly; (Gal. ii;) and of a David's unfriendly and unrighteous dealing with Mephibosheth, the seed of Jonathan; and of his most vile and treacherous dealing with Uriah, a faithful and deserving subject; it may both abate our wonder and offence at the unfaithfulness of our friends, and teach us to compassionate their frailty, when they desert us; and also somewhat abate our immoderate dejectedness and trouble, when we have failed God or man ourselves.

3. Moreover, consider, how the odiousness of that sin, which is the root and cause of such unfaithfulness, is greatly manifested by the failing of our friends. God will have the odiousness of the remnants of our self-love and carnal-mindedness, and cowardice appear: we should not discern it in the seed and root, if we did not see, and taste it in the fruits. Seeing without tasting will not sufficiently convince us. A crab looks as beautiful as an apple; but when you taste it, you better know the difference. When you must yourselves be unkindly used by your friends, and forsaken by them in your distress, and you have tasted the fruits of the remnants of their worldliness, selfishness and carnal fears, you will better know the odiousness of these vices, which thus break forth against all obligations to God and you, and notwithstanding the light, the conscience, and perhaps the grace, that doth resist them.

4. Are you not prone to overvalue and overlove your friends? If so, is not this the meetest remedy for your disease? In the loving of God, we are in no danger of excess; and therefore have no need of anything to quench it. And in the loving of the godly, purely upon account of Christ, and in loving saints as saints, we are not apt to go too far. But yet our understandings may mistake, and we may think that saints have more of sanctity than indeed they have; and we are exceeding apt to mix a selfish common love, with that which is spiritual and holy; and at the same time, when we love a Christian as a Christian, we are apt not only to love him (as we ought) but to overlove him because he is our friend, and loveth us. Those Christians that have no special love to us, we are apt to undervalue and neglect, and love them below their holiness and worth: but those that we think entirely love us, we love above their proper worth, as they stand in the esteem of God: not but that we may love those that love us, and add this love to that which is purely for the sake of Christ; but we should not let our own interest prevail and overtop the interest of Christ, nor love any so much for loving us, as for loving Christ: and if we do so, no wonder if God shall use such remedies as he seeth meet, to abate our excess of selfish love.

O how highly are we apt to think of all that good which is found in those who are the highest esteemers of us, and most dearly love us; when perhaps in itself it is but some ordinary good, or ordinary degree of goodness which is in them! Their love to us irresistibly procureth our love to them: and when we love them, it is wonderful to observe, how easily we are brought to think well of almost all they do, and highly to value their judgments, graces, parts and works: when greater excellencies in another, perhaps, are scarce observed, or regarded but as a common thing. And therefore the destruction or want of love, is apparent in the vilifying thoughts and speeches, that most men have of one another; and in the low esteem of the judgments, and performances and lives of other men: (much more in their contempt, reproaches and cruel persecutions.) Now though God will have us increase in our love of Christ in his members, and in our pure love of Christians, as such, and in our common charity to all, yea, and in our just fidelity to our friend; yet would he have us suspect and

moderate our selfish and excessive love, and inordinate partial esteem of one above another, when it is but for ourselves and on our own account. And therefore as he will make us know, that we ourselves are no such excellent persons, as that it should make another so laudable, or advance his worth, because he loveth us; so he will make us know, that our friends, whom we overvalue, are but like other men: if we exalt them too highly in our esteem, it is a sign that God must cast them down. And as their love to us, was it that made us so exalt them; so their unkindness or unfaithfulness to us is the fittest means to bring them lower in our estimation and affection. God is very jealous of our hearts, as to our overvaluing and overloving any of his creatures: What we give inordinately and excessively to them, is some way or other taken from him, and given them to his injury, and therefore to his offence. Though I know that to be void of natural, friendly or social affections, is an odious extreme on the other side; yet God will rebuke us if we are guilty of excess. And it is the greater and more inexcusable fault to overlove the creature, because our love to God is so cold, and so hardly kindled and kept alive! He cannot take it well to see us dote upon dust and frailty like ourselves, at the same time when all his wondrous kindness, and attractive goodness, do cause but such a faint and languid love to him, which we ourselves can scarcely feel. If therefore he cure us by permitting our friends to shew us truly what they are, and how little they deserve such excessive love (when God hath so little) it is no more wonder, than it is that he is tender of his glory, and merciful to his servants' souls.

5. By the failing and unfaithfulness of our friends, the wonderful patience of God will be observed and honoured, as it is shewed both to them and us. When they forsake us in our distress (especially when we suffer for the cause of Christ) it is God that they injure more than us: and therefore if he bear with them, and forgive their weakness upon repentance, why should not we do so, that are much less injured? The world's perfidiousness should make us think, how great and wonderful is the patience of God, that beareth with, and beareth up so vile, ungrateful, treacherous men that abuse him to whom they are infinitely obliged! And it should make us consider, when men deal treacherously with us, how great is that mercy that hath borne with,

and pardoned greater wrongs, which I myself have done to God, than these can be which men have done to me! It was the remembrance of David's sin, that had provoked God to raise up his own son against him (of whom he had been too fond), which made him so easily bear the curses and reproach of Shimei. It will make us bear abuse from others, to remember how ill we have dealt with God, and how ill we have deserved at his hands ourselves.

6. And I have observed another reason of God's permitting the failing of our friends. It is, that the love of our friends may not hinder us when we are called to suffer or die. When we overlove them, it teareth our very hearts to leave them: and therefore it is a strong temptation to draw us from our duty, and to be unfaithful to the cause of Christ, lest we should be taken from our too dear friends, or lest our suffering cause their too much grief. It is so hard a thing to die with willingness and peace, that it must needs be a mercy to be saved from the impediments which make us backward: And the excessive love of friends and relations, is not the least of these impediments: O how loath is many a one to die, when they think of parting with wife, or husband, or children, or dear and faithful friends! Now I have oft observed, that a little before their death or sickness, it is ordinary with God to permit some unkindness between such too dear friends to arise, by which he moderated and abated their affections, and made them a great deal the more willing to die. Then we are ready to say, It is time for me to leave the world, when not only the rest of the world but my dearest friends have first forsaken me! This helpeth us to remember our dearest everlasting Friend, and to be grieved at the heart that we have been no truer ourselves to him, who would not have forsaken us in our extremity. And sometimes it maketh us even awearry of the world, and to say as Elias, "Lord take away my life," &c., (1 Kings xix. 4. 10. 14,) when we must say, 'I thought I had one friend left, and behold even he forsaketh me in my distress.' As the love of friends entangleth our affections to this world, so to be weaned, by their unkindnesses, from our friends, is a great help to loosen us from the world, and proveth oft a very great mercy to a soul that is ready to depart.

And as the friends that love us most, and have most interest in our esteem and love, may do more than others, in

tempting us to be unfaithful to our Lord, to entertain any error, to commit any sin, or to flinch in suffering; so when God hath permitted them to forsake us, and to lose their too great interest in us, we are fortified against all such temptations from them. I have known where a former intimate friend hath grown strange, and broken former friendship, and quickly after turned to such dangerous ways and errors, as convinced the other of the mercifulness of God, in weakening his temptation by his friend's desertion; who might else have drawn him along with him into sin. And I have often observed, that when the husbands have turned from religion to infidelity, familism, or some dangerous heresy, that God hath permitted them to hate and abuse their wives so inhumanly, as that it preserved the poor women from the temptation of following them in their apostacy or sin: when as some other women with whom their husbands have dealt more kindly, have been drawn away with them into pernicious paths.

Therefore still I must say, we were undone if we had the disposing of our own conditions. It would be long before we should have been willing ourselves to be thus unkindly dealt with by our friends; and yet God hath made it to many a soul, a notable means of preserving them from being undone for ever. Yea, the unfaithfulness of all our friends, and the malice and cruelty of all our enemies, doth us not usually so much harm, as the love and temptation of some one deluded erring friend, whom we are ready to follow into the gulf.

7. Lastly, consider that it is not desirable or suitable to our state, to have too much of our comfort by any creature: not only because it is most pure and sweet, which is most immediately from God; but because also we are very prone to over-love the creature; and if it should but seem to be very commodious to us, by serving our necessities or desires, it would seem the more amiable, and therefore be the stronger snare. The work of mortification doth much consist in the annihilation or deadness of all the creatures, as to any power to draw away our hearts from God, or to entangle us and detain us from our duty. And the more excellent and lovely the creature appeareth to us, the less it is dead to us, or we to it; and the more will it be able to hinder or ensnare us.

When you have well considered all these things, I suppose you will admire the wisdom of God in leaving you under this kind of trial, and weaning you from every creature, and teaching you by his providence, as well as by his word, to cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of? And you will see that it is no great wonder that corrupted souls, that live in other sins, should be guilty of this unfaithfulness to their friends: and that he that dare unthankfully trample upon the unspeakable kindness of the Lord, should deal unkindly with the best of men. You make no great wonder at other kind of sins, when you see the world continually commit them; why then should you make a greater or stranger matter of this, than of the rest? Are you better than God? Must unfaithfulness to you be made more heinous, than that unfaithfulness to him, which yet you daily see and slight? The least wrong to God is a thousandfold more than the greatest that can be done to you, as such. Have you done that for your nearest friend, which God hath done for him, and you, and all men? Their obligations to you are nothing in comparison of their great and manifold obligations to God.

And you know that you have more wronged God yourselves, than any man ever wronged you; and if yet for all that, he bear with you, have you not great reason to bear with others?

Yea, you have not been innocent towards men yourselves. Did you never wrong or fail another? Or rather, are you not more apt to see and aggravate the wrong that others do to you, than that which you have done to others? May you not call to mind your own neglects, and say as Adonibezek, "Threescore and ten kings having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: As I have done so God hath requited me." (Judges i. 7.) Many a one have I failed or wronged, and no wonder if others fail and wrong me.

Nay, you have been much more unfaithful and injurious to yourselves, than ever any other hath been to you. No friend was so near you, as yourselves; none had such a charge of you; none had such helps and advantages to do you good or hurt; and yet all the enemies you have in the world, even in earth or hell, have not wronged and hurt you

half so much as you have done yourselves! O, methinks the man or woman that knoweth themselves, and knoweth what it is to repent; that ever saw the greatness of their own sin and folly, should have no great mind or leisure to aggravate the failing of their friends, or the injuries of their enemies, considering what they have proved to themselves! Have I forfeited my own salvation, and deserved everlasting wrath, and sold my Saviour and my soul for so base a thing as sinful pleasure, and shall I ever make a wonder of it, that another man doth me some temporal hurt? Was any friend so near to me as myself; or more obliged to me? O sinful soul, let thy own, rather than thy friend's deceit and treachery, and neglects, be the matter of thy displeasure, wonder and complaints!

And let thy conformity herein to Jesus Christ, be thy holy ambition and delight: not as it is thy suffering, nor as it is caused by men's sin; but as it is thy conformity and fellowship in the sufferings of thy Lord, and caused by his love.

I have already shewed you that sufferers for Christ, are in the highest form among his disciples. The order of his followers usually is this: 1. At our entrance, and in the lowest form, we are exercised with the fears of hell, and God's displeasure, and in the works of repentance for the sin that we have done. 2. In the second form, we come to think more seriously of the remedy, and to inquire what we shall do to be saved, and to understand better what Christ hath done and suffered, and what he is and will be to us; and to value him, and his love and grace. And here we are much inquiring how we may know our own sincerity, and our interest in Christ, and are labouring for some assurance, and looking after signs of grace. 3. In the next form or order we are searching after further knowledge, and labouring better to understand the mysteries of religion, and to get above the rudiments and first principles: and here if we escape turning bare opinionists or heretics, by the snare of controversy or curiosity, it is well. 4. In the next form we set ourselves to the fuller improvement of all our further degrees of knowledge; and to digest it all, and turn it into stronger faith, and love, and hope, and greater humility, patience, self-denial, mortification, and contempt of earthly vanities, and hatred of sin; and to walk more watchfully

and holily, and to be more in holy duty. 5. In the next form we grow to be more public-spirited: to set our hearts on the church's welfare, and long more for the progress of the Gospel, and for the good of others; and to do all the good in the world that we are able, for men's souls or bodies, but especially to long and lay out ourselves for the conversion and salvation of ignorant, secure, unconverted souls. The counterfeit of this, is, an eager desire to proselyte others to our opinions, or that religion which we have chosen, by the direction of flesh and blood, or which is not of God, nor according unto godliness, but doth subserve our carnal ends. 6. In the next form we grow to study more the pure and wonderful love of God in Christ, and to relish and admire that love, and to be taken up with the goodness and tender mercies of the Lord, and to be kindling the flames of holy love to him that hath thus loved us; and to keep our souls in the exercise of that love: and withal to live in joy, and thanks, and praise to him that hath redeemed us and loved us; and also by faith to converse in heaven, and to live in holy contemplation, beholding the glory of the Father and the Redeemer in the glass which is fitted to our present use, till we come to see him face to face. Those that are the highest in this form, do so walk with God, and burn in love, and are so much above inferior vanities, and are so conversant by faith in heaven, that their hearts even dwell there, and there they long to be for ever. 7. And in the highest form of the school of Christ, we are exercising this confirmed faith and love, in sufferings, especially for Christ; in following him with our cross, and being conformed to him, and glorifying God in the fullest exercise and discovery of his graces in us, and in an actual trampling upon all that standeth up against him, for our hearts: and in bearing the fullest witness to his truth and cause, by constant enduring, though to the death. Not but that the weakest that are sincere, must suffer for Christ if he call them to it: martyrdom itself is not proper to the strong believers. Whoever forsaketh not all that he hath for Christ, cannot be his disciple. (Luke xiv. 33.) But to suffer with that faith and love forementioned, and in that manner, is proper to the strong: and usually God doth not try and exercise his young and weak ones with the trials of the strong; nor set his infants on so hard a service, nor put them in the

front or hottest of the battle, as he doth the ripe confirmed Christians. The sufferings of their inward doubts and fears doth take up such : it is the strong that ordinarily are called to sufferings for Christ, at least in any high degree. I have digressed thus far to make it plain to you, that our conformity to Christ, and fellowship with him in his sufferings, in any notable degree, is the lot of his best, confirmed servants, and the highest form in his school among his disciples ; and therefore not to be inordinately feared or abhorred, nor to be the matter of impatience, but of holy joy ; and in such infirmities we may glory. And if it be so of sufferings in the general (for Christ), then is it so of this particular sort of sufferings, even to be forsaken of all our best and nearest, dearest friends, when we come to be most abused by the enemies.

For my own part, I must confess that as I am much wanting in other parts of my conformity to Christ, so I take myself to be yet much short of what I expect he should advance me to, as long as my friends no more forsake me. It is not long since I found myself in a low (if not a doubting) case, because I had so few enemies, and so little sufferings for the cause of Christ (though I had much of other sorts) : and now that doubt is removed by the multitude of furies which God hath let loose against me. But yet, methinks, while my friends themselves are so friendly to me, I am much short of what I think I must at last attain to.

But let us look further into the text, and see what is the cause of the failing and forsaking Christ in the disciples ; and what it is that they betake themselves to, when they leave him.

“ Ye shall be scattered every man to his own.”

Self-denial was not perfect in them, selfishness therefore in this hour of temptation did prevail. They had before forsaken all to follow Christ ; they had left their parents, their families, their estates, their trades, to be his disciples : but though they believed him to be the Christ, yet they dreamt of a visible kingdom, and did all this with too carnal expectations of being great men on earth, when Christ should begin his reign ; and therefore when they saw his apprehension and ignominious suffering, and thought now they were frustrate of their hopes, they seem to repent that they had followed him (though not by apostacy and an habitual or

plenary change of mind, yet) by a sudden passionate frightful apprehension, which vanished when grace performed its part. They now began to think that they had lives of their own to save, and families of their own to mind, and business of their own to do. They had before forsaken their private interests and affairs, and gathered themselves to Jesus Christ, and lived in communion with him, and one another: but now they return to their trades and callings, and are scattered every man to his own.

Selfishness is the great enemy of all societies, of all fidelity and friendship: there is no trusting that person in whom it is predominant: and the remnants of it, where it doth not reign, do make men walk unevenly and unsteadfastly towards God and men. They will certainly deny both God and their friends, in a time of trial, who are not able to deny themselves: or rather he never was a real friend to any, that is predominantly selfish. They have always some interest of their own, which their friend must needs contradict, or is insufficient to satisfy. Their houses, their lands, their monies, their children, their honour, or something which they call their own, will be frequently the matter of contention; and are so near them, that they can for the sake of these, cast off the nearest friend. Contract no special friendship with a selfish man; nor put any confidence in him, whatever friendship he may profess. He is so confined to himself, that he hath 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 loveth you for himself, as he loveth his money, or horse, or house, because you may be serviceable to him: or as a horse or dog doth love his keeper, for feeding him: and therefore when your provender is gone, his love is gone; when you have done feeding him, he hath done loving you; when you have no more for him, he hath no more for you.

Object. 'But (some will say) it is not the falseness of my friend that I lament, but the separation, or the loss of one that was most faithful: I have found the deceitfulness of ordinary friends; and therefore the more highly prize those few that are sincere. I had but one true friend among abundance of self-seekers; and that one is dead, or taken from me, and I am left as in a wilderness, having no mortal man that I can trust, or take much comfort in.'

Answ. Is this your case? I pray you answer these few

questions, and suffer the truth to have its proper work upon your mind.

Quest. 1. Who was it that deprived you of your friend? Was it not God? Did not he that gave him you, take him from you? Was it not his Lord and Owner that called him home? And can God do any thing injuriously or amiss? Will you not give him leave to do as he list with his own? Dare you think that there was wanting either wisdom, or goodness, justice or mercy, in God's disposal of your friend? Or will you ever have rest, if you cannot have rest in the will of God?

2. How know you what sin your friend might have fallen into, if he had lived as long as you would have him? You will say, that God could have preserved him from sin. It is true; but God preserveth sapientially, by means, as well as omnipotentially: and sometimes he seeth that the temptations to that person are like to be so strong, and his corruption like to get such advantage, that no means is so fit as death itself, for his preservation. And if God had permitted your friend by temptation to have fallen into some scandalous sin, or course of evil, or into errors or false ways, would it not have been much worse than death to him and you? God might have suffered your friend, that was so faithful, to have been sifted and shaken, as Peter was, and to have denied his Lord; and to have seemed in your own eyes as odious as he before seemed amiable.

3. How know you 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. And there are sadder roots of corruption unmortified, that may spring up into bitter fruits, than most of us ever discover in ourselves. Many a mother hath her heart broken by the unnaturalness of such a child, or the unkindness of such a husband, as if they had died before, would have been lamented by her, with great impatience and excess. How confident soever you may be of the future fidelity of your friend, you little know what trials might have discovered. Many a one hath failed God and man, that once were as confident of themselves, as ever you were of your friend. And which of us see not reason to be distrustful of ourselves? And can we know another better than ourselves? or promise more concerning him?

4. How know you what great calamity might have befallen your friend, if he had lived as long as you desired? When the righteous seem to men to perish, and "merciful men are taken away," it is "from the evil to come" that they are taken. (Isa. lvii. 1.) How many of my friends have I lamented as if they had died unseasonably, concerning whom some following providence quickly shewed me, that it would have been a grievous misery to them to have lived longer! Little know you what calamities were imminent on his person, his family, kindred, neighbours, country, that would have broke his heart. What if a friend of yours had died immediately before some calamitous subversion of a kingdom, some ruins of the church, &c. and if, ignorantly, he had done that which brought these things to pass, can you imagine how lamentably sad his life would have been to him, to have seen the church, the Gospel, and his country, in so sad a case? especially if it had been long of him? Many that have unawares done that which hath ruined a particular friend, have lived in so much grief and trouble, as made them consent that death should both revenge the injured on them, and conclude their misery. What then would it have been to have seen the public good subverted, and the faithful overwhelmed in misery, and the Gospel hindered, and holy worship changed for deceit and vanity; and for conscience to have been daily saying, 'I had a hand in all this misery; I kindled the fire that hath burned up all!'

What comfort can you think such friends, if they had survived, would have found on earth? unless it were a comfort to hear the complaints of the afflicted, to see and hear such odious sins as sometimes vexed righteous Lot to see and hear; or to hear of the scandals of one friend, and the apostacy of another, and the sinful compliances and declinings of a third; and to be under temptations, reproaches and afflictions themselves? Is it a matter to be so much lamented, that God hath prevented their greater miseries and woe?

5. What was the world to your friends while they did enjoy it? or what is it now, or like to be hereafter to yourselves? Was it so good and kind to them, as that you should lament their separation from it? Was it not to them a place of toil and trouble, of envy and vexation, of enmity and poison? of successive cares, and fears, and griefs? and

worst of all, a place of sin? Did they groan under the burden of a sinful nature, a distempered, tempted, troubled heart, of languishings and weakness of every grace; of the rebukes of God, the wounds of conscience, and the malice of a wicked world? And would you have them under these again? or is their deliverance become your grief? Did you not often join in prayer with them, for deliverance from malice, calamities, troubles, imperfections, temptations and sin? and now those prayers are answered in their deliverance; and do you now grieve at that which then you prayed for?

Doth the world use yourselves so well and kindly, as that you should be sorry that your friends partake not of the feast? Are you not groaning from day to day yourselves? and are you grieved that your friends are taken from your griefs? You are not well pleased with your own condition: when you look into your hearts, you are displeased and complain: when you look into your lives, you are displeased and complain; when you look into your families, into your neighbourhoods, unto your friends, unto the church, unto the kingdom, unto the world, you are displeased and complain. And are you also displeased that your friends are not under the same displeasure and complaints as you? Is the world a place of rest or trouble to you? And would you have your friends to be as far from rest as you?

And if you have some ease and peace at present, you little know what storms are near! you may see the days, you may hear the tidings, you may feel the griping griefs and pains, which may make you call for death yourselves, and make you say, That a life on earth is no felicity, and make you confess that they are "Blessed that are dead in the Lord, as resting from their labours," and being past these troubles, griefs and fears. Many a poor troubled soul is in so great distress, as that they take away their own lives to have some taste of hell; and yet, at the same time, are grieving because their friends are taken from them, who would have been grieved for their griefs, and for ought they know might have fallen into as sad a state as they themselves are now lamenting.

6. Do you think it is for the hurt or the good of your friend that he is removed hence? It cannot be for his hurt, unless he be in hell. (At least, it is uncertain whether to

live would have been for his good, by an increase of grace, and so for greater glory.) And if he be in hell, he was no fit person for you to take much pleasure in upon earth: he might be indeed a fit object for your compassion, but not for your complacency. Sure you are not undone for want of such company as God will not endure in his sight, and you must be separated from for ever. But if they be in heaven, you are scarce their friend if you would wish them thence. Friendship hath as great respect to the good of our friends as of ourselves. And do you pretend to friendship, and yet lament the removal of your friend to his greatest happiness! Do you set more by your own enjoying his company, than by his enjoying God in perfect blessedness? This sheweth a very culpable defect either in faith or friendship; and therefore beseemeth not Christians and friends. If love teacheth 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?

7. God will not honour himself by one only, but by many: he knoweth best when his work is done: when our friends have finished all God intended them for, when he put them into the world, is it not time for them to be gone, and for others to take their places, and finish their work also in their time? God will have a succession of his servants in the world. Would you not come down, and give place to him that is to follow you, when your part is played, and his is to begin? If David had not died, there had been no Solomon, no Jehoshaphat, no Hezekiah, no Josiah, to succeed him and honour God in the same throne. You may as wisely grudge that one day only takes not up all the week, and that the clock striketh not the same hour still, but proceedeth from one to two, from two to three, &c. as to murmur that one man only continueth not, to do the work of his place, excluding his successors.

8. You must not have all your mercies by one messenger or hand: God will not have you confine your love to one only of his servants; and therefore he will not make one only useful to you; but when one hath delivered his message and done his part, perhaps God will send you other mercies by another hand; and it belongeth to him to choose the messenger, who gives the gift. And if you will

childishly dote upon the first messenger, and say you will have all the rest of your mercies by his hand, or you will have no more, your frowardness more deserveth correction than compassion: and if you be kept fasting till you can thankfully take your food, from any hand that your Father sends it by, it is a correction very suitable to your sin.

9. Do you so highly value your friends for God, or for them, or for yourselves, in the final consideration? If it was for God, what reason of trouble have you, that God hath disposed of them, according to his wisdom and unerring will? Should you not then be more pleased that God hath them, and employeth them in his highest service, than displeased that you want them?

But if you value them and love them for themselves, they are now more lovely when they are more perfect; and they are now fitter for your content and joy, than they could be in their sin and sorrows.

But if you valued and loved them but for yourselves only, it is just with God to take them from you, to teach you to value men to righter ends, and upon better considerations; and both to prefer God before yourselves, and better to understand the nature of true friendship, and better to know that your own felicity is not in the hands of any creature, but of God alone.

10. Did you improve your friends while you had them? or did you only love them, while you made but little use of them for your souls? If you used them not, it was just with God, for all your love, to take them from you. They were given you as your candle, not only to love it, but to work by the light of it; and as your garments, not only to love them, but to wear them; and as your meat, not only to love it, but to feed upon it. Did you receive their counsel, and harken to their reproofs, and pray with them, and confer with them upon those holy truths that tended to elevate your minds to God, and to inflame your breasts with sacred love? If not, be it now known to you, that God gave you not such helps and mercies only to talk of, or to look upon and love, but also to improve for the benefit of your souls.

11. Do you not seem to forget where you are yourselves, and where you must shortly and for ever live? Where would you have your friends, but where you must be yourselves? Do you mourn that they are taken hence? Why, if they

had staid here a thousand years, how little of that time should you have had their company? When you are almost leaving the world yourselves, would you not send your treasure before you to the place where you must abide? How quickly will you pass from hence to God, where you shall find your friends that you lamented as if they had been lost, and there shall dwell with them for ever! O foolish mourners! would you not have your friends at home? at their home and your home, with their Father and your Father, their God and your God? Shall you not there enjoy them long enough? Can you so much miss them for one day, that must live with them to all eternity? and is not eternity long enough to enjoy your friends in?

Object. ' But I do not know whether ever I shall there have any distinct knowledge of them, or love to them, and whether God shall not there be so far All in All, as that we shall need or fetch no comfort from the creature.'

Ans. There is no reason for either of these doubts: For,

1. You cannot justly think that the knowledge of the glorified shall be more confused or imperfect than the knowledge of natural men on earth. We shall know much more, but not so much less. Heaven exceedeth the earth in knowledge, as much as it doth in joy.

2. The angels in heaven have now a distinct, particular knowledge of the least believers, rejoicing particularly in their conversion, and being called by Christ himself " Their Angels." Therefore when we shall be equal to the angels, we shall certainly know our nearest friends that there dwell with us, and are employed in the same attendance.

3. Abraham knew the rich man in hell, and the rich man knew Abraham and Lazarus: therefore we shall have as distinct a knowledge.

4. The two disciples knew Moses and Elias in the mount, whom they had never seen before; though it is possible Christ told them who they were, yet there is no such thing expressed; and therefore it is as probable that they knew them by the communication of their irradiating glory: much more shall we be then illuminated to a clearer knowledge.

5. It is said expressly, 1 Cor. xiii. 10—12, that our present knowledge shall be done away only in regard of its imperfection; and not of itself, which shall be perfected:

“ when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away :” as we put away childish thoughts and speeches, when we become men : the change will be from “ seeing in a glass” to “ seeing face to face,” and from “ knowing in part” to “ knowing even as we are known.”

2. And that we shall both know, and love, and rejoice in creatures, even in heaven, notwithstanding that God is all in all, appeareth further thus :

1. Christ, in his glorified humanity, is a creature ; and yet there is no doubt but all his members will there know and love him in his glorified humanity, without any derogation from the glory of his Deity.

2. The body of Christ will continue its union, and every member will be so nearly related, even in heaven, that they cannot choose but know and love each other. Shall we be ignorant of the members of our body ? and not be concerned in their felicity with whom we are so nearly one ?

3. The state and felicity of the church hereafter, is frequently described in Scripture, as consisting in society. It is a kingdom, the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem ; and it is mentioned as part of our happiness to be of that society. (Heb. xii. 22—24, &c.)

4. The saints are called kings themselves ; and it is said that they shall judge the world, and the angels (and judging in Scripture is frequently put for governing) ; therefore (whether there will be another world of mortals which they shall govern, as angels now govern men ; or whether the misery of damned men and angels will partly consist in as base a subjection to the glorified saints, as dogs now have to men, or wicked reprobates on earth to angels ; or whether in respect of both these together, the saints shall then be kings, and rule and judge ; or whether it be only the participation of the glory of Christ, that is called a kingdom, I will not here determine ; but) it is most clear that they will have a distinct, particular knowledge of the world, which they themselves must judge ; and some concernment in that work.

5. It is put into the description of the happiness of the saints, that they shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. Therefore they shall know them, and take some comfort in their presence.

6. Love (even to the saints, as well as unto God) is one of the graces which shall endure for ever. (1 Cor. xiii.) It is exercised upon an immortal object (the image and children of the Most High), and therefore must be one of the immortal graces. For grace in the nature of it dieth not; and therefore if the object cease not, how should the grace cease, unless you will call its perfecting a ceasing?

It is a state too high for such as we, and I think for any mere creature to live so immediately and only upon God, as to have no use for any fellow creature, nor no comfort in them. God can make use of glorified creatures, in such subserviency and subordination to himself, as shall be no diminution to his allsufficiency and honour, nor to our glory and felicity. We must take heed of fancying such a heaven itself, as is above the capacity of a creature; as some very wise divines think they have done, that tell us we shall immediately see God's essence (his glory being that which is provided for our intuition and felicity, and is distinct from his essence; being not every where, as his essence is). And as those do, that tell us, because that God will be All in All, therefore we shall there have none of our comfort by any creature. Though flesh and blood shall not enter into that kingdom, but our bodies will then be spiritual bodies; yet will they be really the same as now, and distinct from our souls; and therefore must have a felicity suitable to a body glorified. And if the soul did immediately see God's essence, yet as no reason can conclude that it can see nothing else, or that it can see even created good, and not love it, so the body however must have objects and felicity fit for a body.

Object. 'But it is said, If we knew Christ after the flesh, henceforth know we him no more.'

Ans. No doubt but all the carnality in principles, matter, manner and ends of our knowledge, will then cease, as its imperfections; but that a carnal knowledge be turned into a spiritual, is no more a diminution to it, than it is to the glory of our bodies, to be made like the stars in the firmament of our Father.

Object. 'But then I shall have no more comfort in my present friends than in any other.'

Ans. 1. If you had none in them, it is no diminution to our happiness, if indeed we should have all in God, im-

mediately and alone. 2. But if you have as much in others that you never knew before, that will not diminish any of your comfort in your ancient friends. 3. But it is most probable to us, that as there is a twofold object for our love in the glorified saints; one is their holiness, and the other is the relation which they stood in between God and us, being made his instruments for our conversion and salvation, so that we shall love saints in heaven in both respects: and in the first respect (which is the chiefest) we shall love those most that have most of God, and the greatest glory (though such as we never knew on earth). And in the second respect we shall love those most, that were employed by God for our greatest good.

And that we shall not there lay by so much respect to ourselves, as to forget or disregard our benefactors, is manifest, 1. In that we shall for ever remember Christ, and love him, and praise him, as one that formerly redeemed us, and washed us in his blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God: and therefore we may also, in just subordination to Christ, remember them with love and thankfulness, that were his instruments for the collation of these benefits.

2. And this kind of self-love (to be sensible of good and evil to ourselves) is none of the sinful or imperfect selfishness to be renounced or laid by, but part of our very natures, and as inseparable from us as we are from ourselves.

Much more, were it not digressive, might be said on this subject; but I shall only add, That as God doth draw us to every holy duty by shewing us the excellency of that duty; and as perpetuity is not the smallest excellency; so he hath purposely mentioned that love endureth for ever (when he had described the love of one another), as a principal motive to kindle and increase this love. And therefore those that think they shall have no personal knowledge of one another, nor personal love to one another (for we cannot love personally, if we know not personally), do take a most effectual course to destroy in their souls all holy special love to saints, by casting away that principal or very great motive given them by the Holy Ghost. I am not able to love much where I foreknow that I shall not love long. I cannot love a comely inn, so well as a meaner dwelling of my own, because I must be gone to-morrow. Therefore

must I love my Bible better than my law-books, or physic-books, &c. because it leadeth to eternity. And therefore I must love holiness in myself and others, better than meat and drink, and wealth and honour, and beauty and pleasure; because it must be loved for ever, when the love of these must needs be transitory, as they are transitory. I must profess from the very experience of my soul, that it is the belief that I shall love my friends in heaven, that principally kindleth my love to them on earth; and if I thought I should never know them after death, and consequently never love them more, when this life is ended, I should in reason number them with temporal things, and love them comparatively but a little; even as I love other transitory things (allowing for the excellency in the nature of grace). But now I converse with some delight with my godly friends, as believing I shall converse with them for ever, and take comfort in the very dead and absent, as believing we shall shortly meet in heaven: and I love them, I hope, with a love that is of a heavenly nature, while I love them as the heirs of heaven, with a love which I expect shall there be perfected, and more fully and for ever exercised.

12. The last reason that I give you, to move you to bear the loss or absence of your friends, is, that it gives you the loudest call to retire from all the world, and to converse with God himself, and to long for heaven, where you shall be separated from your friends no more. And your forsaken state will somewhat assist you to that solitary converse with God, which it calls you to: but this brings us up to the third part of the text.

“And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

Doct. ‘When all forsake us, and leave us (as to them) alone, we are far from being simply alone; because God is with us.’

He is not without company, that is with the king, though twenty others have turned him off. He is not without light that hath the shining sun, though all his candles be put out. If God be our God, he is our All, and is enough for us; and if he be our All, we shall not much find the want of creatures while he is with us.

For, 1. He is with us, who is every where, and therefore

is never from us ; and knoweth all the ways and projects of our enemies ; being with them in wrath, as he is with us in mercy.

2. He is with us who is Almighty, sufficient to preserve us, conquerable by none ; and therefore while he is with us, we need not fear what man can do unto us ; for they can do nothing but what he will. No danger, no sickness, no trouble or want can be so great as to make it any difficulty to God to deliver us, when and how he pleases.

3. He is with us who is infinitely wise, and therefore we need not fear the subtilty of enemies ; nor shall any of his undertaken works for his church or us miscarry for want of foresight, or through any oversight. We shall be preserved even from our own folly, as well as from our enemies subtilty ; for it is not our own wisdom that our greatest concerns do principally rest upon, nor that our safety and peace are chiefly secured by ; but it is the wisdom of our great Preserver. He knoweth what to do with us, and what paths to lead us in, and what is best for us in all conditions. And he hath promised to teach us, and will be our sure, infallible guide.

3. He is with us who is infinitely good, and therefore is only fit to be a continual delight and satisfaction to our souls ; that hath nothing in him to disaffect us, or discourage us : whom we may love without fear of overloving ; and need not set any bounds to our love, the object of it being infinite.

4. He is with us, who is most nearly related to us, and most dearly loveth us ; and therefore will never be wanting to us in any thing that is fit for us to have. This is he that is with us, when all have left us, and as to man we are alone ; and therefore we may well say that we are not alone. Of this I shall say more anon in the application.

Quest. ' But how is he with us ?' *Ans.* 1. He is with us not only in his essential presence, as he is every where, but by his gracious fatherly presence : we are in his family attending on him ; even as the eye of a servant is to the hand of his master : we are always with him, and (as he phraseth it himself in the parable, Luke xv,) " all that he hath is ours ;" that is, all that is fit to be communicated to us, and all the provisions of his bounty for his children.

When we awake, we should be still with him ; when we go abroad, we should be always as before him ; our life and works should be a walking with God.

2. He is always with us sufficiently to do us good. Though we have none else that careth for us, yet will he never cast us out of his care, but biddeth us cast our care on him, as promising that he will care for us. Though we have none else to provide for us, he is always with us, and our Father knoweth what we want, and will make the best provision for us. (Matt. vi. 32, 33.) Though we have none else to defend us against the power of our enemies, he is always with us to be our sure defence. He is the rock to which we fly, and upon which we are surely built. He gathereth us to himself, as the "hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." (Matt. xxiii. 37.) And sure while love is thus protecting us, we may well say that the Father himself is with us. Though in all our wants we have no other to supply us, yet he is still with us to perform his promise, that no good thing shall be wanting to them that fear him. Though we may have none else to strengthen and help us, and support us in our weakness, yet he is always with us, whose grace is sufficient for us, to manifest his strength in weakness. Though we have no other to teach us, and to resolve our doubts, yet he is with us that is our chiefest Master, and hath taken us to be his disciples, and will be our light and guide, and will lead us into the truth. Though we have none else to be our comforter in our agony, darkness or distress ; but all forsake us, or are taken from us, and we are exposed as Hagar with Ishmael in a wilderness, yet still the Father of all consolations is with us ; his Spirit who is the Comforter is in us : and he that so often speaketh the words of comfort to us in his Gospel, and saith, "Be of good cheer ; let not your hearts be troubled, neither be afraid," &c., will speak them (in the season and measure which is fittest for us) unto our hearts. Though all friends turn enemies, and would destroy us, or turn false accusers, as Job's friends in their ignorance or passion ; though all of them should add affliction to our affliction, yet is our Redeemer and Justifier still with us, and will stay his restraining hand upon our enemies, and say to their proudest fury, "Hitherto and no further shalt thou go." He is angry with Job's accusing friends, notwithstanding their

friendship and good meaning, and though they seemed to plead for God and godliness against Job's sin. And who shall be against us while God is for us? or, who shall condemn us when it is he that justifieth us? Though we be put to say as David, "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul;" (Psal. cxlii. 4;) yet we may say with him, "I cried unto thee, O Lord; I said, thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living: bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about: for thou shalt deal bountifully with me." (ver. 5—7.) "I poured out my complaint before him; I shewed before him my trouble: when my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path: in the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me." (ver. 2, 3.) Thus, "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble; therefore should we not fear though the earth were removed, and though the mountains were carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled," &c. (Psal. xlv. 1—3.) Though, as David saith, "Mine enemies speak evil of me: when shall he die, and his name perish? And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; when he goeth abroad he telleth it: All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt: An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him; and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more: Yea, my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, that did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me——." (Psal. xli. 5—7.) Yet we may add as he, ver. 12, "And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever." Though, as Psal. xxxv. 7. 11. 15. 16. 20. "Without cause they have hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul: and false witnesses did rise up, they laid to my charge things that I knew not; they rewarded me evil for good. In my adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together; the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear and ceased not; with hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth. For they speak not peace, but they devise deceitful matters against them that are quiet in the land." Yet, "My soul shall be joyful in the Lord; it shall re-

joyce in his salvation. All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee, who deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him." (ver. 9, 10.) Though friends be far off, "The Lord is nigh to them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit: Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate." (Psal. xxxiv. 18, 19, 22.) Therefore, "I will be glad and rejoyce in his mercy, for he hath considered my trouble, and hath known (and owned) my soul in adversity; and hath not shut me in the hand of the enemy.—When my life was spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength failed because of mine iniquity, and my bones were consumed; I was a reproach among all mine enemies, but especially among my neighbours, and a fear to mine acquaintance; they that did see me without, fled from me: I was forgotten, and as a dead man out of mind: I was like a broken vessel: I heard the slander of many: Fear was on every side, while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life; but I trusted in thee, O Lord: I said, thou art my God; my times are in thy hand; deliver me from the hands of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me: Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: Save me for thy mercies' sake.—O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man; thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." (Psal. xxxi.) Thus God is with us when men are far from us, or against us. His people find by happy experience that they are not alone. Because he is nigh them, evil shall not come nigh them unless as it worketh for their good. "He is their hiding-place to preserve them from trouble; the great waterfloods shall not come nigh them; he will compass them about with songs of deliverance." (Psal. xxxii. 6, 7.)

3. And as God is with us thus relatively and efficiently, so also objectively, for our holy converse. Wherever our friends are, God is still at hand to be the most profitable, honourable and delightful object of our thoughts. There is

enough in him to take up all the faculties of my soul. He that is but in a well-furnished library, may find great and excellent employment for his thoughts many years together; and so may he that liveth in the open world, and hath all the visible works of God to meditate upon: but all this were nothing if God were not the sense of books and creatures, and the matter of all these noble studies. He that is alone, and hath only God himself to study, hath the matter and sense of all the books and creatures in the world, to employ his thoughts upon. He never need to want matter for his meditation, that hath God to meditate on. He need not want matter of discourse (whether mental or vocal) that hath God to talk of, though he have not the name of any other friend to mention. All our affections may have in him the highest and most pleasant work. The soul of man cannot have a more sweet and excellent work than to love him: He wanteth neither work nor pleasure, that in his solitude is taken up in the believing contemplations of Eternal Love, and of all his blessed attributes and works. O then what happy and delightful converse may a believer have with God alone! He is always present, and always at leisure to be spoken with; and always willing of our access and audience. He hath no interest cross to our felicity, which should move him to reject us (as worldly great ones often have). He never misunderstandeth us, nor chargeth that upon us which we were never guilty of. If we converse with men, their mistakes, and interests, and passions, and insufficiencies, do make the trouble so great, and the benefit so small, that many have become thereby weary of the world, or of human society, and have spent the rest of their days alone in desert places. Indeed so much of God as appears in men, so much is their converse excellent and delightful; and their's is the best that have most of God. But there is so much of vanity, and self, and flesh, and sin in the most, or all of us, as very much darkeneth our light, and dampeth the pleasure, and blasteth the fruit of our societies and converse. O how oft have I been solaced in God, when I found nothing but deceit and darkness in the world! How oft hath he comforted me, when it was past the power of man! How oft hath he relieved and delivered me, when all the help of man was in vain! It hath been my stay and rest, to look to him, when the creature hath been a broken staff, and deceitful

friends have been but as a broken tooth, or a foot that is out of joint (as Solomon speaketh of confidence in an unfaithful man in the time of trouble, Prov. xxv. 29.) Verily, as the world were but a horrid dungeon without the sun, so it were a howling wilderness, a place of no considerable employment or delight, were it not that in it we may live to God and do him service, and sometimes be refreshed with the light of his countenance, and the communications of his love. But of this more anon.

Use 1. We see our example, and our encouragements. Let us now, as followers of Christ, endeavour to imitate him in this, and to live upon God, when men forsake us, and to know that while God is with us, we are not alone, nor indeed forsaken while he forsakes us not.

I shall, 1. Shew you here negatively, what you must not do. 2. Affirmatively, what you must do; for the performance of your duty in this imitation of Christ.

1. You must not make this your pretence for the undervaluing your useful friends, nor for your unthankfulness for so great a benefit as a godly friend; nor for the neglect of your duty in improving the company and help of your friends. Two is better than one. The communion of saints and help of those that are wise and faithful, is a mercy highly to be esteemed. And the undervaluing of it, is at least a sign of a declining soul.

2. You must not hence fetch any pretence to slight your friends, and disoblige them, or neglect any duty that you owe them, or any means therein necessary to the continuation of their friendship.

3. You must not causelessly withdraw from human society into solitude. A weariness of converse with men, is oft conjunct with a weariness of our duty; and a retiring voluntarily into solitude, when God doth not call or drive us thither, is oft but a retiring from the place and work which God hath 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 let them neglect their labour, that they may spend more time in serving God; as if it were not serving God to be faithful in their master's service.

I deny not but very holy persons have lived in a state of

retirement from human converse. In such cases as these, it may become a duty: 1. In case of such persecution as at present leaveth us no opportunity of serving or honouring God so much in any other place or state.

2. In case that natural infirmity, or disability, or any other accident shall make one less serviceable to God and his church in society than he is in solitude.

3. In case he hath committed a sin so heinous, and of indelible scandal and reproach, as that it is not fit for the servants of Christ any more to receive him into their local communion, though he repent: (for as to local communion, I think, such a case may be.)

4. In case a man through custom and ill company be so captivated to some fleshly lust, as that he is not able to bear the temptations that are found in human converse; but falleth by them into frequent heinous sinning; in this case the right hand or eye is rather to be parted with, than their salvation. And though a mere restraint by distance of temptations and opportunities of sinning, will not prove a man sanctified, nor save the soul that loveth the sin, and fain would live in it; yet, 1. Grace may sometimes appear in the strength and self-denial which is exercised in the very avoiding of temptations, when yet perhaps the person hath not strength enough to have stood against the temptations if it had not been avoided. And, 2. The distance of temptations, and opportunity of serious and frequent consideration, may be a means to help them to sincerity that want it.

5. In case a man by age or sickness find himself so near to death, as that he hath now a more special call to look after his present actual preparation, than to endeavour any more the good of others; and find withal, that solitude will help him in his preparations, his society being such as would but hinder him. In these five cases, I suppose it lawful to retire from human converse into solitude.

But when there is no such necessity or call, it usually proceedeth from one of these vicious distempers: 1. From cowardice and fear of suffering, when the soldiers of Christ do hide their heads, instead of confessing him before men.

2. From a laziness of mind and weariness of duty; when slothful and unprofitable servants hide their talents, pretending their fear of the austerity of their Lord. It is easier to run away from our work than do it; and to go out of the

reach of ignorance, malice, contradiction and ungodliness, than to encounter them, and conquer them by truth and holy lives. So many persons as we converse with, so many are there to whom we owe some duty: and this is not so easy as it is to over-run our work, and to hide ourselves in some wilderness or cell, whilst others are fighting the battles of the Lord. 3. Or it may proceed from mere impatience. When men cannot bear the frown, and scorns, and violence of the ungodly, they fly from sufferings, which by patience they should overcome. 4. Or it may come from humour and mutability of mind, and discontent with ones condition. Many retire from human converse to please a discontented, passionate mind; or expecting to find that in privacy, which in public they could not find, nor is any where to be found on earth. 5. And some do it in melancholy, merely to please a sick imagination, which is vexed in company, and a little easeth itself in living as the possessed man among the tombs. 6. And sometimes it proceedeth from self-ignorance, and an unhumbed state of soul. When men think much better of themselves than others, they think they can more comfortably converse with themselves than with others: whereas if they well understood that they are the worst or greatest enemies, or troubles to themselves, they would more fear their own company than other men's. They would then consider what proud, and fleshly, and worldly, and selfish, and disordered hearts they are likely to carry with them into their solitude, and there to be annoyed with from day to day: and that the nearest enemy is the worst, and the nearest trouble is the greatest.

These vices or infirmities carry many into solitude; 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 sinfully obeying their corruptions: and that they are advanced above others in degrees of grace, while they are pleasing a diseased fancy, and entering into a dangerous course of sin. No doubt but the duties of a public life are more in number, and greater in weight, and of more excellent consequence and tendency (even to the most public good, and greatest honour of God) than the duties of privacy or retirement. 'Vir bonus est commune bonum:' A good man is a common good. And saith Seneca) 'Nulla essent communia nisi pars illorum

pertineret ad singulos. If every one have not some share or interest in them, how are they common? Let me add these few considerations, to shew you the evil of voluntary, unnecessary solitude.

1. You less contribute to the honour of your Redeemer, and less promote his kingdom in the world, and less subserve his death and office, while you do good but to few, and live but almost to yourselves.

2. You live in the poorest exercise of the grace of charity; and therefore in a low, undesirable condition.

3. You will want the communion of saints, and benefit of public ordinances (for I account not a college life a solitary life). And you will want the help of the charity, graces and gifts of others, by which you might be benefitted.

4. It will be a life of smaller comfort, as it is a life of smaller benefit to others. They that do but little good (according to their ability) must expect but little comfort. They have usually most peace and comfort to themselves that are the most profitable to others. *‘Non potest quisquam bene degere qui se tantum intuetur: alteri vivas oportet, si tibi vis vivere.’* Sen. ‘No man can live well, that looketh but to himself: thou must live to another, if thou wilt live to thyself.’

O the delight that there is in doing good to many! None knoweth it that hath not tried it: not upon any account of merit; but as it pleaseth God, and as goodness itself is amiable and sweet; and as we receive by communicating; and as we are under promise; and as charity makes all the good that is done to another to be to us as our own.

5. We are dark and partial, and heedless of ourselves, and hardly brought or kept in acquaintance with our hearts; and therefore have the more need of the eye of others. And even an enemy’s eye may be useful, though malicious; and may do us good, while he intends us evil, saith Bernard, *‘Malum quod nemo videt, nemo arguit: Ubi autem non timeatur reprehensor, securus accedit tentator; licentius perpetratur iniquitas.’* ‘The evil that none seeth, none reproveth: and where the reproveth is not feared, the tempter cometh more boldly, and the sin is committed the more licentiously.’ It is hard to know the spots in our own faces, when we have no glass or beholder to acquaint us with them. Saith Chrysostom, Solitude is *‘velamen omnium*

vitierum :’ the cover of all vices. In company this cover is laid aside, and vice being more naked, is more ashamed. It is beholders that cause shame ; which solitude is not acquainted with : and it is a piece of impenitency not to be ashamed of sin.

6. And we are for the most part so weak and sickly, that we are unable to subsist without the help of others. ‘*Nemo est ex imprudentibus qui relinqui sibi debet.*’ Sen. ‘Unwise men (or infants, or sick-like men) must not be left to themselves.’ And God hath left some impotency, insufficiency and necessity upon all that should keep men sociable and make them acknowledge their need of others, and be thankful for assistance from them, and be ready to do good to others, as we would have others do to us. He that feelth not the need of others, is so unhumbléd as to have the greater need of them.

7. Pride will have great advantage in private, and repentance great disadvantage, while our sins seem to be all dead, because there is not a temptation to draw them out, or an observer to reprove them. ‘*Tam diu patiens quisque sibi videtur et humilis, donec nullius hominum consortio commiscetur : ad naturam pristinam reversurus quum interpellaverit cujuslibet occasionis commotio,*’ inquit Cassianus. ‘Many a man seems to himself patient and humble, while he keeps out of company ; who would return to his own nature, if the commotion of any occasion did but provoke him.’ It is hard to know what sin or grace is in us, if we have not such trials as are not to be found in solitude.

8. Flying from the observation and judgment of others, is a kind of self-accusation ; as if we confessed ourselves so bad as that we cannot stand the trial of the light. ‘*Bona conscientia turbam advocat. Mala in solitudine anxia est et sollicita : si honesta sunt quæ facis, omnes sciant : si turpia, quid refert neminem scire, cum tu scias ! O te miserum si contemnis hunc testem :*’ inquit Seneca. That is, ‘A good conscience will call in the crowd (or witnesses, not caring who seeth) : A bad conscience is anxious and solicitous even in solitude. If they be things honest which thou dost, let all men know : if they be dishonest, what good doth it thee that no man else knoweth it, when thou knowest it thyself ? O miserable man, if thou despise this witness !’ Something is suspected to be amiss with those that are

always in their chambers, and are never seen. Tell not men that you cannot bear the light: it is he that doth evil that hateth the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.

9. Solitude is too like death to be desirable. He liveth that doth good; and he is dead that is useless. 'Vivit is qui multis usui est: vivit is qui sentitur; qui vero latitant et torpent, mortem suam antecesserint,' inquit Sen. 'He liveth that is profitable to many: he liveth that is observed or perceived; but they that lie hid and drowsy, do anticipate their death.' And it is the most culpable death, and therefore the worst, to have life and not to use it.

10. And a life of holy communion is most like unto heaven, where none shall be solitary, but all as members of the heavenly Jerusalem, shall in harmony love and praise their Maker.

These reasons seem sufficient to me to satisfy you that no man should choose solitude without a special necessity or call: nor yet should it be taken for a life of greater perfection, than a faithful serving of God in public, and doing good to more.

I shall now come to the affirmative, and tell you for all this, that 'If God call us into solitude, or men forsake us, we may rejoice in this, that we are not alone, but 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; which though you may not cast off yourselves, you may lawfully be sensible of your ease, if God take off your burden. It is but a cessation from your sharpest conflicts, and removal from a multitude of great temptations. And though you may not cowardly retreat or shift yourselves from the fight and danger, yet if God will dispense with you, and let you live in greater peace and safety, you have no cause to murmur at his dealing. A fruit tree that groweth by the highway side, doth seldom keep its fruit to ripeness, while so many passengers have each his stone or cudgel to cast at it. Seneca could say, 'Nunquam a turba mores quos extuli refero. Aliquid ex eo quod composui turbatur; aliquid ex his quæ fugavi redit: inimica est multorum conversatio.' 'I never

bring home well from a crowd the manners which I took out with me : something is disordered of that which I had set in order ; something of that which I had banished doth return ; the conversation of many I find an enemy to me.' O how many vain and foolish words corrupt the minds of those that converse with an ungodly world, when your ears and minds who live in solitude are free from such temptations ! You live not in so corrupt an air as they. You hear not the filthy, ribald speeches, which fight against modesty and chastity, and are the bellows of lust. You hear not the discontented, complaining words of the impatient ; nor the passionate, provoking words of the offended ; nor the wrangling, quarrelsome words of the contentious ; nor the censorious, or slanderous, or reproachful words of the malicious, who think it their interest to have their brethren taken to be bad, and to have others hate them, because they themselves hate them ; and who are as zealous to quench the charity of others, when it is destroyed in themselves, as holy persons are zealous to provoke others to love, which dwelleth and ruleth in themselves. In your solitude with God, you shall not hear the lies and malicious revilings of the ungodly against the generation of the just : nor the subtle, cheating words of heretics, who being themselves deceived, would deceive others of their faith, and corrupt their lives. You shall not there be distracted with the noise and clamours of contending, uncharitable professors of religion, endeavouring to make odious first the opinions, and then the persons of one another : one saying, Here is the church, and another, There is the church : one saying, This is the true church-government, and another saying, Nay, but that is it : one saying, God will be worshipped thus, another, Not so, but thus, or thus. You shall not there be drawn to side with one against another, nor to join with any faction, or be guilty of divisions. You shall not be troubled with the oaths and blasphemies of the wicked, nor with the imprudent miscarriages of the weak ; with the persecutions of enemies, or the falling out of friends. You shall not see the cruelty of proud oppressors, that set up lies by armed violence, and care not what they say or do, nor how much other men are injured and suffer, so that themselves may tyrannize, and their wills and words may rule the world, when they do so unhappily rule themselves. In your solitude with God, you

shall not see the prosperity of the wicked, to move you to envy; nor the adversity of the just, to be your grief. You shall see no worldly pomp and splendor to befool you, nor adorned beauty to entice you, nor wasting calamities to afflict you. You shall not hear the laughter of fools, nor the sick man's groans, nor the wronged man's complaints, nor the poor man's murmurings, nor the proud man's boastings, or the angry man's abusive ragings. As you lose the help of your gracious friends, so you are freed from the fruits of their peevishness and passions; of their differing opinions, and ways, and tempers; of their inequality, unsuitableness, and contrariety of minds or interests; of their levity and inconstancy, and the powerful temptations of their friendship, to draw you to the errors or other sins which they are tainted with themselves. In a word, you are there half delivered from the VANITY and VEXATION of the world; and were it not that you are yet undelivered from yourselves, and that you take distempered, corrupted hearts with you, Oh what a felicity would your solitude be! But, alas! we cannot overrun our own diseases, we must carry with us the remnants of our corrupted nature; our deadness and dulness, our selfishness and earthly minds, our impatience and discontents; and worst of all, our lamentable weakness of faith, and love, and heavenly-mindedness, and our strangeness to God, and backwardness to the matters 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! how gladly would I overrun both house and land, and honour, and all sensual delights, that I might but overrun it! O where is the place where there is none of this darkness, nor disaffection, nor distance, nor estrangedness from God! O that I knew it! O that I could find it! O that I might there dwell! though I should never more see the face of mortals; nor ever hear a human voice, nor ever taste of the delights of flesh! Alas! foolish soul! such a place there is, that hath all this, and more than this; but it is not in a wilderness, but in a Paradise, not here on earth, but above with Christ! and yet am I so loath to die? yet am I 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 affrighting me from the presence of my Lord, and hindering my desires and willingness to be

gone, thou wrongest me much more, than by laying my flesh to rot in darkness. Fain I would know God, and fain I would more love him and enjoy him; but O this hurtful love of life! O this unreasonable fear of dying, detaineth my desires from pressing on to the happy place where all this may be had! "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death!" this carnal believing heart, that sometimes can think more delightfully of a wilderness than of heaven; that can go seek after God in desert solitude, among the birds, and beasts, and trees, and yet so backward to be loosed from flesh that I may 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 drossy world of flesh and sin, and this to satisfy my fleshly, foolish mind! or can I expect the translation of Enoch, or the chariot of Elias? Is it not enough that my Lord hath conquered death, and sanctified the passage, and prepared the place of my perpetual abode?

Well! for all this, though a wilderness is not heaven, it shall be sweet and welcome, for the sake of heaven, if thence I may have a clearer prospect of it; and if by retiring from the crowd and noise of folly, I may but be more composed and better disposed to converse above, and to use my faith (alas! my too weak, languid faith) until the beautiful vision and fruition come. If there may be but more of God, or readier access to him, or more heart-quickening flames of love, or more heart-comforting intimations of his favour, in a wilderness than in a city, in a prison than in a palace, let that wilderness be my city, and let that prison be my palace, while I must abide on earth. If in solitude I may have Enoch's walk with God, I shall in due season have such a translation as shall bring me to the same felicity which he enjoyeth; and in the mean time, as well as after, it is no disadvantage, if by mortal eyes I be 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 unto solitude, and make it my Paradise on earth, till angels, instead of the chariot of Elias, shall convey me to the presence of my glorified Head, in the celestial Paradise.

Object. 'But it is grievous to one that hath been used to much company, to be alone.'

Answ. Company may so use you, that it may be more grievous to you not to be alone. The society of wasps and serpents may be spared; and bees themselves have such stings as make some that have felt them think they bought the honey dear.

But can you say you are alone while you are with God? Is his presence nothing to you? doth it not signify more than the company of all men in the world? Saith Hierom, 'Sapiens nunquam solus esse potest; habet enim secum omnes qui sunt, et qui fuerunt boni — et si hominum sit inopia, liquitur cum Deo:' viz. 'A wise man cannot be alone; for he hath with him the good men that are or have been — and if there be a want of men, he speaketh with God.' He should rather have said, There can be no want of man, when we may speak with God; and were it not that God is here revealed to us as in a glass, and that we do converse with God in man, we should think human converse little worth.

Object. 'O but solitude is disconsolate to a sociable mind.'

Answ. But the most desirable society is no solitude. Saith Hierom, 'Infinita erimi vastitas te terret? sed tu Paradisum mente deambula; quotiescunque cogitatione ac mente illuc conscenderis, toties in erema non eris:' that is, 'Doth the infinite vastness of the wilderness terrify thee? but do thou (ascend) in mind and walk in Paradise; as oft as thou ascendest thither in thought and mind, so oft thou shalt not be in the wilderness.' If God be nothing to thee, thou art not a Christian but an atheist. If God be God to thee, he is all in all to thee; and then should not his presence be instead of all? O that I might get one step nearer unto 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 unto him, and fullest knowledge and enjoyment of him, though I never more saw the face of friends! I should cheerfully say with my blessed Saviour, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me." And should say so for these reasons following.

1. If God be with me, the Maker, and Ruler, and Disposer of all is with me; so that all things are virtually with

me in him. I have that in gold and jewels which I seem to want in silver, lead and dross. I can want no friend, if God vouchsafe to be my friend; and I can enjoy no benefit by all my friends, if God be my enemy: I need not fear the greatest enemies, if God be reconciled to me. I shall not miss the light of the candle, if I have this blessed sun. The creature is nothing but what it is from God, and in God; and it is worth nothing, or good for nothing, but what it is worth in order unto God, as it declareth him, and helps the soul to know him, serve him, or draw nearer to him. As it is idolatry in the unhappy worldling to thirst after the creature with the neglect of God, and so to make the world his God; so doth it savour of the same heinous sin to lament our loss of creatures more than the displeasure of God. If God be my enemy, or I am fallen under his indignation, I have then so much greater matters to lament than the loss, or absence, or frowns of man, as should almost make me forget that there is such a thing as man to be regarded; but if God be my Father, and my Friend in Christ, I have then so much to think of with delight, and to recreate and content my soul, as will proclaim it most incongruous and absurd to lament inordinately the absence of a worm, while I have his love and presence who is all in all. If God cannot content me, and be not enough for me, how is he then my God? or how shall he be my heaven and everlasting happiness?

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 repented of alienations, and unreservedly resigned myself to him; and where should I dwell but with him that is my Owner, and with whom I have made the most solemn covenant that ever I made? I never gave myself to any other, but in subordination to him, and with a 'salvo' for his highest, inviolable right. Where should my goods be but in my own house? With whom should a servant dwell but with his master? and a wife, but with her husband? and children, but with their father? I am more nearly related to my God, and to my Saviour, than I am to my relations in this world. I owe more to him than to all the world; I have renounced all the world, as they stand in competition or comparison with him; and can I want their company then,

while I am with him? How shall I hate father and mother, and wife and children, and brother and sister 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, as they would alienate me from Christ, and to cleave to him, and be satisfied in him alone. I am now married to Christ, and therefore must cheerfully leave father and mother, and my native place, and all, to cleave to him; and with whom should I now delight to dwell, but with him who hath taken me into so near relation, to be, as it were, one flesh with him! O my dear Lord, hide not thou thy face from an unkind, an unworthy sinner! let me but dwell with thee and see thy face, and feel the gracious embracements of thy love, and then let me be cast off by all the world, if thou seest it meetest for me; or let all other friends be where they will, so that my soul may be with thee; I have agreed for thy sake to forsake all, even the dearest that shall stand against thee; and I resolve by thy grace to stand to this agreement.

3. If God be with me, I am not alone, for he is with me that loveth me best. The love of all the friends on earth is nothing to his love. O how plainly hath he declared that he loveth me, in the strange condescension, the sufferings, death, and intercession of his Son! What love hath he declared in the communications of his Spirit, and the operations of his grace, and the near relations into which he brought me! What love hath he declared in the course of his providences! in many and wonderful preservations and deliverances! in the conduct of his wisdom, and in a life of mercies! What love appeareth in his precious promises, and the glorious provisions he hath made for me with himself to all eternity! O my Lord, I am ashamed that thy love is so much lost; that it hath 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 the society and converse of all others, for the converse of some one bosom friend, that is dearer to me than they all, as Jonathan to David. And can I not much more be satisfied in thee alone, and let go all, if I may continue with thee? My very dog will gladly forsake all the town, and all persons in the world, to follow me

alone! And have I not yet found so much love and goodness in thee, my dear and blessed God, as to be willing to converse alone with thee? All men delight most in the company of those that love them best; they choose not to converse with the multitude when they look for solace and content, but with their dearest friends. And should any be so near to me as God? O were not thy love unworthily neglected by an unthankful heart, I should never be so unsatisfied in thee, but should take up, or seek my comforts in thee; I should then say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee!" Though not only my friends, but my flesh and heart themselves should fail me, it is thou that wilt still be the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever; it is good therefore for me to draw near to thee, how far soever I am from man. O let me there dwell where thou wilt not be strange, for thy loving-kindness is better than life; instead of the multitude of my turmoiling thoughts, let me be taken up in the believing views of thy reconciled face, and in the glad attendance of thy grace; or at least in the multitude of my thoughts within me, let thy celestial 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 where 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 representeth thee, and the books in which I may read thy name; and let me never play with the outside, and gaze on words and letters as insignificant, and not observe thy name which is the sense. Whether it be in company or in solitude, let me be continually with thee, and do thou vouchsafe to hold me by my right hand; and guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me unto thy glory. (Psal. lxxiii. 23—26; lxiii. 3.)

4. If God be with me I am not alone; for I shall be with him whose love is of greater use and benefit to me, than the love of all my friends in the world. Their love may perhaps be some little comfort, as it floweth from his; but it is his love by which, and upon which I live. It is his love that gives me life and time, and health and food, and preserva-

tion; that gives me books, and giveth me understanding: that giveth me provision, and saveth me from turning it to pernicious fleshliness and excess; that giveth me even my friends themselves, and saveth me from that abuse which might make them to me worse than enemies. The sun, the earth, the air, is not so useful or needful to me as his love. The love of all my friends cannot make me well when I am sick: it cannot forgive the smallest of my sins; nor yet assure me of God's forgiveness: it cannot heal the maladies of my soul, nor give a solid, lasting peace to the conscience which is troubled: if all my friends stand about me when I am dying, they cannot take away the fears of death, nor secure my passage to everlasting life; death will be death still, and danger will be danger, when all my friends have done their best. But my Almighty Friend is allsufficient; he can prevent my sicknesss, or rebuke and cure it, or make it so good to me, that I shall thank him for it: he can blot out my transgressions, and forgive all my sin; and justify me when the world and my conscience do condemn me: he can teach me to believe, to repent, to pray, to hope, to suffer, and to 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 the corruptions and distempers of my froward heart; and ease me and secure me in the troublesome war which is daily managed in my breast. He can make it as easy a thing to die, as to lie down and take my rest when I am weary, or to undress me at night and go to bed. He can teach death to lay by its terrible aspect, and speak with a mild and comfortable voice, and to me the most joyful tidings that ever came unto my ears; and to preach to me the last and sweetest sermon, even the same that our Saviour preached on the cross; "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Christ in Paradise." (Luke xxiii. 43.)

And is this the difference between the love of man and of God? And yet do I lament the loss of man! And yet am I so backward to converse with God, and to be satisfied in his love alone! Ah, my God, how justly mayest thou withhold that love which I thus undervalue; and refuse that converse which I have first refused! and turn me over to man, to silly man, to sinful man, whose converse I so much desire, till I have learnt by dear experience the difference be-

tween man and God, and between an earthly and an heavenly friend! Alas! have I not tried it oft enough, to have known it better before this day! Have I not oft 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 friends, by self-seeking friends, by mutable, erroneous, deceived, scandalous, back-sliding friends, by proud and self-conceited friends; by passionate, quarrelsome, vexatious friends, by self-grieving, troubled friends, that have but brought me all their calamities and griefs to be additions to my own; by tempting friends, that have drawn me to sin more effectually than enemies; by tender, faithful, but unable friends, that have but fetched fire from my calamities and sorrows, to kindle their own, not equally sharing, but each one taking all my trouble entirely to himself; that have been willing, but insufficient to relieve me; and therefore the greater was their love, the greater was their own, and consequently mine affliction: that would have been with me, but could not; that would fain have eased my pain, and strengthened my languishing body, but could not; that would fain have removed all my troubles, and comforted my cast-down mind, but could not. O how often have I found that human friendship is a sweet, desired addition to our woe; a beloved calamity, and an affliction which nature will not be without, not because it loveth evil, nor because it 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 pointeth us up to the blessed, delightful society and converse which in the heavenly Jerusalem we shall have with Christ.

But O how much better have I found the friendship of the allsufficient God! His love hath not only pitied me, but relieved me; he hath not only been as it were afflicted with me in my afflictions, but he hath delivered me seasonably, and powerfully, and sweetly hath he delivered me: and when he had once told me that my afflictions were his own, I had no reason to doubt of a deliverance. My burdened mind hath been eased by his love, which was but more burdened by the fruitless love of all my friends. Oft have I come to man for help, and ease, and comfort, and gone away as from an empty cistern, that had no water to cool

my thirst; but God hath been a present help: could I but get near him, I was sure of light, how great soever was my former darkness: could I but get near him, I was sure of warming, quickening life, how dead soever I had been before: but all my misery was, that I could not get near him! my darkened, estranged, guilty soul, could not get quieting and satisfying acquaintance: my lumpish heart lay dead on earth, and would not stir, or quickly fell down again, if by any celestial force it began to be drawn up, and move a little towards him: my carnal mind was entangled in diverting vanities: and thus I have been kept from communion with my God. Kept! not by force of human tyranny; not by bars or bolts, or distance of place, or by the lowness of my condition; nor by any misrepresentations or reproach of man; but, alas! by myself, by the darkness and deadness, and sluggishness, and earthliness, and fleshliness, and passions of a naughty heart! These have been my bars, and bolts, and gaolers; these are they that have kept me from my God: had it not been for these, I might have got nearer to him; I might have walked with him, and dwelt with him; yea, "dwelt in him, and he in me;" and then I should not have missed any friends, nor felt mine enemies: and is it my sinful distance from my God that hath been my loss, my wilderness, my woe? And 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; and 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 have his, be content if thou have not theirs. He wants not man that enjoyeth God. Gather up all the love, and thoughts, and desires 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 discontents, and sweet experience shall tell thee thou hast made a happy change.

5. If God be with me, I am not alone, because he is with me with whom my greatest business lieth. And what company should I desire, but theirs with whom I have my daily

necessary work to do? 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 man about house, or lands, or food, or raiment, or labour, or journeying, or recreations, about society and public peace; but what are these to my business with God! Indeed with holy men I have holy business; but that is but as they are messengers from God, and come to me on his business, and so they must be dearly welcome: but even then my business is much more with God than with them; with him that sent them, than with the messengers. Indeed 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 me acceptance, the thoughts of it would overwhelm my soul.

O therefore, my soul, let man stand by; it is the eternal God that I have to do with: and with whom I am to transact in this little time the business of my endless life. I have to deal with God through Christ, for the pardon of my sins; of all my great and grievous sins; and woe to me, if I speed not, that ever I was born; I have some hopes of pardon, but intermixed with many perplexing fears; I have evidences much blotted, and not easily understood: I want assurance that he is indeed my Father and reconciled to me, and will receive me to himself when the world forsaketh me: I have many languishing graces to be strengthened; and, alas, what radicated, obstinate, vexatious corruptions to be cured! Can I look into my heart, into such an unbelieving, dead, and earthly heart, into such a proud, and peevish, and disordered heart, into such a trembling, perplexed, self-accusing heart, and yet not understand how great my business is with God? Can I peruse my sins, or feel my wants, and sink under my weaknesses, and yet not discern how great my business is with God? Can I look back upon all the time that I have lost, and all the grace that I unthankfully resisted, and all the mercies that I trod under foot or fooled away; or can I look before me and see how near my time is to an end, and yet not understand how great my business is with God? Can I think of the malice and diligence of Satan, the number, power and subtilty of mine enemies, the many snares and dangers that are still before me, the strength and number of temptations, and my ignorance, unwatchfulness and weakness to

resist, and yet not know that my greatest business is with God? Can I feel my afflictions and lament them, and think my burden greater than I can bear, and find that man 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 and lamentations, or feel my soul overwhelmed within me, so that my words are intercepted, and I am readier to break than speak, and yet not perceive that my greatest business is with God? Can I think of dying; can I draw near to judgment; can I think of everlasting joys in heaven, and of everlasting pains in hell, and yet not feel that my greatest business is with God? O then, my soul, the case is easily resolved, with whom it is that thou must most desirously and seriously converse. Where shouldst thou be but where thy business is, and so great business? 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 preferments, lands, and dignities; about the words and thoughts of men, and a thousand toys that are utterly impertinent to my great employments, and signify nothing but that the dreaming world is not awake! What pleasure is it to see the bustles of a bedlam-world? What a stir they make to prove or make themselves unhappy! How long and of how little weight, are the learned discourses about syllables and words, and names and notions, and mood and figure, yea or about the highest planets, when all are not referred unto God! Were it not that some converse with men, doth further my converse with God; and that God did transact much of his business by his messengers and servants, it were no matter whether ever I more saw the face of man: were it not that my master hath placed me in society, and appointed me much of my work for others, and with others, and much of his mercy is conveyed by others, man might stand by, and solitude were better than the best society, and God alone should take me up. O nothing is so much my misery and shame, as that I am no more willing, nor better skilled in the management of my great important business! That my work is with God, and my heart is no more with him! O what might I do in holy meditation or prayer one hour, if I were as ready for prayer, and as good at prayer, as one that has had so long opportunity and so great necessity to converse with God, should be! A prayerless heart, a heart that

fieth 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 use not to return from the presence of God (when indeed I have drawn near him) as I do from the company of empty men, repenting that I have lost my time, and trembling that my mind is discomposed or depressed by the vanity and earthly savour of their discourse. I oft 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, the care, the affections or the diligence employed in his holy work. Many a time I have repented that ever I spent so much time with man, and wished I had never seen the faces of some that are eminent in the world, whose favour and converse others are ambitious of; but it is my grief and shame that so small a part of all my life hath been spent with God, and that fervent prayer and heavenly contemplations, have been so seldom and so short. O that I had lived more with God, though I had been less with the dearest of my friends! How much more sweet then 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 to my review! How many falls, and hurts, and wounds, and griefs, and groans might I have escaped! O how much more pleasing is it now to my remembrance, to think of the hours in which I have lain at the feet of God, though it were in tears and groans, than to think of the time which I have spent in any common converse with the greatest, or the most learned, or the dearest of my acquaintance.

And as my greatest business is with God, so my daily business is also with him. He purposely leaveth me under wants, and suffers necessities daily to return, and enemies to assault me, and affliction to surprise me, that I may be daily driven to him. He loveth to hear from me. He would have me be no stranger with him. I have business with him every hour, I need not want employment for all the faculties of my soul, if I know what it is to converse in heaven. Even prayer, and every holy thought of God, hath an object so great and excellent, as should wholly take me up. Nothing must be thought or spoken lightly about the Lord. His name must not be taken in vain. Nothing that is com-

mon beseemeth his worshippers. He will be sanctified of all that draw shall near him. He must be loved with all the heart and might. His servants need not be wearied for want of employment, nor through the lightness or unprofitableness of their employment. If I had cities to build, or kingdoms to govern, I might better complain for want of employment, for the faculties of my soul, than I can when I am to converse in heaven. In other studies the delight abateth when I have reached my desire, and know all that I can know; but in God there is infinitely more to be known, when I know the most. I am never satiated with the easiness of knowing, nor are my desires abated by any uneasiness or unworthiness in the object; but I am drawn to it by its highest excellencies, and drawn on to desire more and more by the infiniteness of the light which I have not yet beheld, and the infiniteness of the good which yet I have not enjoyed. If I be idle, or seem to want employment, when I am to contemplate all the attributes, relations, mercies, works, and revealed perfections of the Lord, it is sure for want of eyes to see, or a 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, and never need to fear excess of love, how sweet should this employment be. As knowledge, so love is never stinted here, by the narrowness of the object. We can never love him in any proportion either to his goodness and 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 (further than they 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 briars, that go out when they have made a flash or noise, and leave thee to thy cold and 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 then they will never be extinguished or decay for want of fuel; but the further they go, and the longer they burn, the greater will be the flame. Though thou find it hard while love is but a spark to make it burn, and complain that thy

cold and backward heart is hardly warmed with the love of God, yet when the whole pile hath taken fire, and the flame ascendeth, fire will breed fire, love will cause love; and all the malice of hell itself shall never be able to suppress or quench it unto all eternity.

6. And it is a great encouragement to my converse with God, that no misunderstanding, no malice of enemies, no former sin or present frailty, no nor the infinite distance of the most holy, glorious God, can hinder my access to him, or turn away his ear or love, or interrupt my leave and liberty of converse. If I converse with the poor, their wants afflict me, being greater than I can supply; their complaints and expectations, which I cannot satisfy, are my trouble. If I would converse with great-ones, it is not easy to get access; and less easy to have their favour, unless I would purchase it at too dear a rate. How strangely and contemptuously do they look at their inferiors! Great friends must be made for a word or smile; and if you be not quickly gone, they are weary of you: and if you seek any thing of them, or would put them to any cost or trouble, you are as welcome to them as so many vermin or noisome creatures: they please them best that drive you away. With how much labour and difficulty must you climb, if you will see the top of one of these mountains; and when you are there, you are but in a place of barrenness, and have nothing to satisfy you for your pains, but a larger prospect and vertiginous despect of the lower grounds which are not your own. It is seldom that these great-ones are to be spoken with; and perhaps their speech is but a denial to your request, if not some snappish and contemptuous rejection, that makes you glad when you are got far enough from them, and makes you better like and love the accessible, calm, and fruitful plains.

But O how much greater encouragements hath my soul to converse with God! Company never hindereth him from hearkening to my suit; he is infinite and omnipotent, and is 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 host, he is as free and ready to attend and answer the groans and prayers of a contrite soul, as if he had no nobler creatures, nor no higher service to regard. I am oft unready,

but God is never unready ; I am unready to pray, but he is not unready to hear ; I am unready to come to God, to walk with him, and to solace my soul with him, but he is never unready to entertain me. Many a time my conscience would have driven me away, when he hath called me to him, and rebuked my accusing, fearful conscience. Many a time I have called myself a prodigal, a companion of swine, a miserable hard hearted sinner, unworthy to be called his son, when he hath called me child, and chid me for my questioning his love. He hath readily forgiven the sins which I thought would have made my soul the fuel of hell. He hath entertained me with joy, with music and a feast, when I had better deserved to have been among the dogs without his doors. He hath embraced me in his sustaining consolatory arms, when he might have spurned my guilty soul to hell, and said, " Depart from me thou worker of iniquity, I know thee not." O little did I think that he could ever have forgotten the vanity and villainy of my youth ; yea so easily have forgotten my most aggravated sins. 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, hath cancelled all. O how many mercies have I tasted since I thought I had sinned away all mercies ! How patiently hath he borne with me, since I thought he would never have put up more ! And yet besides my sins and the withdrawals of my own heart, there hath been nothing to interrupt our converse. Though he be God, and I a worm, yet that would not have kept me out : though he be in heaven, yet he is near to succour me on earth, in all that I call upon him for : though he have the praise of angels, he disdaineth not my tears and groans : though he have the perfect love of perfect souls, he knoweth the little spark in my breast, and despiseth not my weak and languid love : though I injure and dishonour him by loving him no more ; though I oft forget him, and have been out of the way when he hath come or called me, though I have disobediently turned away mine ears, and unkindly refused the entertainments of his love, and unfaithfully played with those whose company he forbade me, he hath not divorced me, nor turned me out of doors. O wonderful ! that heaven will be familiar with

earth! and God with man! the Highest with a worm! and the Most Holy with an inconstant sinner! Man refuseth me, when God will entertain me; man that is no wiser and better than myself. Those that I never wronged, or deserved ill of, reject me with reproach; and God, whom I have unspeakably injured, doth invite me, and entreat me, and condescendeth to me, as if he were beholden to me to be saved. Men, that I have deserved well of, do abhor me; and God, that I have deserved hell of, doth accept me. The best of them are briars, and a thorny hedge, and he is love, and rest, and joy. And yet I can be more welcome to him, though I have offended him, than I can to them whom I have obliged: I have freer leave to cast myself into my Father's arms, than to tumble into those briars, or wallow in the dirt. I upbraid myself with my sins, but he doth not upbraid me with them. I condemn myself for them, but he condemns me not; he forgiveth me sooner than I can forgive myself: I have peace with him, before I can have peace of conscience.

O, therefore, my soul, draw near to him that is so willing of thy company; that frowneth thee not away, unless it be when thou hast fallen into the dirt, that thou mayest wash thee from thy filthiness, and be fitter for his converse. Draw near to him that will not wrong thee, by believing misreports of enemies, or laying to thy charge the things thou knewest not; but will forgive the wrongs thou hast done to him, and justify thee from the sins that conscience layeth to thy charge. Come to him that by his word and spirit, his ministers and mercies calleth thee to come; and hath promised that those that come to him, he will in no wise shut out. O walk with him that will bear thee up, and lead thee as by the right hand, (Psal. lxxiii. 23.) and carry his infants when they cannot go! O speak to him that teacheth thee to speak, and understandeth and accepts thy stammering; and helpeth thine infirmities, when thou knowest not what to pray for as thou oughtest; and giveth thee groans when thou hast not words, and knoweth the meaning of his spirit in thy groans; that cannot be contained in the heaven of heavens, and yet hath respect to the contrite soul, that trembleth at his word, and feareth his displeasure; that pitieth the tears, and despiseth not the sighing of a broken heart, nor the desires of the sorrowful. O walk with him that is never weary of the converse of the upright soul!

that is never angry with thee but for flying from him, or for 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 good look from him that thou hast leave to walk with; even they that would not look on thee, and they that injured and abused thee, and they that inferiors could have no access to! O how glad would they be then of a smile, or a word of hope and mercy from their Father! Draw near then to him, on whom the whole creation doth depend; whose favor at last the proudest and the worst would purchase with the loudest cries, when all their pomp and pleasure is gone, and can purchase nothing. O walk with him that is love itself, and think him not unwilling or unlovely; and let not the deceiver by hideous misrepresentations drive thee from him: when thou hast felt a while the storms abroad, methinks thou shouldst say, How good, how safe, how sweet is it to draw near unto God!

7. With whom should I so desirously converse, as with him whom I must live with for ever? If I take pleasure in my house, or land, or country, my walks, my books, or friends themselves as cloathed with flesh, I must possess this pleasure but a little while: henceforth know we no man after the flesh: had we known Christ after the flesh, we must know him so no more for ever. (Though his glorified, spiritual body we shall know.) Do you converse with father or mother, with wives or children, with pastors and teachers; though you may converse with these as glorified saints when you come to Christ, yet in these relations that they stand in to you now, you 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 rejoiced not; and those that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it (or as though they used it not): for the fashion of this world passeth away." 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

Why then should I so much regard a converse of so short continuance? Why should I be so familiar in my inn, and so much in love with that familiarity, as to grieve when I must but think of leaving it, or talk of going home, and look forward to the place where I must dwell for ever?

Shall I be fond of the company of a passenger that I travel with (yea, perhaps one that doth but meet me in the way, and goeth to a contrary place), and shall I not take more pleasure to remember home? I will not be so uncivil as to deny those I meet a short salute, or to be friendly with my fellow-travellers: but remember, O my soul, that thou dost not dwell, but travel here, and that it is thy Father's house where thou must abide for ever; yea, and he is nearer thee than man (though invisible), even in thy way. O see him then that is invisible; harken to him when he speaketh; obey his voice; observe his way; speak to him boldly, though humbly and reverently, as his child, about the great concernments of thy state: tell him what it is that aileth thee; and seeing all thy smart is the fruit of thy own sin, confess thy folly and unkindness, crave his forgiveness, and remember him what his Son hath suffered, and for what; treat with him about thy future course; desire his grace, and give up thyself to his conduct and his care: weep over in his ears the history of thy misdoings and unthankful course; tell it him with penitential tears and groans; but tell him also the advantage that he hath for the honouring of his grace, if it may now abound where sin aboundeth: tell him that thou art most offended with thyself, for that which he is most offended with; that thou art angry with thy disobedient, unthankful heart; that thou art even weary of that heart that loveth him no more; and that it shall never please thee, till it love him better, and be more desirous to please him: tell him of thy enemies, and crave the protection of his love: tell him of thy frailties, infirmities and passions, and crave not only his tender forbearance, but his help; tell him that without him thou canst do nothing; and crave the grace that is sufficient for thee, that through him that strengtheneth thee thou mayst do all things: when thou fallest, despair not, but crave his helping hand to raise thee. Speak to him especially of the everlasting things, and thank him for his promises, and for thy hopes; for what thou shalt be, and have; and do among his holy ones for ever. Express thy joys in the promise of those joys; that thou must see his glory, and love him, and praise 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 to him, and speak

good of his name: solace thyself in remembering what a God, what a defence and portion all believers have; and in considering whither he is now conducting thee, and what he will do with thee, and what use he will make of thee for ever: speak with rejoicing of the glory of his works, and the righteousness of his judgments, and the holiness and evenness of his ways: sing forth his praises with a joyful heart, and pleasant and triumphing voice; and frown away all slavish fears, all importune, malicious suggestions and doubts, all peevish, hurtful, nipping griefs, that would mar or interrupt the melody; and would untune or unstring a raised well-composed soul. Thy Father loveth thy very moans and tears; but how much more doth he love thy thanks and praise! Or if indeed it be a winter-time, a stormy day with thee, and 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, and tell him, "Thou hast sinned against heaven, and before him, and art no more worthy to be called his son;" but yet fly not from him, but beg his pardon and the privilege of a servant; and thou wilt find embracements, when thou fearest condemnation; and find that he is merciful and ready to forgive: only return, and keep closer for the time to come. If the breach through thy neglect be gone so far, as that thou seemest to have lost thy God, and to be cast off, and left forsaken; despair not yet; for he doth but hide his face till thou repent: he doth not forsake thee, but only tell thee what it is to walk so carelessly as if thou wouldst forsake him: thou art faster and surer in his love and covenant than thou canst believe or apprehend. Thy Lord was as dear as ever to his Father, when he cried out, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But yet neglect him not, and be not regardless of his withdrawals, and of thy loss: lift up thy voice and cry but Father; in despite of unbelief, cry out, My Father, my Saviour, my God, and thou shalt hear him answer thee at last, My child; cry out, O why dost thou hide thy face? and why hast thou forsaken me! O 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 ravening beast! to my sin, to Satan, to my foes and thine! Lift up thy voice and weep, and tell him, they are the tears and lamentations of

his child : O beg of him, that thy wanderings and childish folly, may not be taken as acts of enmity, or at least that they may be pardoned ; and though he correct thee, that he will return and not forsake thee, but still take thee and use thee as his child, or if thou hast not words to pour out before him, at least smite upon thy breast, and though thou be ashamed or afraid to look up towards heaven, look down and say, " O Lord, be merciful to me a sinner," and he will take it for an acceptable suit, that tendeth to thy pardon and justification, and will number such a sentence with the prayers which he cannot deny. Or if thou cry and canst not hear of him, and hast long called out upon thy Father's name, and hearest not his voice and hast no return ; inquire after him of those thou meetest : ask for him of them that know him, and are acquainted with his way ; make thy moan unto the watchmen ; and ask them, where thou mayst find thy Lord. And at last he will appear to thee, and find thee first, that thou mayst find him, and shew thee where it was that thou didst lose him, by losing thyself and turning from him ! seek him and thou shalt find him ; wait and he will appear in kindness ; for he never faileth or forsaketh those that wait upon him.

This kind of converse, O my soul, thou hast to prosecute with thy God. Thou hast also the concernments of all his servants ; his afflicted ones, to tell him of ; tell him also of the concernments of his kingdom, the fury of his enemies, the dishonour they cast upon his name, the matters of his Gospel, cause, and interest in the world ; but still let his righteous judgment be remembered, and all be terminated in the glorious, everlasting kingdom.

Is it not much better thus to converse with him that I must be with for ever, about the place, and the company, and work, and concernments of my perpetual abode, than to be taken up with strangers in my way, and detained by their impertinencies ?

I have found myself so long in these meditations that I will but name the rest, and tell you what I had farther to have treated on, and leave the enlargement to your own meditations.

8. I have no reason to be weary of converse with God, seeing it is that for which all human converse is regardable

Converse with man, is only so far desirable as it tendeth to our converse with God; and therefore the end must be preferred before the means.

9. It is the office of Christ, and the work of the Holy Ghost, and the use of all the means of grace, and of all creatures, mercies, and afflictions, to reduce our straying souls to God, that we may converse with him, and enjoy him.

10. Converse with God is most suitable to those that are so near death; it best prepareth for it; it is likest to the work that we are next to do. We had rather, when death comes, be found conversing with God, than with man; it is God that a dying man hath principally to do with; it is his judgment that he is going to, and his mercy that he hath to trust upon; and therefore it concerneth us to draw near him now, and be no strangers to him, lest strangeness then should be our terror.

11. How wonderful a condescension is it that God should be willing to converse with me! with such a worm and sinful wretch; and therefore how inexcusable is my crime, if I refuse his company, and so great a mercy!

12. Lastly, Heaven itself is but our converse with God and his glorified ones (though in a more perfect manner than we can here perceive). And therefore our holy converse with him here is the state that is likest heaven, and that prepareth for it, and all the heaven that is on earth.

It remaineth now that I briefly tell you what you should do to attain and manage this converse with God, in the improvement of your solitude. (For directions in general for walking with God, I reserve for another place.) At present let these few suffice.

Direct. 1. 'If you would comfortably converse with God, make sure that you are reconciled to him in Christ, and that he is indeed your Friend and Father.' "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Can you take pleasure in dwelling with the consuming fire? or conversing with the most dreadful enemy? Yet this I must add, that every doubting or self-accusing soul may not find a pretence to fly from God. 1. That God ceaseth not to be a Father whenever a fearful soul is drawn to question or deny it. 2. That in the universal love and grace of God to mis-

erable sinners, and in the universal act of conditional pardon and oblivion, and in the offers of grace, and the readiness of God to receive the penitent, there is glad tidings that should exceedingly rejoice a sinner; and there is sufficient encouragement to draw the most guilty, miserable sinner to seek to God, and sue for mercy. But yet the sweetest converse is for children, and for those that have some assurance that they are children.

But perhaps you will say, that this is not easily attained. How shall we know that he is our Friend?

In brief, I answer, If you are unfeignedly friends to God, it is because he first loved you. Prefer him before all other friends, and all the wealth and vanity of the world; provoke him not by wilfulness or neglect; use him as your best Friend, and abuse him not by disobedience or ingratitude; own him before all, at the dearest rates, whenever you are called to it: Desire his presence; lament his absence: love him from the bottom of your hearts; think not hardly of him; suspect him not; misunderstand him not; hearken not to his enemies; receive not any false reports against him; take him to be really better for you, than all the world: Do these, 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.

Direct. 2. 'Wholly depend 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 his displeasure shall surprise you, fly presently for safety unto Christ; whatever guilt shall look you in the face, commit yourself and cause to Christ, and desire him to answer you: when the doors of mercy seem to be shut against you, fly to him that bears the keys, and can at any time open to you and let you in: desire him to answer for you to God, to your own consciences, and against all accusers; by him alone you may boldly and comfortably converse with God; but God will not know you out of him.

Direct. 3. 'Take heed of bringing a particular guilt into the presence of God, if you would have sweet communion

with him.' 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 the 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 fears, what shame, what self-abhorrence, and self-revenge will guilt raise in a penitent soul, when it comes into the light of the presence of the Lord! It will unavoidably abate your boldness and your comforts; when you should be sweetly delighting in his pleased face, and promised glory, you will be befooling yourselves for your former sin, and ready even to tear your flesh, to think that ever you should do as you have done, and use him as you would not have used a common friend, and cast yourselves upon his wrath. But an innocent soul, or pacified conscience, doth walk with God in quietness and delight, without those frowns and fears which are a taste of hell to others.

Direct. 4. 'If you would comfortably converse with God, be sure that you bring not idols in your hearts.' Take heed of inordinate affection to any creature. Let all things else be nothing to you, that you may have none to take up your thoughts but God. Let your minds be further separate from them than your bodies; bring not into solitude or contemplation, a proud, or lustful, or covetous mind: it much more concerneth thee, what heart thou bringest, than what place thou art in, or what work thou art upon. A mind that is drowned in ambition, sensuality, or passion, will scarce find God any sooner in a wilderness than in a crowd (unless he be there returning from those sins to God), wherever he seeth him, God will not own and be familiar with so foul a soul. Seneca could say, 'Quid prodest totius regionis silentium, si affectus fremunt?' What good doth the silence of all the country do thee, if thou have the noise of raging affections within? And Gregory saith, 'Qui corpore remotus vivit, &c.' He that in body is far enough from the tumult of human conversation, is not in solitude, if he busy himself with earthly cogitations and desires: and he is not in the city, that is not troubled with the tumult of the worldly cares and fears, though he be pressed with the popular crowds. Bring not thy house, or land, or

credit, or carnal friend along with thee in thine heart, if thou desire and expect to walk in heaven, and to converse with God.

Direct. 5. 'Live still by faith; let faith lay heaven and earth as it were together.' Look not at God as if he were far off; set him always as before you, even as at your right hand. (Psal. xvi. 8.) Be still with him when you awake. (Psal. cxxxix. 18.) In the morning thank him for your rest; and deliver up yourself to his conduct and service for that day. Go forth as with him, and to do his work; do every action, with the command of God, and the promise of heaven before your eyes, and upon your hearts: live as those that have incomparably more to do with God and heaven, than with all this world; that you may say with David, (as afore cited), "Whom have I in heaven but thee! and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee." (Psal. xxxvii. 25, 26.) And with Paul, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Phil. i. 21.) You must shut up the eye of sense (save as subordinate to faith), and live by faith upon a God, a Christ, and a world that is unseen, if you would know by experience what it is to be above the brutish life of sensualists, and to converse with God. O Christian, if thou hast rightly learned this blessed life, what a high and noble soul-conversation wouldst thou have! How easily wouldst thou spare, and how little wouldst thou miss the favour of the greatest, the presence of any worldly comfort! City or solitude would be much alike to thee, saving that the 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, 'Unus pro populo mihi est, et populus pro uno; mihi satis est unus, satis est nullus.' One is instead of all the people to me, and the people as one; one is enough for me, and none is enough. Thus being taken up with God, thou mightest live in prison 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 mayst find him, and converse with him, and lift up pure 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 do place their highest felicity and delight.

How little cause then have all the church's enemies to triumph, that can never shut up 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 Christ sitting at the right hand of God. A Patmos allowed holy John communion with Christ, being there in the Spirit on the Lord's-day. (Rev. i. 9, 10.) Christ never so speedily and comfortably owneth his servants, as when the world disowneth them, and abuseth them for his sake, and hurls them up and down as the scorn and offscouring of all. He quickly found the blind man that he had cured, when once the Jews had cast him out. (John ix. 35.) Persecutors do but promote the blessedness and exceeding joy of sufferers for Christ. (Matt. v. 11, 12.)

And how little reason then have Christians, to shun such sufferings, by unlawful means, which turn to their so great advantage ! and to give so dear as the hazard of their souls by wilful sin, to escape the honour, and safety, and commodity of martyrdom !

And indeed we judge not, we love not, we live not, as sanctified ones must do, if we judge not that the truest liberty and love is not as the best condition, in which we may best 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 take us up ! It is our prepossessioned minds, our earthly hearts, our carnal affections and concupiscence, and the pleasures of a prosperous state that are the prison and the jailors of our souls. Were it not for these, how free should we be, though our bodies were confined to the straitest room ! He is at liberty that can walk in heaven, and have access to God, and make use of all the creatures in the world, to the promoting of this his heavenly conversation. And he is the prisoner whose soul is chained to flesh and earth, and confined to his lands and houses, and feedeth on the dust of worldly riches, or walloweth in the dung and filth of gluttony, drunkenness and lust ; that are far from God, and desire not to be near him ; but say to him, Depart from us, we would not have the knowledge of thy ways : that love their prison and chains so well, that they would not be set free, but hate those with the most cruel

hatred that endeavour their deliverance. Those are the poor prisoners of Satan that have not liberty to believe, nor love God, nor converse in heaven, nor seriously to mind or seek the things that are high and honourable; that have not liberty to meditate or pray, or seriously to speak of holy things, nor to love and converse with those that do so: that are tied so hard to the drudgery of sin, that they have not liberty one month, or week, or day, to leave it, and walk with God so much as for a recreation! But he that liveth in the family of God, and is employed in attending him, and doth converse with Christ, and the host of holy ones above, in reason should not much complain of his want of friends, or company, or accommodations, nor yet be too impatient of any corporal confinement.

Lastly, be sure then most narrowly to watch your hearts, that nothing have entertainment there, which is against your liberty of converse with God. Fill not those hearts with worldly trash, which are made and new-made to be the dwelling-place of God. Desire not the company which would diminish your heavenly acquaintance and correspondence. Be not unfriendly, nor conceited of a self-sufficiency; but yet beware lest under the honest 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 cor rival and competitor with your highest friend; for if you do, it is not the specious title of a friend that will save you from the thorns and briars of disquietment, and from greater troubles than ever you found from open enemies.

O blessed be that high and everlasting Friend, who is every way suited to the upright souls; to their minds, their memories, their delight, their love, &c. by surest truth, by fullest goodness, by clearest light, by dearest love, by firmest constancy, &c.—O why hath my drowsy and dark-sighted soul been so seldom with him? Why hath it so often, so strangely, and so unthankfully passed by, and not observed him, nor hearkened to his kindest calls? O what is all this trash and trouble that hath filled my memory, and employed my mind, and cheated and corrupted my affections, while my dearest Lord hath been days and nights so unworthily forgotten, so contemptuously neglected and disregarded, and loved as if I loved him not! O that these drowsy and those waking nights, those loitered, lost, and

empty hours had been spent in the humblest converse with him, which have been dreamed and doted away upon—now I know not what! 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 befriendeth my dark, and dull, and backward soul, in its undertaken progress, and heavenly conversation! or if there be none such upon earth, let me here take no one for my friend! O blot out every name from my corrupted heart, which hindereth 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 shall I not run to thee, when I have none else that will know me! shall I not draw near thee, when all fly from me! when daily experience crieth out so loud, 'NONE BUT CHRIST; GOD OR NOTHING.' Ah foolish heart, that hast not thought of it. 'Where is that place, that cave or desert, where I might soonest find thee, and fallest 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, that I have a heart to find, before I am like to find my Lord! O loveless, 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 mercies and 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 I may but be nearer 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 that repentance hath its anger, its hatred and its revenge! I am truly angry with the heart that hath so oft and foolishly offended thee! Methinks I hate that heart

that is so cold and backward in thy love, and almost grudge it a dwelling in my breast! Alas! when love should be the life of prayer, the life of holy meditation, the life of sermons and of holy conference, and my soul in these should long to meet thee, and delight to mention thee, I straggle, Lord, I know not whither! or 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 replenished with life, and light, and love divine; and I hear him as our Head and Treasure proclaimed and offered to us in the Gospel!" This is thy record, that "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 head 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 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 that is hell, to be thrust from God. But sure the cause is all at home, could I find it out, or rather could I cure it! It is sure my face that is turned from God, when I say, His face is turned from me. But if my life must here be out of sight, and hidden in the root (with Christ in God), and 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 the blessed day of thine appearing, and not to fear the time of my deliverance, nor unbelievably to linger in this Sodom, as one that had rather stay with sin, than come to thee! Though sin hath made me backward to the fight, let it not make me backward to receive the crown; though it hath 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 oft drawn back, when I should have come unto thee, and walked with thee in thy ways of grace, yet heal that unbelief, and disaffection, which would

make me to 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 their painfulness help me to desire to be delivered from them and to be at home, where (without the interposing nights of thy displeasure) I shall fully feel thy fullest love, and walk with thy glorified ones in the light of thy glory, triumphing in thy praise for evermore. Amen.

But now I have given you these few directions for the improvement of your solitude for converse with God, lest I should occasion the hurt of those that are unfit for the lesson I have given, I must conclude with this caution (which I have formerly also published), That it is not melancholy or weak-headed persons, who are not able to bear such exercises, for whom I have written these directions. Those that are not able to be much in serious, solitary thoughtfulness, without confusions and distracting suggestions, and hurrying, vexatious thoughts, must set themselves for the most part to those duties which are to be done in company by the help of others; and must be very little in solitary duties: for to them whose natural faculties are so diseased or weak, it is no duty, as being no means to do them the desired good; but while they strive to do that which they are naturally unable to endure, they will but confound and distract themselves, and make themselves unable for those other duties which yet they are not utterly unfit for. To such persons, instead of ordered, well-digested meditations, and much time spent in secret thoughtfulness, it must suffice that they be brief in secret prayer, and take up with such occasional abrupter meditations as they are capable of, and that they be the more in reading, hearing, conference, and praying and praising God with others; until their melancholy distempers are so far overcome, as that (by the direction of their spiritual guides) they may judge themselves fit for this improvement of their solitude.