

A SERMON
PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF
MR. JOHN CORBET,
THAT
FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST
WITH
HIS TRUE AND EXEMPLARY CHARACTER.

A
S E R M O N

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FUNERAL OF MR. JOHN CORBET,
§c. §c.

2 COR. xii. 1—9.

It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

It is but lately that we were here lamenting the loss of this city and the church of God, in the removal of an excellent saint: we are now come on the like occasion. It is a year of jubilee for holy souls, and a harvest for heaven. The ripest are

gathered, and the green and sour fruit is yet left on earth. But, oh ! what a heavy judgment is it, to the needy world, which wants such lights, as God is taking in. But we are not the choosers. It is well if we be obedient learners, and can follow such to life in the holy path.

The text read to you, hath so much matter of instruction that will excuse me if I scarce name the most. It is part of Paul's vindication against the accusers of his person and ministry, which were some erroneous judaizing teachers. He confesseth that glorying is an inexpedient thing, and sounds like folly ; but yet, in case of necessary defence, it may be modestly and sincerely done. Especially the opening of those divine revelations and gifts which make for the strength of the faith of others. The explication shall be taken in as we go.

Observ. 1. It is no new thing for the wisest and holiest of Christ's ministers to be accused even by the teachers of Christianity.

For 1. There are many erroneous teachers, that are confident they are in the right, and oppose the teachers of truth as if they were the erring men.

2. And there are worldly, proud, malignant hypocrites, who bring their unsanctified hearts into the sacred office, and manage it as men do common trades, but with greater enmity and strife.

3. And there are abundance of ignorant or half-wise injudicious men, who have self-conceitedness enough to be peremptory and confident, but neither knowledge nor humility enough to perceive their own weakness and mistakes.

Use 1. Therefore let it not become a scandal to you, if you hear some teachers accusing and vilifying others.

2. And think not that a minister is erroneous or faulty, merely because others, though of great name, do accuse him, or so represent him. It hath still been so, and while Satan is Satan, and man is corrupt man, and there is so much darkness, and so much worldly temptations, and cross interests, it will be so ; and preachers will be made the common and dangerous hinderers of preachers ; and where they have power, will silence them, and disgrace their work.

Observ. 2. Glorying or boasting, is in itself an inexpedient thing. It savours of pride, and selfishness, and folly, when it is not necessary and just. And therefore all Christians should be backward to it.

Observ. 3. Yet that which is so inexpedient, may, on just occasions, become good, and a duty.

That is, 1. When it is made needful to God's honour and the vindication and success of our ministry and the truth.

And,

2. When these are our true needs. And,

3. When we speak nothing but the truth.

Use 3. Oh, that men knew how great a sin it is, by their confident errors and rash accusations, to put Christ's ministers upon such a defence; much more to seek their silence and destruction.

2. And here you see that inconveniences will not excuse us from necessary duties; nor prove that all is unlawful which hath such. What is it in this confused and imperfect world that hath not its inconveniences. In government, both monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, absolute and limited, have their many inconveniences. In churches, the power of people and pastors, equality and subordination, riches and poverty, severity and lenity, to use discipline or neglect it, have their inconveniences. In worship, imposed words or free, and all human forms and modes have their inconveniences. In houses, a married life and a single, to have children and to have none, to have servants or none, to have much business or little, to be high or low, rich and poor, to rule gently or severely, have all their inconveniences. In our conversations, to be yielding or not, to converse with few or many, with high or low, to speak or to be silent, have all their inconveniences.

And yet there are men that on one side can silence Christ's faithful ministers by hundreds or thousands, and persecute the true members of Christ, and cast out true discipline, and corrupt the churches, and justify all this by urging some inconveniences. And there are others that can unchurch most churches in the world, and separate from their worship, and think the charge of inconveniences will justify all. And so we should have no government, no ministry, no worship, no families, wives, or children, or servants, no books, no trades, no food, no physic, if all mere inconveniences forbid them.

By this our instance, Solomon may be understood, what it is to be wise and righteous overmuch, some are so wise and righteous (materially, not formally) that they can find faults in all persons, all duties, all speeches, all actions, and on pretence of doing all better, would hinder us from doing what we can, and

undo all as if it were for amending. Not but that inconveniences may make actions sinful ; but the great part of christian prudence lieth in holding the balance, and trying wisely whether the good or hurt, the benefit or inconvenience do weigh down ; we shall never preach or pray, nor converse with mankind without some inconveniency.

Observ. 4. Divine revelations acquainting the soul with heaven, are matters most worthy of lawful, humble, modest glorying.

It was Paul's heavenly visions which he gloried in as his advancement, when he had mentioned his many persecutions and sufferings in the way.

These tend to that perfection and felicity of souls : in these men have to do with the glorious Jehovah, the angelic choir, the heavenly society, our glorified Head, our highest hopes, and matter of the greatest everlasting joys. Oh, if God would but give you and me this heavenly sight, and let us but once see what Paul saw, what little things would crowns and lordships seem to us when we look down from such a height ! What trifling should we think most of the bustles of this world ! What toys and dreams, their wealthy honour and sinful delights ! I should then say, ' Now I see what it is that we seek and hope, and suffer for, what it is to enjoy God and our Redeemer : and therefore now I know what it is to be a believer, a saint, a man indeed.' Oh ! what a help to mortification would such a sight of paradise be ? How easily should we after resist temptations, deny the flesh, condemn the world, and hate our sins. Oh ! how it would overcome all these distrustful trembling fears of death, and make us long, and groan, and cry to be with Christ. What life would it put into all holy duty. How easily should we bear our short afflictions. How would it mellow our sour, contentious minds toward one another, and teach us better whom to love and live in peace with, than pride and worldliness or faction will teach us.

Fellow Christians, though you and I may not expect such raptures and ecstasies as Paul's ; yet we have the gospel of Jesus, a divine revelation of this same heavenly glory ; not to be set light by, because we see it not ourselves. It is by the Son of God that saw it, and now is there preparing it for us ; it is sealed by a certain word, and the heavenly beams are sent down from him upon our hearts, to show it us, and lead us up. We are capable of a lively belief, of the full assurance of hope, of

the pledges, earnest, and first-fruits ; and of rejoicing with unspeakable, glorying joy. We are capable in our manner, and are sure of traffic for heaven, and with heaven, of sending up our treasures, and there conversing in spirit, as in the city which is our home, and hearing by faith the joyful harmony of the heavenly songs and praises of Jehovah. Here we are capable of such a powerful touch with the loadstone of divine love, or to have our spirits so refined and sublimated, as shall make it as natural to them to make upward towards Christ, and long for full and perfect union. Oh! had we lived as believers should have lived, how much more of heavenly-mindedness, and delight might we have attained than we have done. Oh! thank God for the gospel revelation, and beg grace to bring it in power on your hearts. And then, let worldlings take their earthly portions ; we can spare them all that hindereth not the gathering and edification of the church, and the heavenly interest of souls.

· **Observ. 5.** There is a third heaven and heavenly paradise, where are the concerns and hopes of holy souls.

Paul was taken thither up ; had he no interest there, no hopes, no friends, no business there ; why, then, should he have been rapt up thither ? How many heavens there be, and why it is here called the third ; I will not interrupt your more necessary thoughts, by conjecturing inquiries. Most say, the air is called the first ; the starry heaven the second ; and the place of the glorified spirits the third ; but these are vain conjectures. No man knoweth how many there be ; the globes or stars, are at vast distance from each other ; some great philosophers have been tempted to think, that world is infinite, as an adequate effect of infinite power, because God hath no unactive power ; all this is profane rashness. The heavens, which are our inheritance, are the place where perfect glorious spirits shall live in blessed society with Christ and one another ; joyfully beholding the glory of God, and feeling the delights of mutual love ; and yet there are different degrees of glory from the different degrees of the capacity of spirits ; whether also from any difference in the place, and communicating causes, we shall shortly better know : there are more sorts of spirits than we can now know. Though I know not how to receive Aquinas's doctrine, that no two angels are of the same species ; the diversity, as well as the incomprehensible glory and numbers, are unknown to us. Those that God employeth under Christ as his pursuivants,

messengers, and servants for his church, are called angels. Whether there be orders over orders, quite above angels, and how angels differ from the perfected spirits of the just, we know not.

As it is designed for saints, its glory consisteth,

1. In the glory of the place.
2. In the perfecting and glorifying the natures and persons that enjoy it.
3. In the glory of the heavenly society, Christ, angels, and saints.
4. In the glory of their high and excellent work, to love and magnify God for ever.

5. In the communication of the joyful love, and light, and life of God, upon these glorified spirits. Oh! what doth every one of these words signify! Is not this a paradise indeed, that is a place of purest, greatest pleasure?

Use 1. And are we not taught by such a glass as this, how great and how good a God we serve? Oh, look up to the heavens and see what he is by that which he hath made. Yea, it is said, (Psalm cxiii. 6,) that he humbles himself to behold the things in heaven, as well as upon earth. O sinners! what a God do you despise, neglect, and forget! and what a heaven do you sell for fleshly lust, and to feed a corruptible body for the grave! O Christians! what a God have we to serve and fear, and how zealously and purely should we serve him! What a God have we to trust and hope in, and how great a sin is it to distrust him! What a heaven have we to seek and hope for, and how cheerfully and constantly should we do it! Alas! our cold hearts, and slothful lives, and worldly cares, and sinking spirits, bescem not such a God and heaven. Were we designed but to inhabit the sun, or some resplendent star, how high is it above this earth? Shall we creep only on earth and feed on dust, and defile our souls as if we were preparing them by sin for hell, when we have a third heaven and paradise to look up to, and seek and hope for?

Doth Satan say, 'What is that to thee, that is so far above thee?' It is to us; it is the place where the glory of God is which we seek; where our glorified Head is. The place of holy spirits, whither also Enoch and Elias were translated; where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob live; whither Christ's Spirit went at death, and where he received the believing thief; where Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom, which Stephen foresaw, and to

which he was received. It is the place which we are set on earth to seek, dearly purchased, surely promised, to which God's Spirit is now preparing us, and of which it is our pledge and seal. Were it not for such an end and hope, how vain were man, and what a dream this world. Take heaven from us, and take our lives, our joys, yea, more than many such lives as these. Oh! that we could be more deeply sensible for what we are Christians, and for what we hope! what holy, patient, joyful Christians should we then be. But it is not a wavering belief, a divided heart, and a few cold, strange, and staggering thoughts of heaven that will do this as we desire it.

Observ. 6. Souls are not so closely tied to the body, but now they may be rapt up into paradise, or the third heavens.

When Paul could not tell whether it was in the body or out of it, it showeth somehow the soul was there, and that it is possible it might be out of the body.

Obj. If it were in the body, the body must go with it. If out of the body, it must leave the body dead.

Answ. It might be in the body, and not take up the body. If man were born blind, the lucid spirits, and a visive faculty would act only within, but as soon as a miracle opened his eyes, he would see as far as the sun and stars. And the sun sends down even its beams to this earth. Should God open this dark lantern of the body, we little know how far a soul may see without any separation from the body. Did not Stephen's soul in the body see Christ in glory?

And if it went out of the body, it followeth not that it must be separated from the body and leave it dead. When London was on fire, how high did the flame go above the fuel, and yet it was not separated from the fuel. A soul can stay in the body, and yet not be confined to it as a chicken in the shell, but may see, and mount above it to the heavens.

Use. Therefore think not of souls as you do of bodies, which are circumscribed in their proper places. We know not what formal thoughts to have of the dimensions or locality of spirits. Somewhat such *eminenter* they have, (for they have individuation and numeral quantity, and some passivity,) but not *formaliter* as gross bodies have. While the soul is in the body it worketh on it, and is a substance distinct from it, and such a form as hath also its own form, even its formal power or virtue, of vital activity, sensitive and intellective perception, and sensitive and rational appetite. It is active life itself, as the prin-

cept, it perceiveth itself, and loveth itself, it understandeth what other spirits are, by itself, it remembereth innumerable things past, it riseth up to some knowledge of God, it can seek, love, and obey him, and all this though not out of the body, yet above any efficiency of bodily organs. Oh! what a sad part of man's fall is it, to lose so much as the world hath done, of the knowledge of ourselves. And to begin to know ourselves, our souls, and how man differs from a beast, is the first part of recovering knowledge, leading up towards the knowledge of God, which is the highest.

O then, sirs, do not only own the heavenly dignity of souls, but use your souls accordingly. Are they good for no better than to serve the body in lust and appetite, and keep it in motion and some pleasure, or at least from stinking a while in the world? Sinners, hear and consider, if you wilfully condemn your own souls to bestiality, God will condemn them to perpetual misery. Yea, you do it yourselves, and pass from brutishness to the devilish nature and woful state.

Observ. 7. The things of the heavenly paradise are to mortal men unutterable.

That is,

I. Such as cannot be uttered. And,

II. Such as must not be uttered. It is not lawful to Paul that saw them.

Not that nothing of it may or must be uttered. Christ hath brought life and immortality to light. They are great things and glorious which are by him revealed. Enough well believed and used to overcome the temptation of this flesh and world, and to raise us to a holy life, and joyful hope, and comfortable sufferings and death. Christ best knoweth the just measure of revelation meet for earth. Candles must serve for narrow and dark rooms, and are more worth than all the gold on earth. The sun by day must not come too near us lest it burn us up, but send us its beams at the distance that we can bear them. And all souls are not here meet for the same measures, much less for that sight which the glorified enjoy. The pure in heart do see God, (Matt. v.,) and even here more than impure souls.

I. There is no human language that hath words fit to reveal that part of the heavenly things which God hath shut up from us as his secrets. Man's words are only fitted to man's use and to man's concerns, and not to angels and the secrets of heaven. We speak not a word of God himself, which signifieth formally

what God is, but only analogically or by similitude, and yet not in vain. Paul saw, and holy souls see, that which no human language can properly express.

2. And if it could, yet mortals could not understand it, no more than a language which they never heard.

3. And Paul had it revealed in a manner suited to his own use, and not in a manner meet for communication.

II. And it was unlawful also to utter it. 1. For God saw not all that meet for the dark world of undisposed sinners, which was allowed to one eminent saint.

2. Nor would he have so much more revealed by a minister than the Son of God from heaven had himself before revealed.

3. And the revelation is to be suited to the fruition. Full knowledge is fit only for those that must fully enjoy it.

Use. Therefore remember with what measures of heavenly knowledge we must be here content, so much as Christ hath revealed and is suitable to a distant life of faith. I have known some run into greater calamities than I will mention, by an expectation of visible communion with angels, and others by rash conceits of visions, dreams, and prophetic revelations; but the common error of Christians is, to content themselves with a feeble faith, (or at least get no better,) and then think it should be made up by somewhat like to sight or corporal sense, and to be unsatisfied because they know no more than by believing they can reach to. As if believing were but an uncertain apprehension, (with which we are unsatisfied,) and we are not content to live on that which God hath revealed, but we would fain know more, before we are ready for it; whereas we must explicitly believe all that is explicitly revealed, and implicitly believe and trust God for the rest.

We are here used to live by sight and sense, and the soul is strange to such apprehensions as are quite above sense and without it. And fain we would have God bring down the unseen things to these sensations and perceptions, and we would fain have distinct and formal knowledge of that which God hath but generally revealed. It is somewhat excusable for a soul to desire this, as it is the state of perfection to which we do aspire. But it is not well that we remember not more that sight and full fruition are reserved together for the life to come, and that we live no more thankfully and joyfully on so much as we may in the body by believing know.

Quest. What may we conjecture those things are which Paul had seen, and must not utter ?

Why should we inquire when they must not be uttered ? We may mention a possibility to rebuke our bold, unquiet thoughts.

Our souls would fain have not only analogical, but formal conceptions of the essence, substance, glory, immensity, eternity of God. Hope for much in heaven, but never for an adequate comprehension. But this is the very highest of all those things which are not to be uttered, and therefore not to be here attained.

Our souls would fain be perfect extensively and intensively in philosophy, and know heaven and earth, the spheres, or orbs, or vortices ; the magnitudes, number, distances, motions, and the nature of all the stars, and the compagination of the whole frame of being. But this is unutterable, and not here to be known.

Our souls would fain know more of the angelical nature ; what such spirits are, whether absolutely immaterial as mere acts and virtues ; or substances which are pure matter, and what their number and differences are, and how vast, and many, and distant their habitations, and what are their offices on earth or elsewhere ; and how much they know of us and our affairs, and in what subordination men, churches, and kingdoms stand to them, and they to one another, and how they are individuated, and how far one. But all these are unutterable, and locked up from us.

Our souls would fain know whether there was any world before this earth, and the creation of the six days ; and whether there was any spiritual Being, which was an eternal effect by emanation from an eternal cause, as light from the sun ; and whether the sun and stars are intellectual or sensitive, and exceed man in form, as well as in matter, and what the noble nature of fire is. But these things are unutterable, and so not knowable to us.

Our souls would fain have more sensible perceptions of themselves, as to their substance, and their separate state. Whether they are substances utterly immaterial ; how they are generated, how they subsist, and act out of the body, and how they do enjoy. How they are individuate, and yet how far one. How far one or not one with Christ, and one another. Whether they are divisible in substance as continued quantities, as well in number as *quantitates discretæ*. What place and limits do confine them (being not infinite). How far they have

still sensation; and how they see, praise, and enjoy God; and how they converse with one another; and how far they know the things on earth; and how their state before the resurrection differs from what it will be after; and how far the soul will be instrumental in the raising of the body. But all these are unutterable things.

We would fain know more of the decrees of God, and how all his acts are eternal, and yet produce their effects in time. How they are many, and yet but one, producing divers contrary effects. Many such things inquisitive nature would fain know which are unutterable.

But this must satisfy us :

1. That sinful souls, and dark, in a dark body, and a dark world, are not fit for so great a light, nor capable of it. It will put out our eyes to gaze so nearly on the sun.

2. That Christ hath revealed so much of the greatness and certainty of the heavenly glory, as he seeth meet and suitable to God's holy ends and us.

3. That the church hath so much clearer a revelation than the heathen and infidel world, as should make us thankful for our light.

4. That, if we believe the revelation of the gospel soundly, we may live a holy, joyful life, and die in the peace and triumph of our hopes.

5. That it is not by sight, but by faith that we must here live, in our wilderness expectant state.

6. That the more we cleave to God, and live by faith above the flesh and world whilst we are in it, the clearer and sweeter our apprehensions of heaven will be.

7. That God must be trusted implicitly about that which is yet unknown to us, as well as explicitly for what we know. And,

8. That what we know not now, we shall know hereafter, and the day is near. Let these things quiet our souls in health and sickness, though we are yet in darkness as to the unutterable things.

9. And always add, that what we know not, Christ knoweth for us, to whom it belongeth to prepare the place for us, and us for it, and to receive us. Had we but a friend in heaven whom we could trust, we could partly take up with their knowledge. Our Head is there, and the eyes that we must trust to are in our Head.

But how was Paul in danger of being exalted above measure, by the abundance of revelations ?

Answ. 1. It might have been above the measure meet for man in flesh, and so unsuitable to his present state.

2. It might have been unto sinful pride, as the angels fell from God, and as Adam fell, desiring to be as a God in knowledge.

Observ. 8. Even heavenly revelations may be made the matter and occasion of unmeet and sinful exaltation.

For, 1. It is the nature of sin to turn all our objects into itself to feed it. Not as they are without us *in esse reali*, but within us *in esse cognito*, the ideas in our minds. Austin saith, indeed, that grace is that *quo nemo male utetur*, but he must mean it, 1. As in itself. 2. And efficiently, grace never doth evil. But objectively in the idea or remembrance of it, it may be abused to pride.

2. And the greatest and most excellent objects as ours, give pride the greatest advantage. Heavenly revelations are far more excellent than gold, and dominion, and worldly pomp. Children are proud of fine clothes, and worldly fools of vain-glory, but saints may be more tempted to be proud of wisdom, holiness, and things above the reach of others.

3. And Satan knoweth how to fetch temptations from the highest, best, and holiest things, and his malice being as much against them as against us, he will be here most malignantly industrious.

Use. We see, then, that pride is such a sin as the holiest saint is not fully secured from; no, not when he hath been hearing unutterable words, and seeing the heavenly paradise itself, no, not if he come down from the third heavens, and bring his imperfect nature with him. Though he came newly from converse with angels, much more when he cometh from the most fervent prayers, or holiest meditations, or most heavenly and successful studies, and from hearing the most scraphic preacher, or preaching as such an one himself. He is not out of danger when he newly cometh from the most self-denying acts of mortification, or the greatest victory against temptation, or the greatest sufferings for Christ. What a sad description do Cyprian and Epiphanius make of the miscarriages of some confessors that had offered to die for Christ.

Let none, therefore, abuse the grace of Christ, and the doctrine of perseverance, by thinking that it sets him above all danger or fears of falling, unless he can say, that he is better than Paul was, and hath seen and heard more than he did in

paradise ; than Peter did with Christ ; and Moses and Elias on the holy mount. Oh, that this age did not loudly tell us, how much the real, or supposed knowledge of divine things may be abused to sinful exaltations. By one side, even by most famed teachers, to contempt of others, and lording it over the heritage of God, and racking and rending his church by their needless, yea, wicked, convulsive, imposing devices. And, by the other side, by hurtful, unwarrantable censures and separations, and speaking evil of the things which they know not. Have you heard and seen more of heaven than others ? Be, then, more holy, loving, merciful, and peaceable, and liker those in heaven than others. Read over and over James iii., show out of a good conversation your works with meekness of wisdom ; for the wisdom from above, neither befriendeth enmity to piety or peace, but is first pure, then peaceable, &c.

But how is Paul kept from being exalted above measure ? God gave him a thorn in the flesh. Note,

Observ. 9. God seeth our danger, when we see not our own, and saveth us from that which we saw not, or had not else prevented. Thanks to him, and not to us.

But how doth God do it ? By a thorn in the flesh.

Observ. 10. It is better that the flesh smart, than the soul be overmuch exalted.

No pain or suffering of the flesh, is so bad as pride, nor hath so bad effects.

Use. Why, then, do we so little fear exaltation ? How greedily do some religious people desire it. How impatient of any thing that crosses it, and humbleth them. How little do they lament it, and confess it. Is pride so rare, or so small a sin, even among preachers and zealous men ?

And why do we so much fear every thorn in the flesh ; every sickness, pain, or cross, as if pride could be prevented, or killed at too dear a rate ? And why do we quarrel with God for our sufferings, as if our disease were not so bad as his remedy. Who ever heard you in health cry out of your pride, as in sickness you do of your pain. It is a happy thorn, which lets out this corrupt and pestilent blood.

But what was this thorn in the flesh of Paul ?

Answ. The Greek word signifieth, a sharp stake, pale, nail, stub, or thorn, or any such sharp thing, that runs into the flesh, as it falls out with barefoot travellers, among such thorns and stubs.

It is strange how many expositors came to take up that injurious conceit, that it was fleshly lust ; which hath not the least colour in the text.

1. Lust would be rather likened to a fire or itch, than to a thorn.

2. It would be called an alluring, rather than a buffeting.

3. Paul had a life of labour and suffering, which would keep down fleshly lust.

4. This thorn is given him, as sent from God, to save him from sin ; but where is God said to give men lust, to save them from pride.

5. This thorn was the buffeting of a messenger of Satan ; but it is not like, that Satan could so excite lust in Paul.

6. Paul prayed thrice, that it might be taken from him ; it is not like, that Satan could so follow him with lustful motions, and that Paul would not have mentioned fasting, and other means of cure.

7. God doth not yet say, that he will yet take it from him ; but under his weakness, manifest his sustaining grace, which sounds not like an answer of a prayer against lust.

8. Paul is vindicating his ministry against accusers, by mentioning his infirmities, that is, his bodily sufferings and his revelations ; and is the telling them of his lust a meet means for this ?

9. It is called his weakness, which is his usual title for his sufferings ; but you may see, (Rom. vii.,) that he calleth lust by more odious names.

I doubt not, but it was some bodily suffering which was this thorn ; but whether by persecutors, or by a disease, is the chief doubt ; many think that it was by persecution :

1. Because it was by a messenger of Satan.

2. Because wicked men are, in Scripture, likened to thorns.

I more incline to think, it was a fit of some violent pain in the flesh, and most likely the stone, (or some such thing,) which, indeed, is a tormenting thorn in the flesh. For,

1. We read of his frequent persecutions ; but never that he so named them, or that he so much prayed against them ; but rejoiced, as Christ bids such, with exceeding joy. (Matt. v. 11, 12.) And when he and all the apostles so much exhort believers to rejoice in sufferings for Christ, is it like he would here tell men how he prayed against it

And as to the reasons for the contrary sense :—

1. Wicked men are called thorns, as hurtful ; and so are other hurting things. Christ had a crown of thorns on his head ; (John xix. 5 ;) and Paul must feel one in his flesh. Any thing hurtful is likened to thorns. (Job xli. 2 ; Prov. xxvi. 9, and xxii. 5 ; Hos. ii. 6, and ix. 6.)

2. And Satan is, in Scripture, usually mentioned as God's executioner, even in trying his children. It was into his hands that Job was put ; hurting work is fittest for an evil and destroying angel. He would sift the apostles as wheat, by outward affrighting, as well as inward tempting. However, suffering it was.

Observ. 11. A thorn in the flesh is one of God's means to keep the best from being overmuch exalted.

You have heard, that the best may need it ;

1. And the flesh hath so much hand in our sin, that it is fit to bear its part of suffering.

2. And it is the most ignoble part, and therefore its suffering hath less of hurt, and less to signify God's displeasure. Soul sufferings are the sore sufferings ; and it is the soul that is the chief agent in our duties ; and, therefore, where it is spared, we are least disabled for God's work, and our communion with him.

3. And the nearness of body and soul is such, that God can use the body to keep the soul in a humble, and a safe condition.

Use. Mistake not the nature and meaning of the flesh's suffering. Grudge not at God, if he exercise thus his greatest saints. Wonder not if the best men have sharp persecutions, pinching wants, and painful sickness, a long and sharp tormenting stone, or other such like thorn in the flesh.

1. It is but the flesh, in our brutish part ; common to beasts. If flesh must die and rot, why may it not first feel the thorn.

2. We grudged not at that health, and youth, and ease, and pleasure of it, which was the danger and temptation to the soul ; why, then, should we grudge at the pain, which tendeth to our cure.

3. If you feel not the need of suffering, you know not yourselves. Did you know your pride, and overmuch love of flesh and ease, you would say, that pain is a physic which you need, were it but to help on your willingness to die.

4. Pain here depriveth us of none of our true felicity ; it

hindereth not God's love to us ; it keeps us not from heaven ; Lazarus was in a fairer way than Dives. It takes nothing from us, but what we covenanted to forsake for Christ.

5. Do we not find that we are better when we suffer, than when we are high ? Were religious people better when victories and successes did lift them up, than they have been in their sufferings ? Did they live then more humbly, peaceably, and heavenly ?

6. The thorn will soon be taken out ; flesh will not endure long, and therefore this pain will not be long. A few more painful nights and days, and the porter which we fear will break open our prison doors, and end these weary, grievous sufferings.

Use 2. And think not the thorn is a mark, that such are worse than others. Paul was not worse ; and shall we censure such as he ?

Use 3. But let us all know the use of suffering ; what cure hath this medicine wrought ? Blessed be our wise and gracious Physician, we find it a powerful, though unpleasant remedy. It keepeth Lazarus from the sins of Dives ; from living a worldly, sensual life, and loving the prosperity of the flesh, instead of heavenly, true felicity. It keepeth us from a beastly living to our appetites and lust ; which would divert and deprave the spiritual appetite. It keepeth us from being deluded by worldly flatteries, and looking for a portion in this life, and laying up a treasure on earth, and from growing senseless and impenitent in sin. It awakeneth the soul to serious expectations of eternity, and keepeth us as within the sight or hearing of another world ; and tells us to the quick, that we must make ready to die, and to be judged, and that we have much more to do with God, than with man ; and for heaven, than earth. It taketh down pride, and all excessive respects to human approbation ; and keeping us still in the sight of the grave, doth tell us what man's body is, *mors sola fatetur, quantula sunt hominum corpuscula.* Juv. What faithful soul, that hath been bred up in the school of afflictions, doth not by experience say, that it was good for him ? How dull, how proud, how worldly might we else have been, and trifled away our lives in sloth and vanity.

And it is not for nothing that our thorns (or nails) in the flesh, are kin to the nails that pierced our Saviour on the cross.

and that we tread in his steps, and as cross-bearers are thus far conformable to his sufferings.

Be patient, then, under the pain, and careful to improve it, and thankful for the profit. And let not the soul too much condole the flesh, as if it had not at hand a better habitation and interest. It is but this "vile body;" (Phil. iii. 9;) lent us for a little time, as our clothes till night, or as our horse in a journey; when we have done with them, be content of God's separation; and till then, let us not take our corrector for our enemy. I groan too much, Lord; I complain too much; I fear too much; but my soul doth acknowledge the justice, and love, and wisdom of thy dealings, and looketh that this thorn should bring [forth sweet and happy fruit, and that all the nails of my cross being sanctified, by the blood of my crucified Redeemer, should tend to make me partaker of thy holiness.

But who put this thorn into Paul's flesh? It was one of Satan's messengers.

Observ. 11. The sufferings of the holiest persons in the flesh, may be the buffetings of a messenger of Satan.

No wonder; he that hath got somewhat of his own in us all, defiling us with sin, if he also may answerably be permitted to afflict us. He possessed many in Christ's time, and it was devils that made them dumb, and deaf, and mad; whom Christ at once delivered from devils and diseases. He is called the accuser and destroyer, and he that had the power of death, (Heb. ii. 14,) whom Christ by death and resurrection conquered. Christ calleth his healing the palsy-man the forgiving of his sin. And James saith, upon prayer and anointing, the sick should be healed, and his sins forgiven. And for the cause of sin, many Christians were sick and weak, and many fallen asleep. I cannot say, that good angels may not hurt men, and execute God's judgments; but Scripture maketh evil ones his ordinary executioners.

Use. Therefore it is no proof, that a man is not a child of God, though the devil have permission to torment his flesh. "The devil shall cast some of you into prison." (Rev. ii. 10.)

Please God, and Satan hath no power; and Christ will take out the thorn ere long, which Satan is permitted to put in.

But how doth Paul endure the thorn? He prayeth that it might depart from him.

Observ. 12. The best men are sensible of the suffering of the flesh, and may pray God to take it from them.

Grace doth not make the flesh insensible, nor separate the soul from it, though it set us above it; nor make us despise it, though it show us a higher interest and better habitation, and teach us to bear the cross, and resign the body to the will of God. A godly man may groan under his pain, and take it as a fruit of sin, and an act of the chastising justice of an offended Father, and pray against it as hurtful, though not as a remedy. They that ignorantly dispute that because Christ hath suffered all our punishment, therefore there is no penal hurt in pain or death, confute themselves if they complain under it, or pray against it, or desire such prayers from the church or any. Yea, one use of the thorn is to awaken and quicken us to prayer, like Jonas's storm.

Use. Go, then, to God in all affliction, but not with carnal, discouraged hearts. He maketh you thus feel the need of his mercy, that you may, with the prodigal, think of home, and cry for mercy, and abuse it no more. Christ did not blame the blind and lame for crying out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on us;" nor the Canaanite woman for begging for the crumbs. Is any afflicted, let him pray, and send for the elders' prayers. The thorn in the flesh will make us feel; and feeling will teach us to repent and pray, and prayer is the means of hope for the deliverance of body and soul. Grace maketh us not stupid, yet there are some that think a man behaveth not himself like a believer, if he cry and pray that the thorn may depart. What think they of David, in Psalm vi. and xvii. and lxxxviii., and many more? What think they of Christ, that prayed that, if possible, the cup might pass by him. He did it to show that even innocent nature is averse to suffering and death, though grace makes us submit to the will of God. (We continue men when we are believers.) We must mourn with them that mourn, and yet not love others better than ourselves, nor feel their thorns more sensibly than our own. We must neither despise chastenings, nor faint.

But how doth Paul pray? Doth he make any great matter of his thorns? He besought the Lord thrice that it might depart.

Observ. 13. Even earnest and oft prayer is suitable to sharp afflictions.

There is a kind of devils and, so of Satan's thorns, which go not out by fasting and prayer; no, not by Christ's own apostles.

The sense and means must be suited to the malady. God can do it upon one prayer, or upon none; but we are not so easily fitted to receive it.

And Paul, in this also, is conformed to Christ, who, in his agony, prayed thrice against his cup, though with submission.

Use 1. You see here that the apostles' gift of healing was not to be used at their own wills, not for their own flesh that it might not suffer, but for the confirmation of the faith, when it pleased the Holy Spirit. Trophimus and Epaphroditus might be sick, and Timothy need a little wine with his water, though Paul had the gift of healing.

Use 2. O let our pains drive us all to God: who hath not some? Sickneses are all abroad: what house, how few persons have not some; and yet is there a prayerless house or person? If faith have not taught you to pray as Christians, methinks feeling should teach you to pray as men. I say not that prayer must shut out food and physic; but food and physic will not do, if prayer prevail not with the Lord of all.

Use 3. And think not thrice or continued praying to be too much, or that importunity is in vain. "Christ spake a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not wax faint." (Luke xviii. 1.) Whether God deliver us or not, prayer is not lost: it is a good posture for God to find us in; we may get better if we get not what we ask. Obey and pray, and trust God.

But what answer doth the Lord give to Paul's thrice praying. He saith, "My grace is sufficient for thee, and my strength is manifested in weakness."

1. It was not a promise that the thorn should depart.

2. It seems to be rather a denial at the present, and that Paul must not yet be cured of his thorn; for it is called a weakness that must continue for the manifesting of God's strength: and what was the sufficiency of grace and strength for, but to endure and improve the thorn?

3. But this promised grace and strength is better than that which was desired.

Observ. 14. Even oft and earnest prayer of the greatest saint for deliverance from bodily pains, may not be granted in the kind, or thing desired.

For, 1. We are not lords, but beggars, and must leave the issue to the donor: and God hath higher ends to accomplish than our ease or deliverance. It is meet that he should first fit

all his actions to his own will and glory, and next to the good of many, and to his public works in the world, and then look at our interest next.

2. And we are utterly unmeet judges of matter, manner, time, or measure, what God should give us for the body, and how much, and how, and when. When should we be sick, or pained, or persecuted, or die, if all our prayers must be absolutely granted? We know not how much better God is preparing us for by pain, and bringing us to by dismal death. He will not keep us from grace and glory because our flesh is loth to suffer and to die.

3. And this Paul also was conformed to Christ. He was heard in the thing that he feared, when, in his agony, he prayed with strong cries; but it was not by the removing of the bitter cup, but by divine strength and acceptance. And so it is with Paul; sufficient grace and strength to bear is the thing promised.

Use 1. We see, then, that they are mistaken that think Christ's promise of giving believers whatever they ask, will prove him a breaker of his promise, if the strongest believer receive not all that he asketh for the body. Was not Paul a strong believer? All that God hath promised, and we are fit to receive, God will be sure to give.

2. Let not unbelief get advantage by God's not granting such prayers for the body. Say not, 'Why, then, is it my duty to pray?' 1. You know not before-hand but God may give it: possibility bids you beg. 2. Why did Christ pray against his cup? 3. You lose not prayer; you draw nearer God; you exercise repentance and desire; you signify your dependence; you are prepared for much greater gifts.

Observ. 15. When God will not take the thorn out of our flesh, and deliver us when we pray, from bodily sufferings, he will be sure to do better for prepared persons, even to give them his sufficient grace, and manifest his strength in their pain and weakness.

It is not for want of love or power that he lets us tumble on our beds in pain, or lie under slanderers' or persecutors' rage. He that with a word could make the world, with a word can save from all this. But if we suffer not, how shall suffering graces be exercised; faith, patience, self-denial, and hope? Is not grace better than ease or life? How shall we get the benefit of

suffering if we feel it not? How shall grace and divine strength be manifested to ourselves and others?

Quest. What is it that grace is sufficient for?

Answ. 1. Not to set us up above the frailties of humanity and mortality, nor to raise us to the joy that souls in heaven have. 2. Not to every one alike, but in our several measures. Some fear pain and death more than others: some have greater patience and joy, and long to depart and be with Christ.

But to all the faithful it shall suffice, 1. To keep them from revolting from Christ, and repenting of their choice and hope. 2. To save them from charging God foolishly, as if he did them wrong. 3. It shall keep them from damning despair. When Satan sifteth them, Christ's intercession shall keep their faith from failing. Grace shall humble them, and save them from sin, and the flesh, and world: they shall cast soul and body upon Christ, and trust him in hope in their several degrees: and those that have been more believing, heavenly, and fruitful than the rest, are likeliest to have the greatest peace and comfort, especially in their greatest need.

Quest. And how is God's strength manifested in our weakness?

Answ. 1. It is manifested to ourselves, by keeping us from sin, and sinking into despair, and enabling us to bear, and trust, and wait, and usually in the peace or joy of hope. We know we are insufficient for this ourselves. When flesh and heart, as natural, fail us, God is the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever. (Psalm lxxiii. 26.) We do not think oft before that ever we can bear and overcome, as grace enableth us.

2. And it is manifest oft to others, who shall see that power of grace in the sufferings of believers, which they did not see in their prosperity.

Use 1. Let not, then, our own weakness and insufficiency too much distress us with fears of suffering and death; yea, when we feel the thorn, let us not forget our help and strength. By grace here is meant, the loving and merciful help of God, especially giving us the inward strength by which we may not only bear, but improve the sufferings of the flesh. This body was not made to be here incorruptible or immortal; we were born in sin, and therefore born to pain and death. We have lived in sin, and no wonder if we live in sorrow; but the sufferings of our Redeemer have sanctified our sufferings. The cross is not now

such a cursed thing as guilt had made it. "He took our suffering flesh and blood, that he might destroy by death the devil that had the power of death, and deliver us who, by the fear of death, were all our lifetime subject to bondage." (Heb. ii. 14.) Our pain prepareth us for endless pleasures, and our sorrows for our Master's joy. When we have suffered with him, we shall reign with him: he liveth, and we shall live by him: he is risen, and we shall rise by him: he is in glory, and we must be with him.

In the mean time, his grace is sufficient for us, not only in health and ease, but in all our pain and sickness. He is not so unskilful or unkind, as to give such physic to his own, which shall do them more harm than good. Though it be grievous at the present, it brings forth the quieting fruit of righteousness; but we must first be exercised therein. Let us not, then, be his impatient patients; grace can support us and overcome. Men are not sufficient: our wit, our power, our worthiness are not sufficient; but God's grace is sufficient. If ease and life had been better than grace and glory, we might have had them; but God giveth us better than flesh would choose. Though the body be weak, the head weak, the memory weak, the stomach weak, and all weak, yet God is strong, and his strength will support us, and bring us safe to our journey's end. Lazarus lay among dogs, in weakness, at the rich man's doors, but the angels conveyed him in strength to Abraham's bosom. We must lie, and languish, and groan, in weakness, but Omnipotence is engaged for us. We must die in weakness, but we shall be raised in power, by him who will change these vile bodies, and make them like to his glorious body, by the power by which he can subdue all things to himself. (Phil. iii. 20, 21.) Let us, therefore, "lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees;" (Heb. xii. 12;) looking to Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross.

And let us beg more for divine grace and strength, than for the departing of the thorn. Grace is better than ease and health. If the soul be a nobler part than the body, the health of it is more desirable. Bodily ease is common to brutes and wicked men: strength of grace is proper to saints: ease and health in this life are short, but holiness will be everlasting. Health fits us for fleshly pleasure, but holiness for communion with God. Oh, pray not carnally, for the flesh more than for the Spirit, for earth more than for heaven! Pray, that while

the outward man is perishing, the inward man may be renewed day by day; and that our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, may work for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the temporal things which are seen, but at the eternal things, which are unseen to us. (2 Cor. iv. 16—18.) Why should we grudge at any sufferings, which are for the glory of God's grace and strength: as Christ said of Lazarus, "This sickness is not unto death (that is, the end of it is not to end his life, though he die) but that the glory of God may be revealed." So pain and death are not God's ends, but the manifesting of his grace and strength.

But, alas! It is not only the flesh that is weak, but grace itself; (as it is in us, though not as it is in God and of God;) nor is it flesh only that hath the thorn, but the heart or conscience also hath its part. The spirit of a man (if sound and well) will sustain (his bodily) infirmities: but a wounded spirit, who can bear? If faith were not weak, if hope, and love, and desire were not weak, the weakness of the body might well be borne. If sin and guilt were no wound or thorn in the soul and conscience, we could be more indifferent as to the flesh, and almost as quietly bear our own pain and death, as our neighbour's. Though it is hard to say as *Tertullian*, *Nihil crus sentit in nervo, cum animus est in celo*; yet our content and joy would overcome the evil of our suffering. But, alas! when soul and body must be both at once lamented, this, this is hardly borne! Lord! seeing it is thy sufficient grace, and not my bodily ease which I must trust to, and my weakness must manifest thy strength: O let not grace also be in me insufficient and weak! O let not faith be weak, nor hope, nor love, nor heavenly desires and foretastes be weak! Nor patience and obedience weak! Head is weak, and heart is weak; but if faith also be weak, what shall support us: at least let it be unfeigned and effectual, and attain its end, and never fail. Flesh is failing, and health (as to its proper strength) is failing. But be thou my God, the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. And whatever thorn the flesh must feel, yet let me finish my course with joy. Amen.

I have run over many things in a text so suitable, that I could not well spare any of them. Those that well knew our deceased friend, will say, that except Paul's extraordinary rapture, and apostolical privileges, in Paul's case I have been describing his.

I come not to gratify the interest of any of his relations, to speak to you according to custom of a stranger whom I knew not; but for the honour of God's grace, and our own edification, to tell you what I knew by my most faithful and familiar friend. It is almost forty years since I heard him preach in the city of Gloucester; there was his entrance, and there he lived, (under a papist bishop of the Protestant church, Godfry Goodman, as his last testament in print professed,) there he abode during the civil wars, and wrote the history of what happened there. He was after removed to the city of Chichester, and from thence to Bramshot in Hampshire, where he continued till 1662, when, silenced with the rest, he was cast out. He lived peaceably in London, without gathering any assembly for public preaching. Dwelling in Totteridge with Alderman Web, his great love drew him there, to remove to me, with whom a while he took up his habitation. In all the time that he was with me, I remember not that ever we differed once in any point of doctrine, worship, or government, ecclesiastical or civil, or that ever we had one displeasing word.

The king's licenses encouraged his old flock at Chichester to invite him thither, though they had the help of another nonconformist before, with whom he joined with love and concord. God many years afflicted him with the disease that was his death; while the pain was tolerable to nature, he endured it, and ceased not preaching till a fortnight before he was carried up to London to have been cut. But before that could be done, in about a fortnight more he died. This is the short history of his course.

But I will next give you his true character, and then tell you how like his case was to Paul's here in my text, and then tell you to what use I do all this.

I. He was a man so blameless in all his conversation, that I may say as I did here lately of another (Alderman Ashhurst) that I never heard one person accuse or blame him, except for nonconformity, and that difference from others in these divided times, which his book expresses. Of which more anon.

II. Were it not that I have said we never differed, and so made myself an incompetent judge, I should have said that I thought him a man of great clearness and soundness in religion, much by the advantage of the calmness and considerateness of his mind.

III. He was of so great moderation and love of peace, that

he hated all that was against it, and would have done any thing for concord in the church, except sinning against God, and hazarding salvation. In the matter of the five articles, or arminianism, he went the reconciling way, and I have seen a compendium of his thoughts in a manuscript, which is but the same with what I have delivered in my Cath. Theol. but better fitted to readers that must have much in a few words.

He constantly at Totteridge joined in all the worship with the public assembly, and had no sinful, separating principles. He was for Catholic union, and communion of saints, and for going no further from any churches or Christians than they force us, or than they go from Christ. He then preached only to such neighbours as came into the house between the times of the public worship. He was for loving and doing good to all, and living peaceably with all as far as was in his power. Something in episcopacy, presbytery, and independency, he liked, and some things he disliked in all; but with all sorts lived in love and peace, that did seek the furtherance of men's salvation. Many parts of conformity he could have yielded to, but not to all, nothing less than all would satisfy.

IV. In all he was true to his conscience, and warped not for a party's interest or faction. If all the nonconformists in England had refused, he would have conformed alone, if the terms had been reduced to what he thought lawful. And he studied that with great impartiality.

V. He managed his ministry with faithfulness and prudence: he took it for heinous sacrilege to alienate himself from the sacred office to which he was devoted, though men forbid it him. But he thought not the same circumstances of ministration necessary to all times and places: he was not for open preaching to great numbers, when it was like by accident to do more hurt than good: nor yet for forbearing it, when it was like to do more good than hurt. He spared not his flesh, but held on from year to year under his great pain of the stone in the bladder, till within a month before he died. Much less would the prohibition of any restrain him, to whom God gave no such forbidding power.

VI. He served God with self-denial, not with any selfish or worldly designs: he never looked after preferment or riches, or any great matters in the world: he had daily bread, and was therewith content.

VII. He suffered his part in our common lot, 1662, Aug.

22, (ejected and silenced with about 2000 more,) with as little murmuring as any man that I knew. I never heard him dishonour the king, nor speak much against those by whom he suffered, or rip up their faults, unless a rare and necessary self-defence be called an accusing them. I never heard him so much as complain how much church-maintenance he was deprived of, nor of the difficulties of his low, dejected case.

VIII. He was a great hater of that base pride and envy, which possesseth too many of the sacred office, who grudge if others be preferred before them; and if the people go from them to others for their greater edification, and think themselves wronged if they be not followed and applauded, either above, or equal with more worthy men: he was very careful to preserve the reputation of his brethren, and rejoiced in the success of their labours, as well as of his own, and a most careful avoider of all divisions, contentions, or offences. And he was very free in acknowledging by whom he profited, and preferring others before himself.

IX. He was very much in the study of his own heart, by strict examination, as his cabinet-papers, which may come to light, make known, as I had also occasion otherwise to know.

X. By this examination he was confidently assured of his own sincerity in the true love of God, and of holiness, for itself, and such like evidences which he wrote down renewing his examination as occasion required: and though he had known what it was to be tempted to doubt of the life to come, he was fully settled against all such doubts and temptations.

XI. But though he had a settled assurance both of the truth of the Gospel, and the life to come, and of his own satisfaction and sincerity: yet, so lively were his apprehensions of the greatness of his approaching change, and the weight of an everlasting state, and what it is to enter upon another world, that he was not without such fears, as in our frail condition here, poor mortals that are near death are liable to. And indeed, fear signifieth a belief of the word of God, and the life to come, much more than dull insensibility: but he signified his belief both by fear and hope, and strong assurance.

XII. He had the comfort of sensible growth in grace. He easily perceived a notable increase of his faith, and holiness, and heavenliness, and humility, and contempt of worldly vanity,

especially of late years, and under his affliction, as the fruit of God's correcting rod.

I have truly given you the description of the man, according to my familiar knowledge. I shall yet review the similitude of his case with this of Paul described in my text.

I. Paul was accused by envious, contentious teachers : and so was he ; though I never heard any one person else speak evil of him ; as is said, they that upbraided not Paul with his former persecution, nor had any crime to charge him with, yet accused his ministry : as they said of Daniel, " We shall find no fault against him, except it be concerning the law of his God." His preaching and writings, though all for peace, were the matter of his accusations : the bishop blamed him for preaching, even when the king had licensed him : and a nameless writer published a bloody invective against his pacificatory book, called ' The Interest of England,' as if it had been written to raise a war. The enemies of peace were his enemies.

II. He took boasting to be inexpedient, as Paul did : and when he was silenced as unworthy to be suffered in the ministry, he once offered a modest defence to the bishop, and wrote a short and peaceable account of his judgment about the sin of schism, in his own vindication.

III. He had (though not the extacy of Paul, yet) great knowledge of things divine and heavenly to have been the matter of his glory.

IV. The heavenly paradise was the place of his hopes, where he daily studied to lay up his treasure, which had his chiefest thoughts and care.

V. He found by experience that an immortal soul is not so tied to this body of flesh, but that it can get above it, and all its interest and pleasure, and live on the hopes of unseen glory.

VI. As he knew the incapacity of mortals to have formal and adequate conceptions of the state of the heavenly paradise and separated souls ; so he submitted to God's concealing will, and lived on the measure of gospel revelation.

VII. He knew the danger of being exalted above measure, by occasion of holy knowledge ; and how apt man is to be so puffed up.

VIII. God himself saved him from that danger, by his humbling, wholesome, sharper remedy.

IX. A thorn in the flesh was God's remedy to keep him in a

serious, humble frame ; three great stones were found in his bladder, and one small one in a corrupted kidney ; and how painful a thorn these were for many years, it is easy to conjecture.

X. Satan was permitted to try him as Job, not only by the pain of his flesh, but also by reproaches, as aforesaid, and by casting him out of his ministry, as unworthy to preach the gospel of Christ, unless he would say, swear, and do all that was by men imposed, and the rest of those afflictions, which are contained in such an ejected, impoverished, calumniated state, are described in the late and former experience of many such.

XI. Though I never heard him pray against poverty or reproach, yet for the liberty of his ministry he did, that he might preach that gospel of salvation. And pain forced him to have recourse to God, for deliverance from the thorn in his flesh. And if Christ and Paul prayed thrice with earnestness, no wonder if continued pain made him continue his suit to God.

XII. As Christ was heard in the thing which he feared, and yet must drink that cup, and Paul, instead of the departing of the one, was promised sufficient grace, and the manifesting of God's strength in his pain and weakness ; so it pleased not God to take away the thorn from our dear brother's flesh ; but he did better for him, and gave him his supporting help, and an increase of grace, and showed his own strength in all his weakness ; and also hastened his final deliverance, beyond expectation.

And now he is past all, at rest with Christ, and all the blessed. We see not them, but they see God and God seeth us, and is preparing us for the same felicity ; and if it be by the same means, and we must bear the cross, and feel the thorn, it will be wholesome and short, and good is the will and work of God. Lord, let me not account ease, honour, or life dear to me, that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry received of the Lord, and come in season and peace to thee.

And is not this providence of God, and this example of our deceased friend of use to us ? Yes, no doubt, of manifold use.

I. It is of great use to all the land, to good and bad, to observe God's threatening in the removal of his servants. Oh ! how many excellent Christians, and faithful ministers of Christ,

have been taken hence within a few months ; the same week we hear of four or five more besides our brother, and some of them the most excellent, useful men. And, is it not time, 1. To repent of our neglect of such helps as God is now removing? 2. And to be presently awakened to use them, better before the rest be taken away? Alas ! poor souls, what a case are you in, if you die, or the word be taken from you, before you are regenerated, and prepared for a better life. It is not so much their loss and hurt, as yours, which Satan endeavoureth in silencing so many hundred such ; and it is your heavy punishment, more than theirs, which God inflicteth by their death. O speedily repent, before that death have stopped the mouths which called you to repentance. And it should awaken the best to prepare for death, and for public suffering ; it seems there is some great evil to come, when God thus takes away the best. Yea, if it should be a forerunner of a better state, yet all, save two of the old stock, that dishonoured God in the wilderness, must fall, and it was by bloody wars, (a dreadful means,) that Joshua, and the new generation, were to possess the land of promise.

II. It is of use to us, unworthy ministers of Christ, who yet survive, 1. It calleth loudly to us, to work while it is day, for our night is near, when we cannot work ; death will shortly silence us all more effectually than men have done. Do Gods work prudently, do it patiently, peaceably, and in as much concord, and true obedience, as you can ; but be sure you do it, whoever forbid it, or be against it, as long as God or yourselves have not rendered you incapable. Whatever silencers say against it, necessity is upon you ; God calls for it, souls call for it. The charge is dreadful ; (2 Tim. iv. 1, 2;) your vows call for it ; Satan's malice, and the number of soul-betrayers and murderers must provoke you ; our time is short : souls are precious : Christ the chief shepherd dearly purchased them, and will judge you according to your works. It will not justify your neglect to say, ' Men forbade me : sufferings were prepared for me : bishops and famous divines wrote learned books to prove that preaching was to me a sin, and that I was bound to forbear it when forbidden.' 2. And it telleth us, that we, as well as others, must prepare for the sharpest trials from God ; no thorn in the flesh so sharp and painful, which we may not feel ; no death so violent or sudden, but we may undergo : love and hatred are not known by outward events, prosperity, or adversity. A great difference Solomon acknowledgeth between the

good and the bad, the righteous and wicked; him that sacrificeth, (or worshippeth God,) and him that doth not; him that sweareth, (perjuringly, or profanely,) and him that feareth (such) an oath; some are loved of God, and some are hated. And this difference is manifest in such disposals, even of prosperity and adversity, as tend to their greater holiness and happiness, which shall manifest the difference fully, and for ever; but outward events manifest it not in themselves; all such things come alike to all; yea, the cross is more laid on the godly, than the wicked. O therefore, away with the two disciples' desires of church-preferment, and worldly dignity, and prepare to drink of Christ's cup, and be baptised with his baptism. (Eccles. ix. 1—3; Matt. xx. 22, 23.) Learn daily how to bear slanders and persecutions from men, even from christian teachers; and how to lie in fleshly pains, night and day; and how to die: and all this in faith, and peace, and joy, at least in the quiet hope of everlasting joy.

III. And without any disgracing, or provoking design, but merely in conscience and compassion to the souls of the people, and of our reverend brethren themselves; I do humbly entreat the right reverend, and reverend imposing clergy, to lay by awhile, if possible, all unrighteous prejudice, and partiality, and worldly interests and respects, and consider that they also must die, and as they will stand to it at last, to resolve these questions:—

I. Whether those terms of church concord and peace be wisely and justly made, which are too narrow to receive such men as this (for faith, knowledge, peaceableness, blamelessness, holiness, &c.) into the ministry, communion of their church, or to endure them out of a jail? Whether wise and good men could find no better? And whether Christ ever directed the church to exclude such, or did not plainly require the contrary? And whether the apostles ever excluded such, or made such rules?

II. Whether they think in their hearts, that it were better all the good were undone, which hath been done by non-conformists these eighteen years, to the ministerial furthering of knowledge, repentance, holiness, and salvation, than that such should have preached the gospel when forbidden?

III. Whether it will be peace to your consciences at the judgment of Christ, that any of you have furthered the silencing of such, and their other sufferings?

IV. Whether they that have written and preached against their preaching, or for their silencing, and the execution of the laws against them, or persuaded them to give over their work themselves, and reproached and accused them for doing it, be not engaged in this frightful cause ?

V. Is it not gross partiality, if you will cherish men of ignorance, viciousness, or far less worth, while such as these are thought intolerable, merely because the former are more obedient to you, than fear of sinning will suffer these to be.

VI. Was that church therein guided by the Spirit of Christ, which made the canon which *ipso facto* excommunicateth such ?

VII. If you had known as many of the (about) two thousand silenced, and as well as I have done, how much of the grace of God shined in them ; is it possible, that any man, that hath the true fear and love of God, and sense of everlasting things, could ever, by any pretences of church government or order, or upon any bias of interest, have consented to their silencing and sufferings ?

Some will think, that in partiality, I over magnify men, because they were of my own mind and party. I have, (besides some pious women,) written the characters, and published the praises of divers, of Mr. Richard Vines, Mr. John Janeway, Mr. Joseph Allen, Mr. Henry Stubbs, Mr. Wadsworth, and now Mr. John Corbet, and lately one layman, Alderman Ashhurst ; and he that hath now received them, whom such as you cast out, or vilified, knoweth that I have in knowledge of them, and love to Christ, whose grace shined in them, spoken simply the truth from my heart ; and it is in a time and place, where it is fully known, and feareth no confutation ; and the history shall live, to the shame of church-dividing, tearing principles, and all thorny, hurtful dispositions, and to the encouragement of the faithful, and the imitation of those that in time to come shall by faith, patience, and well-doing, seek for immortality, and eternal life, by serving our Redeemer, and pleasing God.