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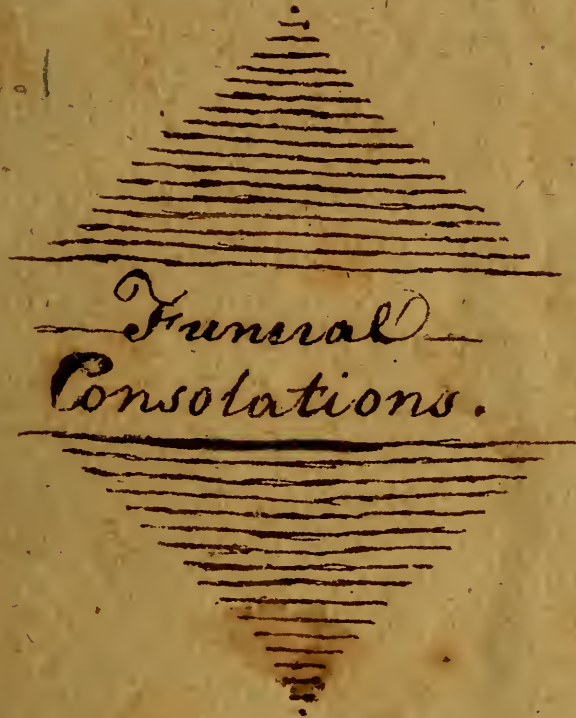
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FROM

JOHN xiv. 28.

*If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said, I go  
to the Father.*

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## FUNERAL CONSOLATIONS.

JOHN XIV. 28.

*If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said, I go to the Father : For my Father is greater than I.*

I PRESUME it is unknown to very few of this assembly, under what mournful circumstances I now appear in this place ; or what that sorrowful *occasion* is, which in the choice of these words I have regard to, and *which* (by a due consideration of them) I desire to be relieved under.

The words are a very proper *lenitive* for assuaging the immoderate sorrow of christians, upon the death of their lamented pious *friends* ; a time when nature *melts* into tears, overwhelmed with a swelling *tide* of grief, which is hardly kept within the bounds either of reason or of grace, Alas ! when our withering *gourds* are smitten of God, especially if with a sudden and early stroke, we are ready to think with *Jonah*, *we do well to be angry*, or to fret and pine : On this grievous occasion we hear little else but the voice in *Ramah*, *lamentation and weeping*, *Rachel weeping for her children*, (or friends) *and refusing to be comforted, because they are not*. So that it must be a very powerful argument indeed, that can charm the tumultuous spirit of a deep mourner into a calm moderation of his anguish.

And if there be any argument in the world sufficient in the case, no doubt but our Saviour has *chosen* it here, who urges his disciples with a mighty *dissuasive* from too much grief : and this *taken* from that which was the very root and spring of it, *viz.* their unfeigned *love* to him.

The case was in short this : our Lord *Jesus* was now about to die, and was taking his farewell of his disci-

ples ; Yet, says he, *a little while, and ye shall not see me* ; and again, *whither I go ye cannot come.\** Upon these melancholy tidings, their hearts were sore troubled : no wonder if they were loth to part with so kind a friend, or to lose so dear a *Master* ; such a wise guide and profitable teacher ; especially since they were like to be left in a very forlorn case, as a poor naked prey to the rage and hatred of a blind and malicious generation. They seemed content to die along with him, if that might be ; *Why cannot I follow thee ? I will lay down my life for thee,†* was the language of one and all of them ; but they could not bear the thoughts of a disconsolate separation.

Our Lord, seeing them thus dejected, endeavours to cheer and hearten them : *Let not your hearts be troubled ;‡* or do not take on and grieve so, but hearken to what I have to say for your consolation : And then he applies several arguments to this purpose, *viz.* from his design in going to *prepare a place*, where he and they might forever live together ; *I go to prepare a place for you ; I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.¶* A reviving consideration ! that they should one day meet their dear friend again, and that their separation was to be but for a while. Well, but for all this, death makes such a vast distance between friends, and we know so little of another state, that the disciples seemed to doubt, whether ever they should meet again if once they parted : They knew not whither he was going, nor the way to follow him : Thomas saith unto him, *Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way ?¶¶* In answer to this *Christ* tells them, he was the *Way, Truth, and Life ; i. e.* that the sure way to follow him to heaven, was by a due observance of his doctrine and precepts, as being the Ambassador and Representative of God to men, to deliver his mind on earth : For this he desires their belief ; at least, if they would not take his word, they might be satisfied from *his works*, which shewed

\* John xiii. 33. † John xiii. 37. ‡ John xiv. 1.

¶ John xiv. 3. ¶¶ John xiv. 5.

the *Father* did dwell in him. *Then\** he argues from the great advantage they would reap by his removing to heaven, to intercede for them, and to send down the *Holy Spirit* upon them.

But, lest all this should not quiet them, he has one argument more in reserve, in these words of my *text*, and that the most moving that can be ; in which he desires them, *if they loved him*, that they would not so much mourn as *rejoice* at his departure : intimating, that he would take it for a proof of their love to him, if they would mourn less. They thought, doubtless, they shewed love to him in grieving for his death ; and it may seem strange, that *Christ* should put such a contrary interpretation upon their friendly sorrow, or should require so unnatural a thing of them, as to rejoice for his departure : What, (might they think) shall we rejoice at so amiable a friend's removal from us ? Or can we be glad that we shall see his face here no more ? No, it is impossible ; we have no heart, no disposition to be glad in this sad season : therefore he adds a reason to back this great *paradox* ; *viz.* because he was *going to the Father* ; that is, to be rewarded and glorified by *him* who was *greater than himself*, and so was able to exalt him ; which could not be without leaving them : Therefore, says he, *If ye love me, ye should rejoice, because I told you, I was going to the Father.* Hence I lay down this proposition,

*That true love to our departed pious friends, should prompt us to rejoice at their translation hence to heaven.*

I know indeed there were peculiar reasons why the disciples should rejoice at *Christ's* departure to the *Father*, *viz* because by it he should do them more beneficial service, than by his stay. *It is expedient*, says he, *that I go away : For if I go not, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you †* But these are not the *motives* our Lord *Jesus* argues from in the text ; this were to argue from their own interest, or love to *themselves* ; whereas he argues

\* John xiv. 11.

† John xvi. 7.



here from their pure *love to him* : supposing themselves were to receive no advantage, but present loss by his death, yet for his sake, they should rejoice at his happiness in going to the *Father*. So that it is an argument as truly applicable to the case of any other holy friend's departure, when on *our part* there is real love and affection to them, as the spring ; and on *their part*, it can be said truly, that they go to the Father, as the ground and matter of this joy.

In speaking to this point, I shall, *First*, Shew the meaning of our Saviour's words. *Secondly*, The force of his argument.

*First*. I shall consider the meaning of our Saviour in these words, both negatively, and positively.

*First, Negatively*. 1. It was not Christ's meaning, by these words, to say, that there was no real *love* at the bottom of his disciples' great sorrow for his death ; or that there was no true love, where there was not visible joy on this occasion. That would have been an hard interpretation indeed of their *friendly* grief : They knew it was from love that their grief sprang ; that if they had not loved much, they had sorrowed less ; they were ready to make the appeal to him, *Thou knowest that we love thee*. Indeed he saw so much *love* in their sorrow, that it made him argue thus with them ; *If*, or seeing, *ye love me*, &c. *q. d.* I see you love me, and are expressing your tender affection to me, by your mournful countenance and words, which shew your regret of my departure ; *since* then love so prevails and works, let me argue with you from that *prevailing* passion : without extinguishing or discouraging it, let me direct it into a right course, and then that *love* which now makes you grieve, shall much more make you to rejoice. He does not question but supposes their love, in these words.

In like manner, neither must it be said, that there is no *love* to our departed friends whose decease we lament with a flood of tears : it is past the power of any man in the world to convince us of that ; for we feel our love as plainly as we do our grief : And indeed our grief is nothing but our disappointed unsatisfied love ;



nay, it was from our Lord's own weeping over dead *Lazarus* that it was said, *Behold, how he loved him.*\* It is love makes us feel the pain of an heart-rending separation, between us and an amiable friend: It is *love* makes us miss the wonted desire of our eyes, its *once* so pleasant object: Why else do men weep chiefly for relations and friends whom they love, if love do not influence grief?

2. Nor does our Lord intend to intimate, that all such sorrow for our holy friends' departure is an unlawful, or unbecoming expression of our love. Doubtless he was not displeased to see his disciples tenderly affected with his removal, and that he was like to die lamented of some. He who shed tears at *Lazarus'* grave, with sighs and deep groans, cannot be thought to forbid them wholly at his own: therefore he does not chide his disciples with angry reproaches, as though they were wholly in the wrong, but softly and tenderly reasons the matter with them in gentle persuasions; *Let not your hearts be troubled*; as rather pitying their sorrow, than altogether condemning it. He who knows our frame will indulge the weakness of our frail natures a little in this thing, and will allow us to pay a small tribute of *tears* to the precious memory of an endeared friend; and to utter our parting *farewell* with an unusual accent of sorrow. Why should we not weep, when we are sure *we shall see their faces no more*? Since for that very reason the *christians* of *Asia* wept sore at Paul's leaving them; and they of *Cæsarea*,† on the prospect of his dying, (though somewhat remote) did weep, both to the breaking of their own hearts and *his* also. Indeed that same apostle, who seems to speak most against sorrow for the death of *christian* friends, aims not at more than to make some abatement of the usual excesses of grief among the Pagans. *Sorrow not as others, that have no hope.*‡ How that was we may learn in *Deut. xiv. 12.* it was with violent rage, like mad-men under the tyranny of a passion to whose excesses they abandoned themselves without check.

\* John xi. 36.

† Acts xxi. 13.

‡ 1 Thes. iv. 13.

Especially where the relation is *nearest*, (I mean the conjugal) and the separation most violent, there God will permit us to shew the deeper sorrow because he allows greater affection. He that requires such love to the *wife of our bosom*, especially, when the *wife of our youth* too, as to bid us, *rejoice with the wife of thy youth, let her be as the loving hind, and pleasant roe*; be thou *ravished with her love always*.\* Again, *husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved his church* †: And again, *So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies*. He, I say, knows well that so much love cannot (according to the *make* of human nature) but end in great grief, at the dissolution of that near relation.

And though the ancient *patriarchs* were men very renowned for their mortification to the comforts of this world, being truly *pilgrims* on the earth; yet methinks, I find holy *Jacob* expressing such a sensible sorrow for the death of his *Rachel*, many years after, as shews that *wound* was not yet quite healed to his dying day: *As for me*, says he, *when I came from Padan-Aram, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan by the way, when yet there was but a little way to Ephrath, and I buried her there*.‡ He bemoans himself under the sense of his loss, *as for me*, or *that which sticks by me*, in a very sensible remembrance still; *that which I am greatly concerned at, and cannot forget, &c. as for me*, or as to my sorrowful part, *Rachel died by me*; and there I buried my greatest earthly delight. It is no unusual thing with good men, to lament under such circumstances: *Ezekiel's* case was particular; he was forbid§ to mourn for his wife, on purpose to amaze the people with his strange carriage; that they might ask the meaning of so monstrous and unusual a thing, as not to mourn for the taking away the *desire of his eyes*: And it was to represent the greatness of their approaching calamity, that would be so great as to swallow up all private occasions of grief.

More especially may it quicken our sorrow, when we apprehend such a stroke to be the *punishment* of our

\* Prov. v. 18.

† Eph v. 25, 28.

‡ Gen. xlviii. 7.

§ Ezek. xxiv. 16, 21, 22.

iniquities, which withhold and withdraw good things from us ; when we have reason to put that interpretation upon *God's hand* in the death of our dear relations, which she did on the death of her child, that it was *to bring our sins to remembrance* :\* In this case, grace falls in with *nature*, and, by uniting their two streams, the torrent of grief becomes the more violent : For who can look upon his dear friend whom he has pierced and slain, and not mourn bitterly ? But,

*Secondly, Positively,* That which Christ intends here, is,

1. That at least his disciples should mix some joy with their sorrow for his death ; he does not say, *If ye loved me, ye would not grieve, but, ye would rejoice* ; there should be some joy to allay and moderate their sorrow. And indeed, as these two easily consist in the same breast, so there is a proper occasion for this mixture and confusion of our passions, in the death of our pious friends ; because in such dispensations, there is both a bright and cloudy side ; the one in their gain, the other in our great loss : *so that in the multitude of our troubled thoughts within us, there are comforts that may delight our souls* ; † and with David we should have our hearts tuned to sing of mercy and judgment at once. ‡

2. He intends to intimate, that their rejoicing should be *more* than their sorrow upon this occasion : for though he speaks not *exclusively*, in requiring them to rejoice, yet he speaks *comparatively* at least, that they should *rather* rejoice than mourn : joy should be our principal exercise, so that if it be inquired what our frame and carriage is, under such a Providence, it may be said we rather rejoice and triumph, than are dejected. True indeed, an external wanton mirth in jollity and laughter, would be a monstrous *deformity* ; but rational joy and satisfaction is a comely christian temper, that well comports with the gravity of such an occasion.

\* 1 Kings xvii. 18.

† Psalm xciv. 19.

‡ Psalm ci. 1.



3. He suggests further, that to rejoice on such occasions is the most regular and *noble* exercise of love to such departed friends ; it is the most *genuine*, and regular exercise of love ; since the nature of love is to incline us to a joyful congratulation of the prosperity of its endeared object : and it is then it carries most evidences of a *love unfeigned*, when we rejoice in our friend's welfare, though no benefit (but rather damage) redounds to us thereby.

To say the truth, inordinate grief for the translation of a friend to heaven, is no proof at all of any love we bear to them, because it is not their case affects us, but our own : so that all which can be said of us in justice is, that we love ourselves *very well*, whatever we do our friends ; yea, much *better* than we love them, since our own lesser loss causes a trouble, which the thoughts of their much greater gain cannot balance ; so that we are liable to that reproachful challenge, *Is this thy kindness to thy friend ?* Our cheerful satisfaction will better declare that.

And it is far the most *noble*, as well as most genuine exercise of love ; it is a poor ordinary frame to mourn for our dead, as arising from mere sensitive nature : one needs no improvement of mind in order to this ; there needs neither *philosophy* nor *christianity*, virtue nor religion, to teach us this low lesson ; but to *rejoice* in their happy change, to be glad that they are laid in a bed of everlasting rest, whilst we suffer the loss of their pleasant society, this is generous and truly noble love ; this is such an ingenuous greatness of mind, as is only the product of divine faith and christian hope ; which regulates our love, and raises it to so high a pitch, as nothing below the grace of God and the light of the gospel can advance it to. *So much for the explication.*

II. I come next, under the *second general*, to shew the force of our Saviour's *reason*, by which he justifies his inference, *viz.* that *if they loved him they would rejoice*. Now the reason on which he grounds this, is in these words, *because I go to the Father, who is greater than I ;* i. e. to one who would and could exalt and reward him : *q. d.* I am going to be happy and glorious, to a



blessed place, and blessed company, where I shall have no need of your pity or sorrow, and therefore on this consideration you should greatly abate it.

Now allowing for the difference in the glorious rewards and exaltation of our Master, and of his servants, the reason may be extended to others, and has its force in the death of any pious friend: for they also go to the *Father*; the spirit goes to *God who gave it*; not only as the spirits of the wicked, viz. to be disposed of by him, but the holy christians' spirit goes to him, as to his liberal *rewarder*, to see him, and enjoy him, to dwell and converse with him, in that blessed *acquaintance*, which shall never be broken off to eternity; for they go to the same place with their Saviour, *where I am, there shall ye also be*,\* and shall have a mansion in the same Father's house.

Now let us consider what there is implied in all this, that should raise joy upon the departure of our holy friends, in all that rightly love them. Now there are three arguments or grounds of joy which arise hence.

*First*, This implies that our pious and dear friends, though dead, are not utterly extinct and lost: for they only go to the *Father*: they pass from one place and company to another, but are not sunk into the black *abyss of non-existence*. It was but a slender consolation which the heathen philosophers often offered to their mourners, in telling them, that *dead men, indeed, enjoy no good, but neither do they feel any evil*. Indeed, supposing them lost in an utter *extinction*, it is all the comfort we have left concerning the best men; whereas we can only allow *that* to be true of the body; *this* having lost the active animating principle, is *neither* miserable nor happy; *now* like an useless *idol*, it has *eyes* but cannot see, *ears* but cannot hear, and *feet* but cannot walk; it has lost its beautiful *air* and regular motions, and all its sensations of pleasure and pain. But we believe better than so of the *invisible principle*, that this has still the pleasure of life and activity about nobler *objects*; that immortal *tenant* is only removed from a

\* John xiv. 3.

crazy cottage of clay, to a more excellent dwelling *not made with hands*. This indeed is better tidings than what sense reports ; *that* represents them as lost forever, but *faith* tells us, they are but translated : the *one* says, Joseph is utterly devoured by an evil beast, and now *is not* ; by the *other*, we understand he is *safe* and well in another land. This is so mighty a *lenitive* to our grief (which we owe chiefly to the gospel of Jesus Christ) that the apostle sticks not to say, that *he has even abolished death,\** by making this discovery of a future life. Here is then matter of joy, to think that our friends are not perished in the frightful shipwreck ; but as we have sometimes seen the same boisterous waves that break the vessel, do but waft the passenger over to the safe shore ; so death has *landed them safe* on another coast, whose frail bodily vessel is dashed into pieces. No wonder if Rachel refuse to be comforted, if she think her dead children *are not* in being ; but blessed be God, it is not so, for all, even the dead, † *live to God*, though not with us ; they *live*, yea, and they act, and think, and love more busily than ever.

It is with them as with the *sun*, who at evening leaves our *horizon* under disconsolate darkness, and some very foolish persons may think its glory buried and *extinguished*, when it is only gone to the other *hemisphere*, and there shines with as much *beauty* and brightness as ever. Methinks this consideration should make us say as old Jacob, when on good tidings of Joseph's welfare he began to revive : *It is enough, he (or she) alive is ; ‡* it is enough to put us into a transport of joy, to read what our blessed Lord said for the support of *Martha*, when grieved for her brother *Lazarus'* death, *I am the resurrection and the life ; he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.* § Well then, we learn from our Saviour's argument here, that the *surviving christian* has this to say for his comfort, that his dead friend is not rased out of being ; he has shot the gulf,

\* 2 Tim. i. 10.

‡ Gen. xlv. 28.

† Luke xx. 38.

§ John xi. 25, 26.

but is not lost in it. Be not then terrified at their death ; it has killed their body, but could not kill their *soul*.

*Secondly*, This consideration, *that they are gone to the Father*, implies, that they are unspeakably more happy, where they *now* are, than they were, or would have been, if they had continued *here*. This *Christ* plainly intends in the words, *viz.* that he should *change for the better*. It is better being with God *above*, than with their friends on earth ; because,

1. They are hereby *delivered* from our (and once their) troubles. They who pass out of our *Egypt* do certainly go out of a place of great *bondage*, and shake off a mighty *load* of cares and fears, and many uneasy burdens, which, *being* in this tabernacle, they groaned under. The occasions of grief here are so many, either *originally*, or by sympathy, our own, that of most who are departed hence may that account be given, *These are they who came out of great tribulation* : they are gone off from an accursed earth, *doomed* to bear briers and thorns to the torment of man. Their life was but a *tragedy* filled with sighs and groans, not counterfeit but real ; how many provocations to grief or anger filled their eyes with tears, and their mouths with complaints ? One while crying with the *Shunamite's* child, *My Head ! my Head !* and anon with the prophet, *O my Bowels ! my Bowels ! I am pained at my very heart.\**

But *now* there are no *thorns in the flesh* to disquiet them ; they are no longer harassed with *painful diseases* or feeble sickness, with faintings or weariness, or with ungrateful *remedies*, that could neither prevent the frequent alarms, nor the *one* fatal stroke of death. Nay, it is a great part of their deliverance, that they have *now* no frightful views of approaching dreadful death ; *the king of terrors*, with his train of black attendants, will return to them no more ; they are got out of his dominion, they have felt his sting, they have shot the *amazing gulf*, have no more dying *groans and sobs* to fetch, nor *parting agonies* to fear, which terrify us mor-

\* Jer. iv. 19.



tals, who have that conflict yet to go through. These melancholy things with *them* are over and past ; now the weary body is at rest in its *bed* ; the grave is a quiet *sleeping place*, where all is *hush* and still, peace and silence ; *the clods of that valley are sweet unto them.*\* There they have found a *quiet harbour*, where they have *unladen* all their burdens and sorrows ; there they have buried their cares and anxieties ; there they have lodged an *aching head*, or tortured bowels, or pained *limbs* ; that was the goal at which their wearisome race and pilgrimage had its happy end.

Nor are they liable *now* to those *spiritual sorrows* which once disquieted their *tender souls* ; they have no *doubts* of the love of God, for they know and feel it abundantly ; no more an aching heart about their *eternal* condition, saying, *What shall I do to be saved ?* for they have heard, *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into thy Master's joy.* They have no more despondent suspicion of their own *sincerity* towards God, no lamented indispositions to his holy service, *no spots nor wrinkles* to render them a shame or burden to themselves ; they fetch no more such deep sighs as that, *Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death !*† They have no more such bitter challenges as those, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? and why so disquieted within me ?*‡ They are satisfied with God's *likeness*.

They see no *abominations* in that holy land, to cause them to sigh and mourn ; the evil *serpent* enters not their *paradise*, to tempt any to sin : their righteous souls are not *vexed*, with seeing or hearing any filthy or miserable thing : no *groans* of the oppressed, nor *cries* of the persecuted ; no *tragical relations* from our *Aceldama* ; no reports of *this* great slaughter, and *that* mighty desolation, which make up the *history* of this earth, and gain the applauses of the theatre ; no such doleful *tidings*, nor mournful *spectacles*, disturb their quiet felicity.

\* Job xxi. 33. † Rom. vii. 24. ‡ Psal. xlii. 11.



Much less are they grieved for *those consequences* of their death, that now trouble us ; it grieves not them that they have quitted *our world, or company* ; they are not sorry they have left their worldly *possessions* and estates, that the pleasant *places* of their habitation must know them no more ; it wounds not them, that they have left their *once* dearest friends in mournful sorrow, crying after them, *My Father ! my Father !*\* It troubles not them, that their *once* so beloved *offspring* are become exposed *orphans* in the world ; no, as *their sons may come to honour, and they know it not ; so may they be brought low, and they perceive it not.*† They mind not these petty troubles of ours ; it grieves not them (however it may us) that their *comely countenance* is turned to ghastliness and deformity, and their flesh become an habitation of *worms*, that once had a more noble inhabitant : they are not moved at lying in the dark and *solitary vaults* among the dead, nor at the gnawing of *those worms that will die*. We mention these things, or ruminare upon them with *melancholy* thoughts, but so do not they.

Nor have they any other sorrows, *in exchange* for these of the lower world ; no, they have no more any pain, or sorrow, or crying ; *they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, &c. for the Lamb shall feed them, and lead them to the fountain of living waters : and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes.*‡ In a word, it is their *Jubilee*, it is the year of their eternal *release* from all evil, in which they have not only cast off their *bonds and fetters*, but have also put off their *armour* ; have laid by the *shield of faith* and *helmet of hope*, and are sat down in everlasting perfect peace, in the *land of praise and joy*, into which they have carried no discordant complaints. Is not this a great motive to our joy when they are gone ? why should we grieve much for *them*, who grieve not at all themselves ? or, why should *rivers* of *tears* run down our eyes, when God has *wiped away all tears* from theirs forever ?

\* 2 Kings ii. 12.

† Job xiv. 21.

‡ Rev. xxi. 4.—vii. 16, 17.

2. By going to the *Father* they enter into exceeding great joy ; they have not only left *Egypt*, but they have got into the good land of promise : they have not, indeed, all the felicity intended for them ; there are some ornaments and glories which they must not put on nor wear, till the *marriage-day of the Lamb* ; but yet the lines are fallen to them in pleasant places, and they have already a *goodly heritage* ; enough to warrant us to say, that *henceforth they are blessed*,\* because some reward of their works has followed them at present. They are got into their *Father's* house, to their best and dearest friend ; he, who at their penitent return to him, (when they said, *I will go to my Father, &c.*†) was so ready to meet them with compassionate embraces, to call for *the ring and fatted calf*, and to assure them of his gracious acceptance on earth, has, doubtless, with inexpressible kindness welcomed them to their *everlasting* home. He who before gave them the *earnest*, has now given part of the *inheritance* ; in his good pleasure he has given them the kingdom : their master has bid them *enter into his joy*, and they have put on the *garments of praise*, for the *spirit of heaviness*.

They are gone to a blessed *place*, to a paradise of eternal delights ; are got nearer to the *heaven of heavens*, the royal palace of the King of glory, where the *high and lofty One* dwells in *inaccessible* light, and fills *that temple* with his magnificent train ; where he has erected a *throne* on which infinite Majesty forever resides, at whose *dazzling* brightness the *seraphims* hide their faces, and pay their homage with the greatest veneration ; *where* infinite *beauty* unveils its face to open view, where it amazes, ravishes, and overcomes *myriads* of attentive spectators ; its attractive *charms* draw and fasten all their eyes so, that they never look off from that *amiable object*, they always behold him ; ‡ where they need no books of *devotion* to warm their hearts, one view of his *ineffable glory* being instead of

\* Rev. xiv. 13.

† Luke xv.

‡ Matt. xviii. 10.

a thousand arguments, and wraps them up in the flames of ardent admiring love.

They are gone to blessed *company*, where all are most *holy*, most *wise*, good and happy ; a society made up of the choicest and most *excellent of the earth*, whom God has been gathering together out of all the generations past, and has made *much more* excellent than they were ; all of them *Kings* and *Priests*, and sons of God ; all knit together in the indissoluble bands of *truest love*, which is ever cherished by the engaging *charms* of intimate endearing converse ; so that they are dearer to each other, than ever our *friends* were to us, or we to them on earth. Oh ! what a surprising change is this to them, who, from a world made desolate by prevailing rage and malignity, find themselves gotten into the very *element* of love ! How then can it be but well with them ! for they are gone to *Mount Sion, the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of the Just made perfect, and Jesus the Mediator of the new-covenant.\** They are with the Redeemer in his kingdom, and in a noble *concert of spirits* sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, *Hallelujah, salvation and glory to our God.* They, blessed souls, have all their *wants* supplied, all their needful *desires* satisfied, and their *hopes* fulfilled or well secured ! They inherit *all things*, for God is their portion forever : *Him* they now see and *know* in clear light, and if their faith did not satisfy them, their *sight* now does, which has cured all their deadness and coldness toward him, and has set all right forever.

They are gone to a state of *perfect knowledge, and unstained purity* : They are in a near conjunction with the *Father of lights*, that *eternal fountain* of all truth ; from him their *elevated understandings* receive those vigorous *rays* of divine wisdom, which do both *beautify* and refresh ; the greatest philosophers, who have

\* Heb. xii. 22, 23



made the most successful *essays* upon all the theories of nature, nay, Solomon himself, who had wisdom enough to reach from the *cedar in Lebanon, to the hyssop on the wall, in all the glory of his wisdom*, was not like to one of *these* ; he that is *least* in that kingdom above, is *greater* than he ; *there they are, truly, as wise as the angels of God* ; all their imperfect *partial* knowledge is done away, because *that which is perfect is come*. They have found the way out of those labyrinths, in which we are *mazed* and lost ; and found their joyful victory over a thousand doubts and difficulties. which, after all our *laborious disquisitions*, do pose and confound us mortals : they have found the happy way of *increasing knowledge*, without *increasing sorrow* : how many doubts are with them resolved ! how many mistakes corrected ! how many unknown secrets revealed ! O glorious and *ample* prospect, that from the Mount *Moriah*, the Mount of *Vision*, has opened itself to their clear and satisfying view ! Truly their light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing to behold it.

No less is the pleasure of their perfect holiness, or the exercise of *consummate love*. There is even now a very sweet *relish* in the exercises of a devout mind, while with David he is but *panting after God, as the hart after the water-brooks* ; the soul feels an hidden pleasure in that divine *warmth* ; it is marrow and *fatness* to it, and renders a day in God's courts *better than a thousand* : but it is a much *more* noble thing to love as those *blessed* do, who enjoy and see the *God of love*, and clasp about that infinite *eternal good*, with the brightest flames of ardent, unwearied zeal. How delightful is it to exercise that *love* in high admirations, and to *give it vent* in the transports of endless praise ! How pleasant to serve so *endeared* an object, with a mind cured of all its *infirmities*, and disentangled from all *impediments* ! and above all, how satisfying to behold in themselves so lively a conformity to *him*, whose matchless *excellencies* have so many *myriads* of delightful admirers !

And is not here great *reason* why we should rejoice for them ? Does not *love* teach us to be glad at our



friend's felicity? Oh, my *brethren*, can we indeed with seriousness contemplate the heavenly glory of the saints, so amazing, so unspeakable glory, and not be transported, to think and hope that our beloved dear *friends* are there? Sure, if with Paul we had ever been taken up into the *third heaven*, and had heard things not to be uttered; or if, with St. John, we had in vision surveyed the *New Jerusalem* in all its glory, and heard the charming melody of the *Hallelujahs* sung in her streets; or had ever beheld triumphant saints walking in white robes, with palms in their hands, I say, sure we should be ashamed to weep for them who are there. Look up, *christians*, and see if these be objects of lamentation. What? they that have a *paradise* to dwell in! that have a *kingdom* to enrich them! They that have *angels* to converse with, and an *infinite God* to enjoy! are these to be condoled? No, no, the more we loved them, the more we shall rejoice, because it is so very well with them. Would we indeed recal them from all this bliss and joy, unto a partnership of our tears and groans, our sins and darkness? What! from the possession of all those great things, beyond what our *eye ever saw, or heart conceived*, but yet their eyes do see, and their hearts do rejoice in? Have we such a grief as would dispossess our friends of heaven? Verily, whatever we pretend, this is not from *real love*, for that principle is not so injurious.

When they were on earth, they often wished for a release from this vain life; had they had *wings as a dove*, they had flown away sooner, and been at *rest*. They often went up to Mount *Pisgah*, as Moses, and gave many a longing look towards the promised land; desires and groans were the *harbingers* they sent before their arrival: and now that they have obtained their wishes, we ought rather to congratulate than bewail them: but by no means to wish them back again into the estate that was *once* so uneasy to them.

We have no reason to think that they look back in their *hearts* to our *Egypt*, for we ourselves find many temptations to desire a discharge, and be gone; and

should we be so unkind to our *delivered* friends, as to wish them a *burden* which ourselves would throw off?

The truth, in short, is, we quite forget whither they are gone, (either through unbelief or inconsideration) and so, like Jacob, we mourn for Joseph as lost, when, at the same time, he is Lord over all *Egypt*; or we think of them only with relation to ourselves, and our own want of them, without a regard to *their* good, else it would not be so hard to rejoice for them: for why should we lament their great *deliverance*? or, why should we *hang our harps* on the mournful willow, when they have taken theirs into their hands, into the joyful *choir* of blessed spirits?

3 This consideration, that *they are gone to the Father*, affords us another ground of joy, in that they are gone to the *same* place, where we *ourselves* (if such as they) are hastening to. This is what Christ intimated more than once to his disciples, that they shortly should go to the *same place*,\* and *same Father*, to possess the *mansions* prepared for them in *his* great house: and here it was that their *love* might find matter of great joy. It is the *separation* of our friends from us that grieves us; that we and they must divide into such a *distance*, as admits no more sweet and delightful *converses*: We are ready to say with *Thomas*, *Let us also go, that we may die with him*; † or, with *Ruth* to *Naomi*, *where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried*; as being loth to be parted by death itself. Let us but have their amiable society, whatever it costs us: this our desire is in great measure granted; God will indeed remove them from us, but then it is to *that country and city*, where we ourselves design to settle forever. They are gone, but it is to the same *harbour* which we are bound to, and are upon our voyage for; nay, where we ourselves have already *cast anchor*, by a stedfast hope, though we are not yet landed, as they are. Do we not profess ourselves to be pilgrims on this earth, and that *heaven* is our only *home*? Is it not your real hope that you

\* John xiv. 3.

† John xi. 16.

Ruth i. 17.

shall one day take up your rest in that city of God? If so, whither then could we wish our *friends* to be gone but where they are? Would we not have them to be there, where we may hope to find them again? We are leaving this world ourselves, and if *they* leave it not too, how should we hope to dwell together again? Were they always to have continued here, we could not have staid to enjoy them long; but where they are, we hope to find them again, and to enjoy them forever. That is the place, to which God, the great *Arbiter* of our lot, has adjourned our *next meeting*, where there are *mansions* (not tabernacles) enough; one for Moses, one for Elias, and another for us, I mean for our holy *friends* and ourselves too, which our common Master has prepared.

So then we have this to comfort us, that we know *whither* they are gone, and the *way we know, to follow them*; so that there is nothing else to trouble us, but only that we removed not together: and yet if we and they were in a foreign country on earth, how easily could we send them home some weeks before us, and be glad to hear of their safe arrival? It is much the same case, when they go to God before us, while we are following them; so that we are hoping heaven shall bring us together again: *there* we shall soon meet our dear and pious relations, like the meeting of Joseph and his brethren in Pharaoh's court, with joy and love enough; we shall surely find them somewhere, among the multitudes, coming either *east* or *west*,\* to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, whither ourselves hope to be admitted: And this ought to revive our hearts, as something like it did very much affect the *heathen orator*,† when he cried out as one in an extasy, *O! præclarum diem! &c.* "Oh! glorious day indeed, when I shall come to that assembly of divine spirits!" If a *pagan* could, with so lofty a rapture, think and speak of *that* blessed day, when he expected to meet with the souls of the famous *heroes*, and wise *philoso-*

\* Luke xiii. 29.

† Cicero.



phers, (when yet his expectation was only supported by probable *conjecture*) how much more should it elevate the heart of an assured christian, into the warmest transport of gladness, to think of the day when he shall meet with the patriarchs and prophets, and all the members of the church of the first born, and his *own* endeared friends among them ?

And the *rather*, because that *last mentioned text* seems to suppose a particular knowledge, who those *blessed* are that we shall then converse with, and what relations they stood in, in this present world ; for if *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, shall be then so distinctly known, why not others also ? And if they are known to others, surely, it is known to themselves that they were *grandfather, father, and son*, who once dwelt together as heirs of the promise, in the *same* tabernacles on earth ; no knowledge, nor love shall be *lost*, but what is imperfect and useless.

We shall not indeed (in all probability) carry with us any sensitive *ideas of face or features* into another world, but shall put off these with the body, because they seem *useless*, since there will be no *counterpart* of these to answer them, by *which* to know our friends again in that world ; no, not at the *resurrection itself* ; because their bodies will be wonderfully transformed, not to be known by what they were *formerly* on earth, in their vile condition : I only say this is *probable*, because I will not pretend to certainty in *so dark a case*, or to see into the *shadow of death* ; for I know not what *subtle vehicle*, or fine clothing, the soul may carry away from the body, according to many *philosophers* both *pagan and christian* ; nor whether *those vehicles* have *organs of sight*, or be *objects* thereof, nor what *figure* they will have, nor what *ideas* or memory we shall retain of past objects to compare *them* by ; but yet I see no warrant that ancient christian writer *Irenæus* had, to assert, that *separate souls carry the likeness and figure of their bodies, so that they may be still known thereby in another world*.\* However we may justly hope for a knowledge

\* Con. Har. l. ii. c. 62.



of them *some other way*, by Revelation, information, or mutual discourse, &c. “*I must profess, from the experience of my soul, (says the excellent Mr. Baxter) that it is my belief that I shall love my friends in heaven, that principally kindles my love to them on earth; and if I thought I should never know them more, and consequently not love them after death, I should now love them comparatively little, as I do other transitory things, but now I converse with them with delight, as believing I shall converse with them forever.\** No doubt but they who dwelt together here, “as heirs of the same grace of life,” joining their prayers, shall dwell together there, as joint inheritors of that life, joining their praises. Some not unfitly compare the saints of all ages to a fleet of mariners, all bound for the same port, though some arrive sooner, and some later; and they who have been first there, welcome those that come afterward with joy and great affection: and what though our friends have outsailed us? it is likely we may come in with the next fleet, and meet at home, and then our love will be satisfied again. Perhaps, ere it be long, we may mingle our own ashes with their beloved dust; however that be, our souls hope to join in the same choir, and work with theirs forever, and therefore should rejoice now in this hope.

True, indeed, we shall no more know them *after the flesh*, in the relation they once stood in, in this world: There shall be no more *marriage, nor giving in marriage*,† except it be the marriage of the *Lamb*, which they are waiting for, and for which, *The Lamb's wife is making herself ready*.‡ When not we, my brethren, not *we*, but Jesus Christ himself shall be their glorious everlasting Bridegroom! And as the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, *so will he rejoice over them*.§ Therefore it should greatly pacify us, as it did David, to say, *we shall go to them*; which is much better than their return to us: “They have departed from us for a season, that we might receive them again forever.”

\* Converse with God, &c. page 79. † Luke xx. 35.

‡ Rev. xix. 7. § Isaiah lxii. 5.

I may add, that this is the most effectual consideration in the world, from whence an affectionate mourner can receive full satisfaction ; because it rather supports than suppresses his love to his deceased friend. True love, above all things, has a strong principle of self-preservation ; it resists all things that would extinguish it, and abhors forgetfulness ; no waters can quench it, it is stronger than death, and will survive its object. Now this consideration of *seeing them again*, relieves and revives our love ; it tells us we may cherish and keep it still, and that it shall have a fresh gratification, in the presence of its restored object ; we may love on upon a just ground, and may anticipate the pleasures of that eternal society with our dear friends expected above. So that upon this account, in midst of our anguish, we may imagine the angels' address to the disciples, to be (with some alteration) made to us : " Why gaze ye so, and stand looking after them who are ascended ? These same persons which are taken up from you into heaven, shall ye see coming again." Oh ! that we could, like Abraham, by faith, so *see that day*, though afar off, as to rejoice ! This is the way to perpetuate our memory of them, when they return with delight on our minds, and not as a frightful torment. If there be nothing but sadness and terror, it will soon weary us, and make us study some arts of oblivion, whereas we shall very freely repeat a grateful and welcome remembrance.

The useful inferences from this doctrine, are as follow :

1. This shews us the excellency of christianity, or, how great a blessing the gospel is, that furnishes us with such an antidote, against these temptations to deep sorrow. Indeed it is a comfortable doctrine, which brings life and immortality to light ; which tells us they are but *sleeping in Jesus*, who have died in him, and helps us to put so mild an interpretation on so grievous a calamity. What a soft notion of dying is this, viz. *A going to the Father*, our gracious, compassionate heavenly Father ! Whatever dubious glances this way we find among some of the sagacious

heathen writers, who confess they rather desired, than were able to prove it, (as *Seneca* owns ;) it is certain, they had so little of an assured persuasion of eternal bliss after death, prevailing among them, that the apostle (in this respect opposing them to *christians*) sticks not to describe them thus, *viz. those who have no hope* ;\* but where they had no clear hope, christians have perfect assurance.

And whereas we are apt to be concerned for the outward *tabernacle*, those amiable bodies that were the *desire of our eyes*, and the instruments of conversation, (whose *very* pleasing *idea* makes many a *welcome return* to our grieved minds, and which we love to cherish and preserve in a lively remembrance) the gospel answers this also, though it will be but of little consideration with wise men ; for what are these lumps of clay, without the *animating principle*, more to be valued than the comely garments of a *beautiful* person ? The soul was the true subject of those excellent and sweet dispositions for which we once so admired them.

And yet even *this flesh rests in hope* of a blessed resurrection ; the great Redeemer is the *Guardian* of their dust ; for *this is the Father's will which sent him, that of all which was given him, he should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.* † Nay, he *will change their vile bodies, and will fashion them like to his own glorious body.* ‡ He will one day visit their sepulchres with mighty power, when his spirit shall enter those *dry bones*, and make them to live. He will bring their separated spirits out of that state of widowhood, and reunite them to the body ; but not such a *corruptible body* as we saw them have here. We knew them in weakness and frailty, but he will *raise them in power*. We knew them in *dishonour*, § base and vile ; but he will raise them in glory. We knew it a natural or sensual body, but he will raise it a spiritual : It had not the *glory of a star* here, but then it shall have the beauty and *brightness of the sun.* || O

\* 1 Thess. iv. 13. † John vi. 39. ‡ Phil. iii. 21. § 1 Cor. xv. 43.  
|| Matt. xiii. 43.



*sweet contemplation!* to think how that corruptible shall put on incorruption, and that mortal, so beloved, shall put on immortality! And therefore we do not throw them away carelessly, as things never to be looked after more; but we lay them up in the safe repository of the grave, with solemnity and care, as a treasure in store; "Because the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth and live;"\* and then some use will be made of these deposited remains.

And is this the account the gospel gives of them who die in the Lord? Is this the case of our deceased holy friends? Then, "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?" Thanks be to God for this gospel: that we and our friends have lived under it, and can die more easily for it. O! what a black gulf is death, both to the dying and surviving friend, when they see nothing certain, beyond the grave, and dry bones! but to christians who see it shine beyond the clouds, there is comfort! there is hope! We part awhile, but it is as they who bid good night, only for a little interval of rest. Thus has the gospel abolished and quite annulled death.

2. How much more may a well prepared christian rejoice in his own death? Because he has a far greater concern in its advantages than his loving friends. Indeed death is so solemn a business, *so important a crisis*, the turning point of eternal happiness, or eternal misery, that leads to a judgment so accurate and searching, (the requisite preparation for which is so strict, and human frailties so many) the doom is so dreadful, and the sentence so decisive and irreversible, that no frame is more beseeching or safe for poor sinful creatures to be found in, than that of a *penitent humility*, and a serious awful anxiety about the issue of so momentous a concern.

But when a christian hath deliberately settled the grounds of his hope, and upon impartial search finds the characters of an heir of glory; and the uncorrupted testimony of his conscience, concerning his integrity of

\* John v. 28.

heart and life ; why should he not *rejoice with his trembling*, even when he is stepping over the border of time into a boundless eternity ? Sure it should be a joyful thing to die and *go to the Father* ! And no doubt but it would be so, if he were certain of that ; they who are through humble jealousy apt to cry, Lord, *spare us a little*, would then welcome death with speed. As for a well prepared and assured christian, who knows, if he were absent from the body, *he should be present with the Lord*. how can he but desire it ? Why should he, like others, be hanging back and craving more delay ? Why should he loiter, when a messenger from heaven calls him out of this Sodom ? Rather, he ought to desire to be dissolved, and to loose from this port, and to go with full sails into the *haven of eternal rest*. It is indeed a rough passage, in which he is sure of the shipwreck of the earthly vessel ; but the soul shall land safe in paradise. It is a dark step through the valley of death's shadow, but he is led through it by a sure guide, who will shew them the *path of life* ;\* why then should he fear any ill ? Rather let him say as Zuinglius, when he received the mortal wound, *Ecquid hoc infortunii ?* " What harm is this to me ? " Indeed, nature shrinks and shivers at the thoughts of untried agonies and groans, which we have sometimes seen others labour under. But what though it costs us a few sighs and pangs ? Who would not break his way through one half hour's pangs, into everlasting joys, to have that great sight, viz. the presence of the *God of glory* ? This is enough to make the christian at once both to fight and triumph, while he bids his sorrowful friends rejoice, because *he goes to the Father*.

But alas ! it is astonishing to see how little of this holy welcome death finds among christians ! I doubt the most that the generality of men, esteemed religious, attain to, is only to be unwillingly content with heaven, when ungrateful death will no longer suffer them to stay. How few court his approaches in calm desires ! when they have suffered an unwelcome ship

\* Psalm xvi. 11.

wreck, they are content indeed to land on the celestial shore, rather than perish ; but they had much rather put off the voyage. When therefore they are arrested with sickness or danger, what do we hear, but craving more delay, hanging back, and crying, *Lord, spare me a little longer ?* Where do we find the spirit of those pilgrims, who, having heaven in their eye, *embraced the promise* with joyful arms, and with insatiable desires hastened to arrive there ? They valued not their own country ; ever since they heard of heaven, they would hear of no home on earth. Where are these children of Abraham, these *seed of Jacob*,\* that stand so affected towards heaven, as to rejoice in quitting their kindred and native earth at God's call ? And how should our friends rejoice for us, in what is so unwelcome to ourselves ? Let us not act so inconsistently to our principles, as to extol the felicity of our departed christian friends, and yet be so averse to have their lot. Can we rejoice for them, and yet bemoan ourselves under the same fate ? Or is it so well for them, and can it be ill for us *to go to the Father* ? Nay, our desires should be so much the greater, because our dear Lord is gone before, and so many of our holy friends also. The departure of every amiable relation or friend to heaven is a fresh invitation to our desires to follow, since it is at once to go both to the Father, and to them too which we perhaps have more sensible conceptions of. Were our friends in hell with Dives, the scripture tells us they would have us entreated not to come to that *place of torment* ; but being in paradise, no doubt, they as earnestly wish us a share in their joys ; and shall not our desires be the same ? Let us learn then to converse with death as a friendly thing, which, as the philosopher said of his enemy, may kill us but cannot hurt us. We know where, and to whom, it sends the good man ; it makes him *absent from the body*, but *present with the Lord* : an exchange to which he should be most willing !

3. Let this give a check to our inordinate grief for the death of holy friends. Here is the difficulty to put

\* Heb. xi. 13, 16.



this in practice in a time of trial : Our love is usually so carnal and sensual, that we know not how to raise it to so rational and spiritual an exercise as this. When death has unclasped those mutual embraces of our friends and us, (which nothing but death could do) our passions are soon in such a tumult as David's : " Oh ! my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom : would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son !"\* It is a time when *our bowels will sound like an harp* within us ; when nature can frame itself to no voice but that of lamentation and weeping, and we refuse to be comforted : we cannot forbear Jacob's sorrowful moan, " Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and all these things are against me !"† We have much ado to restrain ourselves from David's passionate exclamation, " I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan ; very pleasant hast thou been to me ; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."‡ We can hardly suppress our inward wishes, with Job, " O ! that it were with me as in months past, when my children were about me !"§ This then is the time when we have need to call in all the aids of our christian faith and hope, for calming our disquieted minds : and surely these should signify something with christians. To what purpose have we the revelation of immortal life, if it be of no use on such occasions ? Why have we more hope than others, if we have not less sorrow ? Make not the world believe you think so meanly of heaven, by mourning for those who are gone thither, as though this world were better. Rebuke these unreasonable passions ; it is their birth-day into glory ; though there was sorrow when *the hour of travail came*, (*i. e.* when we saw our beloved friends in their pangs and agonies, when we saw pale death *changing their countenances, and sending them away* ; then we stood round them with sorrow and tears, as if we shared in their agonies, and died with them ;) yet now that they are delivered, and remember their anguish no more, we

\* 2 Sam. xviii. 33. † Gen. xxxii. 36. ‡ 2 Sam. i. 26.

§ Job xxix. 2, 5.

should carry it as *sharers in their joy*, and believing admirers of their felicity: Thus David washed and anointed himself, when it was said, *the child is dead*. Philo the Jew tells us. That the great veneration which the Hittites expressed to Abram, in that honourable salutation, *thou art a mighty prince*,\* &c. was because they saw him bear the death of his wife Sarah, with more magnanimity and moderation than was usual among them.

Philosophy itself has often laid these storms, and taught the wise Pagans to triumph over these infirmities of nature; and shall christianity be baffled with them? Plutarch tells us of his wife, that when tidings met him on the road that his son was dead, and the company with him came home, they saw all things so serene and easy, that they concluded it was a false report; so calmly and indifferently had she managed herself. Nay, the poor barbarous Americans will sing over the remains of their friends, who they believe are gone to the region of spirits, while they recount with joy the little instances of their valour: And shall not we with more reason rejoice over ours, while we rehearse the evidences of their piety, and the fruits of their faith, and charity, and victory over the world? It is Seneca's supposition, (and may be our firm conclusion of a good man,) "He is not lost at death, but only is sent before."†

Upon how little a business of this life, do we contentedly and patiently part from our dear associates for some weeks or months? And it suffices us to hear they are well, though absent; and shall we take it so very ill, when they are gone (perhaps not much longer) upon so great a business as taking possession of an everlasting kingdom? Can we love them, and not wish their happiness? Or can they be happy, and not die?

It may be they are taken away from evil to come; such times may happen as shall make us say, "Bless-

\* Gen. xxiii. 6.

† Ep. lxiv.

ed are the dead in the Lord, for they are at rest." When we shall interpret God's meaning in their removal by those words, "Come, my people, enter into your chambers, and hide yourselves, till the indignation be overpast."\* However, let there be never so great prosperity in view, they are gainers by the change in the best times; and the day of their death is better than *the day of their birth*; † for they have left a good name for piety and virtue, which is *better than precious ointment*, or more fragrant than those *beds of spices and perfumes*, ‡ in which persons of eminent worth were laid at their death, or those aromatic ointments with which they were embalmed. To which, it is like, Solomon alludes, in that expression, intimating, that he dies with most honour, whose memory is embalmed with the savory fruits of a virtuous life.

All this is most true, when we can say of our deceased friends, that they are *gone to the Father*, and this on solid grounds: when we have known them by divine grace, powerfully biassed toward God, holiness and heaven, as the great centre of all their desires and aims; when we have seen them shine with the Redeemer's image in great meekness and humility, great inoffensiveness, and tender goodness towards all; (for let me tell you, by the way, this sweet and quiet temper does not only endear us to men, but to God; "It is of great price," says the apostle, "in the sight of God;" || so that when God comes to value a person, he makes high account of this meek and peaceable spirit, as being the great ornament of our profession; of which the whole family, and others feel the comfortable charms:) when we have found them possessed and governed with a conscientious dread of offending God or man, (perhaps in some instances too scrupulous) diligent also in the daily duties of secret piety and devotion, with reverence and great seriousness: when we have seen them faithful in all their relative capacity, as therein serving the Lord, as well as men:

\* Isa. xxvi. 20. † Eccl. vii. 1. ‡ 2 Chron. xvi. 14.  
 ¶ 1 Pet. iii. 4.



when they have been eminently mortified to this vain world, to all the gaiety and bravery, the interests, diversions, and pleasures of this life ; and that in years and circumstances very capable of such temptations ; and this because they rather chose *the better part*, which shall never be taken away : when we have beheld their *submissive patience*, and christian resignation to God under misery ; and after all, great humility in an abasing sense of their unworthiness, and need of mercy ; but yet supporting their faith with honourable thoughts of *divine goodness*, and a sense of their *own sincerity* ; so as with hope and strong desires to *breathe out* their departing souls into their Redeemer's hands ; welcoming his approaches, with, *come, Lord Jesus, come quickly*. When we can thus describe our friends, (and I know very well whom I could thus imperfectly describe) why should we not conclude *they are gone to the Father* ? And why should we not rejoice in all the comforts of that consideration ? How unreasonable is our immoderate sorrow, when *all the rest* of their friends rejoice ? For, as themselves rejoice to go to the Father, so the blessed God their Father has welcomed them with joy to their everlasting home : Jesus Christ has presented them as his crown and joy, *without spot or blemish* ; holy angels and spirits congratulate their arrival to their society ; and cannot be supposed to rejoice less at the consummation of their victorious warfare, than at its beginning, in their conversion ; and shall we alone be swallowed up in sorrow ? Rather let us comfort one another with *these words*, and ascend after them in holy desires to be in the same state and place.

For I must add, That we can never receive the comfort of this argument, unless ourselves be in earnest bent towards the same heaven, and can truly hope to meet our friends there. All who part here do not meet again in heaven ; and though they who are departed may be happy, yet if we never see them again, we lose the comfort of such a thought. If we must be separated from them by a dreadful unpassable gulf ; if of us and our

friends, us and our yoke-fellows, us and our children, it be found true here, that *one is to be taken, and the other left* ; they admitted, and we shut out from heaven : This will make their death to be the beginning of an everlasting separation, never to be healed ; only it may be prevented by our serious preparation for the same happy end and state.

Now the account given of that state (here described by *going to the Father*) sufficiently points out to us, what that requisite preparation is. Since it is to dwell and converse with God as *our Father*, how necessary is it to such an end, that we here *love and serve him as our Father*, with all filial respects ? that we bear a lively conformity to his holy nature, in our correspondent wills and affections ? that we walk and converse with him ? that we relish the thoughts of him ? and that, by frequent *approaches to him* in acts of holy devotion, we *may begin the acquaintance* which Heaven is to perfect ! Then may we speak freely of meeting them again, when ourselves are by faith and patience *following them who are now inheriting the promises*.

4. Finally, Let this excite near relations so to live together, as to afford this ground of consolation to their surviving friends at their own death. Though at present I may seem to have been speaking what concerns myself only, yet it concerns you to hearken for the time to come, when the like case may be yours. How surely will death dissolve all your relations, and part you and your beloved friends ? The time is coming, when the now desire of your eyes shall become the terror of them ; when with great anguish of soul, you shall see all your mutual endearing love, all your delightful and pleasant converses, ending in dying agonies and ghastly looks ; and yourselves lamenting over their expiring groans and struggles. Oh ! Sirs, what can comfort you then but this consideration in my text ? or, what shall comfort your poor relatives whom you leave behind you but this, that they hope *you are gone to the Father* ? Methinks, I pity them who sorrow without hope, who mourn for rebellious prodigals,

for wicked, though near relations, who they fear are lost in the horrors of an endless night of darkness and misery, and that the lamp of their life, with that of their hopes, are both gone out together.

Oh ! that therefore none of you would, by your negligent, carnal, irreligious lives, be such a terror to your friends, nor make such a sword to pass through their souls ! When you are sick they tremble and are in pain ; and that for two lives at once, that of the body, and the more important life of the soul too. And when you shall die in that case, they will refuse to be comforted ; they will count themselves undone, through fear that you are so : whereas, did they see you working out your own salvation, and seeking God's kingdom and righteousness in the first place ; could they perceive your penitent return to God, after your long estrangement from him ; and that you are for nothing so concerned, as how you may be saved ; could they be confident of your pardon and acceptance with God *in Christ* , O ! how secure and easy would they be ! When you shall be smitten with sickness, they will then go comfortably, as the sisters of Lazarus did to Christ, saying, *Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick* :\* and when you die, they can cheerfully resign you into his safe hands. When it will comfort their hearts, to hear you say, " My heart and my flesh fail, but God is my portion forever : " and to hear such a comfortable farewell from you, as Christ sent to his disciples, " I am going ; but it is to my God and to your God ; to my Father, and to your Father. " † So mighty a difference is it to our friends, (much more to our own souls) in what condition we live and die.

I beseech you, therefore, to live together as the *heirs of eternal life* ; provoking one another to good works, joining your prayers, and giving mutual examples of piety ; that so you may fit each other for heaven, and may leave a testimony in one another's bosoms, of your sincerity towards God, and your meetness for eternal glory ; that so, whether husbands or wives, parents or

\* John xi. 3.

† John xx. 17.



children, brethren or sisters, die first, your surviving friends may trace you to heaven in their refreshing thoughts, and lodge you there. For "verily they will faint then, unless they can believe you are gone to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.\*" So that when they have laid you in the dark grave, and the curtains of the night are drawn about you, they may entertain themselves with pleasant hopes, that your souls are among the *saints in light*, wrapt up in the embraces of endless love and joy : that you are standing with the *Lamb upon Mount Sion above*, where all his redeemed multitudes shall shortly convene, in order to that great *marriage-day of the Lamb* ; when the glorious bridegroom shall put on all his beautiful ornaments, and appear in his *brightest robes* ; not only with his own, but with his *Father's glory*,† and then shall *they also appear with him* in glory. When heaven shall empty itself of its blessed inhabitants, who shall all come down to be the spectators of this great solemnity ; ambitious to adorn the triumphs of the mighty Jesus, and to augment the magnificence of his appearance. When the spoils of the devouring grave shall be rescued by that triumphant conqueror, and the dead start forth at the sound of his *thundering voice*, and mighty trumpet. When all nations, high and low, shall answer the summons to his awful tribunal, and all with attentive silence wait to hear their final doom. When, "Come, ye blessed, and go, ye cursed," shall send all to their eternal homes ; these to everlasting punishment, but the righteous into *life eternal*. When death and hell, and all such frightful things, shall be cast into the *bottomless lake forever*. Oh, most glorious hope ! Oh, more glorious sight ! when it shall once be, as it surely shall, When "the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion, with songs, and everlasting joy shall be on their heads ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."‡ Wherefore, let us again comfort one another with these words. *Amen*. Even so come, Lord Jesus.

\* Psalm xxvii 13. † Luke ix. 26. ‡ Isaiah xxxv. 10.

*A HYMN.*

*Submission under bereaving Providences.*

PEACE, 'tis the Lord, Jehovah's hand,  
That blasts our joys in death ;  
Changes the visage once so dear,  
And gathers back the breath.

'Tis he the potentate supreme  
Of all the worlds above,  
Whose steady council wisely rule,  
Nor from their purpose move.

'Tis he whose justice might demand  
Our souls a sacrifice ;  
Yet scatters with unwearied hand,  
A thousand rich supplies.

Our covenant God and Father he  
In Christ, our bleeding Lord ;  
Whose grace can heal the bursting heart,  
With one reviving word.

Fair garlands of immortal bliss,  
He weaves for every brow ;  
And shall rebellious passions rise,  
When he corrects us now ?

Silent we own Jehovah's name,  
We kiss the scourging hand ;  
And yield our comforts and our life  
To thy supreme command.

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