

time, a peculiar influence in commending Christianity to the world.

The growth of grace in a believer's heart is greatly dependent upon the fellowship which he maintains with other believers. The proverb holds good in matters of religion, no less than in other things, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." When a person has no religious society,—when he is not in the habit of meeting with godly acquaintances, and conversing with them, in a confiding and practical manner, about the common salvation,—his piety will almost certainly be found (unless the want of Christian society be his misfortune rather than his fault) to be at a low ebb. Hence such injunctions as the following, to be met with on every page [of Scripture:—"Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." "We exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." Even the apostle Paul, in writing to the Romans, expresses a desire to visit them, in the hope of being benefited by them, as well as of benefiting them: "I long to see you that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted* together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me." What Christian, however advanced, has not felt the advantage of communion with other members of the body of Christ,—if not in the way of adding to his knowledge, and removing difficulties that pressed upon his mind, at least in the way of deepening his humility, confirming

* This term in the original is not so restricted in its signification as our word *comforted*. It denotes *spiritual encouragement* in the largest sense. Calvin on the passage appropriately says,—"*Dicit se in ea parte cupere illis commodare suam operam, ubi juvandi sunt adhuc, qui maxime profecerunt. . . . Neo contentus hac modestia, subjicit præterea correctionem, quæ ostendit, se sibi non ita docend illocum usurpare, quin mutuo ab illis discere cupiat.*"