

THOUGHTS FROM THE FATHERS.

JOHN FLAVEL.

BE not too hasty to get off the yoke which God hath put upon your neck. Desire not to be delivered from your sorrows one moment before God's time. Let patience have its perfect work; that comfort, which comes in God's way and season, may remain and do you good.

Our dear parents are gone, our lovely and desirable children are gone, our bosom relations, that were as our own souls, are gone. And do not all these warning knocks at our doors acquaint us, that we must prepare to follow shortly after them?

It was once the case of a godly minister of this nation; and he was much troubled at his return, and said, "I am like a sheep driven out of the storm almost to the fold, and then driven back into the storm again; or a weary traveller that is come near his home, and then must go back to fetch somewhat he had forgotten; or an apprentice whose time is almost expired, and then must begin a new term."

It is not magnanimity, but stupidity to make light of God's corrections.

When God is smiting, we should be searching. Surely our iniquities will inquire after us, if we will not inquire after them.

It often falls out that the setting of one comfort clouds and benights all the rest. Our tears for our last enjoyments so blind our eyes that we cannot see the many other mercies which yet remain. We take so much notice of what is gone that we take little or no notice of what is left. But this is very sinful, for it involves in it both ignorance, ingratitude, and great provocation.

Rouse up thys. If, Christian, and consider, this is not right. Surely the rod works not kindly now. What, did thy love to God expire when thy friend expired? Is thy heart as cold in duty as his body is in the grave? Has natural death seized him, and spiritual deadness seized thee? Surely, then, thou hast more reason to lament thy dead heart than than thy dead friend.

To want comfort in time of affliction is an aggravation of our affliction; but to refuse it when offered us, wants no sin. Time may come when we would be glad to receive comfort or hear a word of support, and shall be denied it.

O! parents, mind this, I beseech you; the time of your child's continuance in the womb was fixed to a minute by the Lord; and when the pariturient fulness of that time was come, were you not willing that it should be delivered thence into the world? The tender mother would not have it abide one minute longer in the womb how well soever she loved it; and is there not the same reason we should be willing, when God's appointed time is come, to have it delivered by death out of this state, which, in respect of the life of heaven, is but as the life of a child in the womb, to its life in the open world?

And let none say the death of children is a premature death. God has ways to ripen them for heaven whom He intends to gather thither betimes, which we know not. In respect of fitness, they die in a full age, though they be cut off in the bud of their time.

Has God smitten your darling, and taken away the delight of your eyes with this stroke? Bear this stroke with patience and quiet submission; for how know you but your trouble might have been greater from the life, than it now is from the death, of your children?

You find it hard to forget your child, though it be now turned to a heap of corruption and loathsome rottenness. O how does your mind run upon it night and day! your thoughts tire not upon that object. Why, surely it is much more easy for you to forget your dear child, whilst living and most endearing, much more when dead and undesirable, than it is for your God to forget you!

To crown all, you shall have an everlasting enjoyment of them in heaven, never to part again. The children of the resurrection can die no more. You shall kiss their pale lips and cold cheeks no more. You shall never fear another parting pull, but be together with the Lord for ever. And this the apostle thought an effectual cordial in this case, when he exhorted the Thessalonians to "comfort one another with these words."

Alas! though you want your friend's company, he wants not yours. Your care was to provide for this child; but Jesus Christ has provided infinitely better for it than you could. You intended an estate, but He a kingdom for it. You thought on such or such a match, but Christ has forbid all others, and married your child to Himself. Could you imagine a higher preference for the fruit of your bodies? A king from heaven has sent for your friend, and do you grudge at the joining? O think and think again, what an honour it is to you, that Christ has taken your friend out of your bosom, and laid them in His own; stripped them out of those garments you provided, and clothed them in white robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb. Let not your hearts be troubled, rather rejoice exceedingly, that God made you instruments to replenish heaven, and bring forth an heir for the kingdom of God.

Poor heart, thou art now dejected by this affliction that lies upon thee, as if all joy and comforts were now cut off from thee in this world. A cloud dwells upon all other comforts. This affliction has so embittered thy soul, that thou tasted no more in any other earthly comforts than in the white of an egg. Oh, that thou didst but consider the consolations that are with God for such as answer His ends in affliction, and patiently wait on Him for their comfort! He has comforts for you far transcending the joy of children.

When it is dark night with men, it is noon-day with Satan; that is, our suffering-time is his busiest working-time.

Be quiet and hold your peace; you little know how many mercies lie in the womb of this affliction.

And what, if by this stroke the Lord will awaken your drowsy soul, and recover you out of that pleasant but dangerous spiritual slumber you were fallen into, whilst you had pillowed your head upon this pleasant sensible creature-enjoyment? Is not this really better for you than if He should say, Sleep on. He is joined to idols, let him alone. He is departing from Me, the fountain, to a broken cistern! let him go?

Ah! reader, little do you know what stings there are in the afflictions of others. Surely you have no reason to think the Lord has dealt more bitterly with you than any. It is a gentle stroke, a merciful dispensation, if you compare it with what others have felt.

May not your unsubmissive carriage under the rod provoke God to hide His face from you? Pray consider it well: nothing is more probable than for this to be the cause of God's withdrawing from you. Could you in meekness and quietness receive that cup your Father hath given you to drink, accept the punishment of your iniquities say, God is the word of the Lord; it is the Lord, let Him do what He will; you would soon find the case altered with you, but the comforting Spirit finds no delight or rest in a turbulent and tumultuous breast.

Examine the grounds of your fear, whether it may not proceed from the strength of your affections to the eternal welfare of your friend, or from the subtlety of Satan, designing hereby to overwhelm and swallow you up in supposed, as well as from just grounds and causes. In two cases, it is very probable your fear may proceed only from your own affection or Satan's temptation. If your relation died young before he did anything to destroy your hopes, or if grown in some good degree hopeful only he did not in life or at death manifest and give evidence of grace with that clearness you desired. As for the case of infants in general, it is none of our concern to judge their condition; and as for those who spring from covenanted parents, it becomes us to exercise charity towards them; the Scripture speaks very favourably of them. And as for the more adult who have escaped the pollutions of the world and made conscience of sin and duty, albeit they never manifested what you could desire they had, yet in them, as in young Abijah, "may be found some good thing toward the Lord," which you never took notice of. Reverence of your authority, bashfulness and shame-facedness, reservedness of disposition, and many other things, may hide those small and weak beginnings of grace that are in children, from the observation of their parents. God might see that in them which you never saw. He despiseth not the day of small things. However this be, your child is now out of your reach. Your concern rather is, to improve the affliction to your own good, than to judge and determine his condition, which belongs not to you but to God.