

DIVINITY.

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Text, *Matthæw*, vi. 22.—The light of the body is the eye: if therefore the eye be single, the whole body will be full of light.

The evangelist seems to intimate by these words, that the true and rational enjoyment of the human soul is derived from God by the exercise of its own contemplations: just as delightful feelings naturally awake in the heart, while the bodily eye rests upon a scene that has caught and fixed its attention. "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light:" that is to say, in the steady view of him who is called the Father of lights, with whom there is no shadow of a change, thy whole nature receiving the rays of his wisdom, and purity, and love, shall partake of the felicity which belongs to these perfections, and be made to resemble "the beauty of the Lord." For, by contemplating the glory of the Lord, and knowing his love which passeth knowledge, we are filled with all its fulness, and change into the same image from glory to glory.

This principle will be more clearly displayed, if we simply inquire what may be meant by "the single eye:" and then consider what is to be understood by the light which is here said to attend its vision.

I. We are to inquire what is meant by "the single eye."

1. It implies the contemplation of one object. It is the mind engaged with God; with God, as the centre of its affections, the source of its pleasure, and the fountain of infinite authority.

This simplicity of object is sought by the eye of the renewed mind in all its inquiries after bliss—"One thing have I desired of the Lord; that will I see", after, that I may behold the beauty of the Lord, and inquire in his temple."

regard to this object is mentioned as the evidence of pure religion. "One thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that "good part." It absorbed the spirit of Paul, and made him say, "this one thing I do; forgetting the things that are behind, I press towards the mark." This is the end of our existence: "whether we live, we live unto the Lord," &c.

A charge I have to keep, a God to glorify," and the holding of this in view, is the "engagement of the single eye."

2. Clearness of perception is also implied in the expression we are endeavouring to explain.

The want of this perception is but too apparent in the human mind. Let me here remind you of the affecting account of human ignorance given by the prophet Isaiah (xliv. 14, 15): "He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the ram doth nourish it. Then shall it be for a man to burn; for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a God, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto." To this we may add the melancholy description of man by the apostle (Rom. i. 22, 23)—"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." This is human wisdom in the things of God—this is man, rational, intellectual man!

And if our imagination has not been vain to the same extent, and our "foolish heart darkened," to the same degree; yet ignorance that beclouds, and enmity that inflames the eye of the understanding, shut out from us the light of heavenly things, and we lived without God in the world. He sent his son to redeem us, but we acknowledged him not,—we looked upon him as a root out of a dry ground, as having no form nor comeliness; when he ought to have been regarded as fairer than the children of men, because he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities. And is it possible to look upon the wide world around us, without observing how blind men are to the objects of real interest? The remark still is a true one, that the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man, because they are *spiritually discern'd*.

Now, "the single eye" implies the reverse of all this mist of ignorance—this disorder'd vision of enmity against God. There is a physician that invites

us to "buy eye-salve," that we may see, there is a wind that bloweth where it listeth, and whose breath fails not to clear away the fogs that obscure the objects of life and immortality; and then we see him that is otherwise invisible, and are enabled to look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. "God who shined out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

3. "The single eye" suggests the idea of undeviating attention to the object of our view.

The more you consult the habits of your own thoughts, the more you will be convinced that the mind is so formed as not to be capable of giving to two objects at the same time the whole of its admiration and attachments: that vigour of thought and affection which we spend upon one object, we withdraw or withhold from another. "Ye cannot serve two masters." "If ye love the world, the love of the father is not in you."

By undeviating attention to the objects of heaven, I do not mean that entire absorption of the heart which belongs to the spirits of the just made perfect; but the prevalence of a holy disposition over every counter-striving principle in the world, in consequence of the more powerful attractions of religion.

There is not unfrequently to be met with in young Christians a strong desire to set their affections on things above; and surely the Christian church is not destitute of some whose sincerity and unconquerable thirst for godliness constrains them to make the solemn professions of the Psalmist—"As the eye of a servant is to the hand of his master, and as the eye of a maid is to the hand of her mistress; so, O Lord, do our eyes wait upon thee, until thou wilt have mercy upon us."

II. We now proceed to consider what is to be understood by the fulness of light that is here said to attend the contemplation of the "single eye."

Light is an emblem of knowledge—of happiness—of usefulness.

1. Then, divine knowledge springs from the contemplation of God.

"The Lord God is a sun," and he is known only by his own influence to be true, and pure, and benevolent, and glorious,

Nothing can be so important as knowledge of him with whom we have to do in mercy and in judgment; for this will enable us to ascertain what is to become of us when he fixes the everlasting settlement of man in misery, or in bliss. We are beings that are hurried onward by every moment of time toward that eternal state where unspeakable glory or endless wretchedness awaits us; and all that we can suffer or enjoy here below, amounts only to the comforts or conveniences of a pilgrim hastening to the point of his destination, and place of his repose. Does it not, then, concern us to know (if, indeed, it is possible to be known) what is to become of us in the end of all things? Whether, think you, is it likely that we shall walk in robes of purity, and accompany the Lamb to living fountains; or whether, if now disrobed of this mortal covering, and stript into a naked spirit, we should be driven away in our wickedness, and left to wander, age after age, through labyrinths of the world, unknown, dark with the smoke of torment, and rendered dismal by sighs of wretchedness, and the endless howlings of despair!

Oh, yes, my brethren, to know, to know now, the mind of God on this great subject is important, as the life of the soul is important; "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation," in which we may rejoice in hope of the promised good, and avoid the threatened dissolution. If, then, our views of these objects are indistinct and obscure, look,—with the single eye" look to God, and be enlightened. The light he sheds upon inquirers; minds is this—"Except ye repent, ye shall perish. He that hath the Son, hath life; he that hath not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, even in his son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life: and, says the author of that felicity, "This is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

2. Light is an emblem of happiness.

"Truly, the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun;" but how much more sweet and pleasant it must be for the eye of a soul, conscious of its guilt, to meet the faintest gleam of that glory which is full of grace and truth? What a paradise is opened in the heart of that man, who lives in the habitual contemplation of Divine objects! He looks at religious duties, and they mark the way of pleasantness, and lead him in the paths of peace. He looks at eternity, and there sorrow and sighing are fled away; he looks at God, and to him he is the God of all consolation. He looks at Christ, who is our peace; to the Divine Spirit, and he is another Comforter. Indeed, to be devoted to God, and to rejoice, are the same things, since the exercises of religion are nothing but streams from the well of water springing up unto everlasting life.

"Light is sown for the righteous," says the Psalmist,—a strong expression, by which he seems to intimate, that the rays of the sun, scattered at every step of his progress through the heavens, are suited to represent the multitude of those seeds of life and blessedness, which are to spring and mature into a harvest of gladness for "the upright in heart."

3. Light is an emblem of usefulness.

The Christian is a light, a star, a lamp ordained for the appointed. The twelve churches are the twelve golden candlesticks. It is the character of a good man to possess diffusive benevolence, to reflect the light he has—thus to shine for the use of others. So lived those men of God, who through faith and patience, inherit the promises. Cheered themselves with the influences of Divine favour, they were anxious to impart unto the cheerless world around, that they also might obtain the salvation of Christ with eternal glory. The infinite brightness of the Sun of Righteousness ever rested on them, and they felt themselves all vigour in the exercise of spreading the knowledge of God. As living orbs, they moved with unrestrained activity, about the everlasting centre of their own joy and wisdom; and as they caught the light, they spread its reflections; and the dark places of the earth were made to know and to rejoice that their light had come, and the glory of the Lord had risen upon them. Thus ought we to live. But, ah,

What have I done for him that died,
To save my wretched soul!

We may apply this subject to many uses, as,

1. It shows the cause of all want of charity towards our fellow Christians.

Oh, if all Christians would only look to Christ with "a single eye," they would be like him, and their resemblance to each other would be complete. The same beams would play upon the countenance of each, and then who could discern even a shade of difference? But, alas! how often it happens, that we become fond, too fond of our religious distinctions. "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." This, my brethren, is wrong as it is foolish; it is losing sight of the sun for the sake of gazing upon the stars; and while the eye of the understanding contracts to the littleness of these objects, there comes upon the moral countenance the expressions of a mean and sour spirit—the very opposite of that spirit which thinketh no evil.

While the stream of our thoughts and affections moves towards God, it is steady, and deep, and peaceful: but, diverted into the channel of bigotry, its irregular and obstructed current is known only by the sound of its murmurings, and the noisy foam of strife. Nothing, my brethren, but a prevailing disposition to contemplate God, can secure to your bosom, and to the church, that peace which passeth understanding—"He that dwelleth in God, dwelleth in love, for God is love."

2. The subject is adapted to excite our gratitude to Divine Goodness.

We might have been in darkness until now. The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. Remember, Christian, that their circumstances might have been ours, and ours might have been theirs; for, "by the grace of God, we are what we are." How finely does the apostle reason with the church at Thessalonica, on the subject of their obligations to the mercy of God—"But ye, brethren, are not of the night, nor of darkness; ye are all children of light, and of the day; therefore, let us not sleep, as do others," &c.