

any direction, and the incapacity to grasp and revolve and comprehend some great truth, may be nothing more than the approach to the limits of the finite creature's power,—as innocent in itself as the bodily infirmity or as the languor or the muscular frame when its strength is exhausted.

It may look lowly and earnest to ransack every chamber of our being, and run back o'er the record of the past, and hold up everything we find—the God-given, the well-meant, and the sin-derived, together—and call them pollutions, and afflict our souls for these things; but there is no solid truth in the exercise, nay, it is mischievous. There is danger of our thinking too leniently of actual sin, when every triviality and weakness is made to bear its name. Our elevation of a foible to the magnitude of a sin, will end in the belittlement of our conception of sin, and of our dread of sin; and we may come by this process to look upon it as a matter of course, and also a matter of no great consequence. Sin's essence is enmity to God: sin's action is transgression of the law of God: sin's wages is death:—all matters of infinitely too dreadful import to be charged and enforced against the bubble that rise on the tide of life's stream, or points of doubtful disputation. We ought, therefore, to be careful to confine the epithet *sinful*, to the actions and dispositions and the state of soul which God calls sinful; and where He attaches the stigma, thence let us never dare to detach it, though it be fixed on an idol we love.

Not by misreading scripture, and saying, In all things we offend; but by feeling that "in many things we offend all," and God above all; by knowing what these offences are, and that their source and motion lie in the depths of the deceitful and desperately wicked heart; by knowing that all is wrong there; that sin has torn us from God, and set us against God; and that we cannot rectify, while we deplore the evil done:—then, out of the depths we cry, the honest truthful prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner." "Pardon mine iniquity for it is great." And this juster estimate of sin will also most effectually keep us from regarding the life spent in folly as in any sense harmless and guiltless. In no other

way will it be so clearly seen that sin's seat and sin's virulence are within the heart, that conduct is but the movement which the engine within has communicated, and that *a life of trifling with God* is as sure an indication of deceitful, cursed sin reigning, as the life marked by vices we detest, or by crimes at which we tremble.

The mother, sitting in her chamber, singing a lullaby, to soothe the sick child upon her lap is worthily employed in holy duty. The words of the nursery song may be undiluted nonsense, but the man, who would denounce the mother and her ditty, in these circumstances, as sinful, is simply an ass. Let the same mother, if such a case be imaginable, sit singing the same song, while her child is playing on the bank of a rapid river, and in real danger; let her continue to sing when her child has fallen into the stream and is swept away by the swift current, and she is either insane or a monster. So while the invitations of the gospel remain unheeded, while the soul is in danger of eternal ruin, which may overtake any Christless sinner in a moment, if you had never perpetrated a deed to make you blush and seek concealment and forgetfulness, if you had never done aught but sleep and wake, and eat and drink, entirely overlooking the grand business of life,—the service of your God—regardless of the interests of the immortal soul, your most precious and responsible charge,—incredulous to the voice of warning,—loving folly, hating reproof, you were playing, mocking, while your soul was on the brink of ruin. Your conduct was insane or monstrous. You were verily guilty, and were tempting God. Drunken Nabal when he came to himself, and learned what danger he had been in, was so overcome by the thought that he sickened and died. Did we know something of the nature of the second death, the spirit's death, and how near the verge of the abyss we stood, or may be standing yet, that knowledge might unhinge the strongest mind among us.

Well, we are sinners, and our sins will find us out.

III. In these circumstances what ought we to do? Endeavour first of all to satisfy yourselves of the *truth* or *falsehood* of the doc-