

BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN

Editor and People.

PRESUMING ON THE FUTURE,

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"Reast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." So speaks the wise king of Israel. The truth of the proverb is self-evident and commands itself to the approval of every reasonable man, because founded on universal experience; and yet, strange to say, it is just such universally accepted aphorisms, that are practically and systematically ignored and contradicted in daily life. Men are willing to recognize them as articles of their creed, but they refuse to shape their conduct in the world, in obedience to their requirements. Speculating as to the future and forming plans and purposes which demand years for their accomplishment, and indulging in hopes which in all probability will never be realized, are evils common to every age and country. Boasting of to-morrow and presuming on an unknown future are universal characteristics of humanity. Nor do national judgments nor individual reverses, check in the smallest degree, this spirit of presumptuous confidence in the certain success of worldly projects. The youth just entering upon real life, looks forward to days and years of diligence and prosperity to counterbalance and atone for the hours at present spent in idleness and folly. The man in the prime of life comforts himself by the assurance, that large returns will so enrich him, that he shall be able to spend the evening of his days in peace and happiness and preparation for a better world. And the old care-worn miser up to his dying hour entertains the hope that life may yet be lengthened, and that its last moments may set in a blaze of glory. The sad commentary upon all these dreams of future bliss, is disappointment—defeat—unexpected reverses—sudden death and sore bereavements. These make up the life of man. They should teach us to moderate our desires and regulate our aspirations. We may not presume upon the dark, untried future, nor seek to lift the veil, which Almighty wisdom has thrown across our pathway, but in faith and humility discharge the duties of the present, without reference to perplexities and uncertainties of coming years. As the poet very beautifully says:

"O, why should the spirit of mortal be proud? Like a swift, fleet, nimble, a fast flying cloud, A flash of the light! e.g., a break of the wave, Man comes from life to his rest in the grave."

"Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath, From the blossom of health to the paleness of death; From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud, O, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"

By such remarks we are not to be understood as rebuking all prudent foresight and preparation against to-morrow's wants. To-morrow will come, and its demands must be met. Domestic duties must be discharged, business engagements must be honorably fulfilled. All this is in accordance with reason, and in perfect harmony with the teachings of Scripture. It is not wrong to engage in plans, although their completion, may be the work of years. It is not sinful to exercise sagacity and economy in looking toward possible contingencies. Nor would we discourage the exercise of a happy and cheerful spirit, that lightens o' care and burdens of the present, by the prospective good fortune of the future. We often need to borrow joy from coming events, to sustain us under present trials. It is good thus to hope, even if we should not enjoy all that a fond imagination has led us to expect. What is wrong is the spirit that leads men to enter upon plans and lay out schemes as if the future depended wholly upon their own wisdom and energy, when they act as independent sovereigns, holding in their hands the reins of providence, and able at pleasure to change and control events, so as to secure their own personal good without reference to their fellow men, and where they exclude divine interposition and agency as if human actions were uncontrolled by a higher power. Such a spirit, prevalent in our day to an alarming extent, and fostered by the teachings of a materialistic philosophy in halls of science and associations for the advancement of learning, is rebuked by sound philosophy and Christian ethics. "Go to low, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain, whereas, ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that." Our times are in his hand. The mystery of our life is under His control:

"These strutting tides of life that seem For wayward aimless course to tend Are sides of the mighty stream That rolls to its appointed end."

There are many obvious reasons why we may not presume upon the future. We are entirely ignorant of coming events. We cannot with any degree of certainty predict a single incident in our own future history, or in the history of the world. We may judge and infer from the past that certain things will happen. Because the laws of nature or of commerce have in some instances produced certain results, we may with some degree of confidence and assurance, expect the same or similar results in the future. But in spite of our closest calculations it is after all but conjecture. In most cases our best judgments are found deceptive and our reasoning false. We know that to-morrow will come, but whether we shall live to see it, or what shall be the character of its events are entirely different questions.

Go back in memory to the days of youth, and mark how different your life has been from what you then expected! Small insignificant events have changed it. All has been arranged according to God's plan, and directed by infinite goodness, but how limited our knowledge of that plan! A child can shape the course of a mighty river in its beginning, and so our place and vocation in the world is often determined by what we call accidental or fortuitous events. A word—a sermon—a chance meeting with some friend, has moulded our

destiny. We intended perhaps to spend our days in one boyhood's home, but Providence led us to another land, and cast our lot among strangers. We had chosen a certain occupation or profession, but God intended differently, and by hedging our way on every side, compelled us reluctantly to accept what has proved the wiser and more useful sphere.

Our ignorance of the future is never to be regarded as a calamity. It is a part of our probationary state. It develops in us a spirit of dependence and cheerful resignation, which are essential parts of our rudimentary training in this world. We must obey, without often knowing the reason why. We must be willing to follow, although we know not whether we are led, and the path seems dangerous and the prospect gloomy. There is nothing in the whole circle of God's dealings with his creatures, that so clearly exemplifies his love and wisdom, as in graciously concealing the future from our ken. Could we scan the future as we see the past, and survey the whole of existence from the cradle to the grave, life would be miserable beyond endurance. No mortal could bear up under such a revelation. Trials are hard enough to bear when they come unexpectedly. It is hard to die on the battlefield, but far more terrible to look forward from day to day to the hour of execution. Who indeed would desire to look into the future? To some few the prospect would be cheering, but to the vast majority it would be a scroll of lamentation, written inside and outside with woe!

In addition to our ignorance of the future how uncertain is life! We fade as the leaf;

"Like to the falling of a star,
Or as the flight of eagles are,
Or like the fresh spring's gaudy hue
Or silver drops of morning dew,
Or like a wind that chases the flood,
Or bubbles which on water stood,
Even such is man, whose borrowed light
Is straight called in and paid to-night.
The wind blows out, the bubble dies,
The spring entombed in autumn lies,
The dew dries up, the star is shot,
The light is passed—and man forgot!"

Death cuts us down in every period of existence; in the spring time of childhood—in the bloom of youth—in the nobility of manhood—in the feebleness of old age. Were it so that the term of our probation on earth was revealed to us, and we could with some degree of certainty calculate the limits of human effort, there might be some reason in crowding up the intervening period with plans and projects, demanding years for their development. Were we told that life would be lengthened out to three score years and ten, there might be some excuse for anticipating the future. But such is not the case. Like our summer days that close in on us in an instant, without the beautiful twilight of other lands, that gradually usher into the darkness, so is it with human existence. Suddenly the strong man bows himself—the powerful intellect is dethrown and the grave covers all that is mortal. In the midst of life we are in death—between us and it there is but a step. If it is—and who gainsays it? why look forward so anxiously to years that may never be enjoyed?

As life itself is uncertain, so are all its blessings. Let life be lengthened out to its fullest extent, and the heart satisfied with everything that can please and gratify, and yet in a single day all our coveted possessions may vanish. The accumulated riches of a busy life take to themselves wings and flee away. The most enduring friendships of the world grow cold—the bright anticipations of early years when about to be enjoyed, lose their freshness and begin to fade. On everything below there is written, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Such is life—full of tortuous windings and perplexing labyrinths—"a mighty maze" but not without a plan." Submission and acquiescence to God's will is the dictate of true wisdom. Even when all things seem to be against us let us hold fast our confidence in the unerring wisdom of Heaven. Cheerfully and conscientiously let us discharge the duties of the hour, depending upon the gracious aid of Omnipotence for success in our enterprises and victory over evil. The duties of life admit of no delay. We are not called to ease a selfish indulgence, but to earnest work. As the diary of our life is sure to fall behind unless it receives constant additions, so the duties of the present must be discharged in proper season. Those of to-morrow are more than sufficient to tax our utmost energy. It matters not what be our specific labor—whether business or religion—if neglected now, it may be beyond our reach to-morrow. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

Not a few act as if the future days of existence were in some way more favourable for active exertions than the present. They have no method in their calling; no fervency in their work. The smallest hindrance is an insurmountable obstacle and the most trifling excuse sufficient for delay. In business affairs such men are always behind—their engagements are never met—their promises are never kept. They dream life away in procrastination and postponement—in good resolutions and praiseworthy intentions. They never accomplish anything, for to-morrow finds them as indolent as to-day. They ignore the purpose of life and forget the end of existence. The present alike with the future is neglected, and old age and enfeebled powers steal upon them with nothing accomplished for themselves or others.

If presuming on the future is wrong, when we have not a single element to guide us in providing against unknown contingencies, it is equally criminal to fritter away existence in easy unconcern and reckless indifference to the claims of God and our fellow men. This present moment may be the turning point of existence—on which hangs our eternal destiny. It is thus of more importance than the endless ages of eternity. The seeds now sown determine the moral harvest—the actions of to-day color the transactions of the judgment day. As the acorn contains the oak in germ, so the life that now is contains the possibilities of the future, including our immortality. In the United States mint at Philadelphia, there is in the gold room, a singular floor of

wooden bars, to catch all the falling particles of the precious metal. When the day's labor is done, the floor, which is in sections removed, and the gold dust swept up to be remelted and coined. Some thirty thousand dollars annually are saved in this way, and so, by the conscientious employment of our spare moments, and by a wise economy of our time, are we to secure a high place of usefulness here and honour hereafter.

"So let us live, that every hour
May do as does the natural flower,
A self-reviving thing of power:
That every word and every deed,
May, in itself, contain the seed
Of future good and future need."

Stratford Beacon.

Rights of People and Pastor.

HAVE THE PEOPLE ANY RIGHTS IN [THE PASTORAL RELATION?

One of the most delicate and difficult questions arises when a large portion of the congregation become disaffected with their pastor, and are conscientiously and intelligently convinced that his ministrations are not for their edification, and are unfavorable to the spiritual interests of their children. They may allege nothing whatever against the moral or ministerial character of the minister. They may esteem him highly as a man, a neighbor, a citizen and a friend, and desire to retain pleasant social relations with him, while yet they are compelled to feel that his preaching does not meet their needs, and that he has ceased to be useful as their pastor.

If the case is reversed, the result is inevitable. A pastor is called to a church that has by great effort raised an adequate salary and he accepts, is settled by the complete forms of the Church, and enters upon his work. He has the united esteem and support of his people, who faithfully fulfill their contract with him, and even more, for they are constantly bestowing upon him tokens of their regard, and he has no reason to doubt that this will continue to their course of action. The work prospers in his hands. And this very prosperity commands him to a wider field of usefulness, and he is invited to come and occupy it. He feels at liberty to judge of his duty in the premises, and to decide the question for himself. If he will go, the remonstrances of his people cannot prevent, and the Presbytery (if it is a Presbyterian Church) will not prevent. He is dismissed from his people, who comply reluctantly with his request, and he goes away with their regrets and tears, but also with fair prayers for his usefulness in his wider field. We have never yet known a case in which a Presbyterian refused to dismiss a minister when he declared that he was bound in conscience to accept a call to another charge.

Now reverse the case. Suppose the people or a respectable portion of the people, that portion of whom the church is to its pecuniary means of support, the elders and men of intelligence and standing, have come to the conclusion, after long and careful observation and experience, that the pastor is not the man for them and their children, and he does not see it. What is to be done? Here arises the delicate question. It is obvious to say that great wisdom, forbearance, sacrifice and patience are to be summoned.

On the one hand are the feelings, the reputation and the subsequent usefulness of the minister. These are to be seriously weighed and not lightly rejected in the adjustment of the question. And here we say, with great decision, that advancing age and bodily infirmity ought not to be a reason for dissolving a pastoral relation.

When a minister has given the vigor of his life to the service of a flock, and now is declining in health and years, the people ought to be bound by every principle of Christian duty and love, not to turn him out to die in the street, like a superannuated horse in the country. God will enable any congregation to make some comfortable provision for the old age of their shepherd, while they also supply his lack of ability with the services of a younger man. But we have seen churches dwindling away under the unacceptable labors of a good man, who might be vastly more useful elsewhere. He sees the decline going on. He knows the inevitable. But under a mistaken sense of duty he declines to yield, and the work of dissolution and dispersion advances. The state of things is pressed upon his attention by the leaders of the congregation, but he does not admit the necessity of retirement. Disaffected members seek other connections. Rival churches are founded. Distractions and alienations ensue. And souls are not saved. Here is the point where the wisdom, piety and unselfishness of the man are challenged. It is the part of Christian faith and heroism to say, "I have tried to do my duty; but if you are not advantaged by my labors, I will make room for another." Judicious friends and the higher church authority would counsel such a course, rather than the cause should suffer.

Men are of little value compared with the cause. We think ourselves often of very great account, and that the world can hardly get along unless we have our own way. But when we put ourselves against the progress of a right work, we have to be thrust aside, or the cause itself suffers. So the interests of the church are paramount to those of an individual, and where the two come into conflict, the less must yield to the greater.

And when all this has been said, each case that comes up must be tried upon its own merits. These are general principles, not to be applied to every state of things, but are designed to enforce the truth that as Christ gave himself for the church, so we also ought to be willing to sacrifice our selves for it.—N. Y. Observer.

There's no music in a "rest," that I know of, but there's the makin' of music in it. And people are always missing that part of the life melody, always talking of perseverance, and courage, and fortitude; but patience is the finest and worthiest part of fortitude, and the rarest too.—Ruskin.

Bible-Synonyms.

PERFECT, UPRIGHT, COMPLETE, PERFECTED.

In the Epistle of St. James, we find the exhortation—"Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." That epistle deals with the subject of endurance and obedience, and perfection in these respects is, as a rule, gained by degrees through the grace of the Holy Ghost, and the influence of divine truth upon the mind. It is, therefore, a proper subject of exhortation and prayer—"That ye may stand perfect and filled in all the will of God." Perfection is just the attainment of one *telos*, i.e., the end and consummation of our holy calling. Entireness is wholeness or completeness of character, not leaving any part unsanctified, or surrendering any faculty to unrighteousness, or lacking any good thing. This does not imply that all are to be filled to the same measure, or moulded to the same shape; but it means that every one is to labour and pray that his Christian life may be not only genuine but complete and consistent according to his capacity, that he be sanctified wholly by the God of peace. 2. The upright is "*yash r*", the man of straightforwardness, rectitude, and equity. The term indicates a tone of character which a healthy moral sense always and everywhere approves. Even Balaam, though himself consciously, and from a selfish motive, swerving from rectitude, knew enough of its value—cry—"Let me die the death of the *yashar*, and let my last end be like his." Moralists, who repudiate divine revelation, must not suppose that they have any priority or superiority in inculcating the virtue and strength of a sincere and upright character. Holy Scripture is not entirely occupied with the history of divine interpositions, or even with the salvation of sinners. In its earlier as well as in its later books, it inculcates and encourages integrity and justice; while it connects these, as our Bible-refusing moralists can not do, with the righteousness of God above, from whom all goodness and truth emanate, and to whom they return in the consecration of His people to the Lord who loves righteousness. 3. The expression "complete in Christ," belongs to the New Testament. In Him dwells more than a fullness of qualities and powers, such as constitutes the consummated ideal man. It is "the fulness of Godhead bodily." This fullness is made accessible and available to all who are His. Out of it they all receive. They are not taken up into the divinity, but divinity streams upon them, and into them, as they dwell by faith in Christ. It is no more the case of a man walking before the Lord, and being perfect, as Noah, Abraham, or Job was perfect. It is the case of a man dwelling in the Lord, hidden in Him for safety, quickened in Him for life, justified in Him for acceptance, nay, filled up or completed in Him. All grace abounds, warms the believer, and perfects the perfect.

Now reverse the case. Suppose the people or a respectable portion of the people, that portion of whom the church is to its pecuniary means of support, the elders and men of intelligence and standing, have come to the conclusion, after long and careful observation and experience, that the pastor is not the man for them and their children, and he does not see it. What is to be done? Here arises the delicate question. It is obvious to say that advancing age and bodily infirmity ought not to be a reason for dissolving a pastoral relation. When the one hand are the feelings, the reputation and the subsequent usefulness of the minister. These are to be seriously weighed and not lightly rejected in the adjustment of the question. And here we say, with great decision, that advancing age and bodily infirmity ought not to be a reason for dissolving a pastoral relation.

On the whole, looking closely at the private character of Queen Victoria, as derived from conversation of some who knew her best, from her books, and from all we can see of her life, it is a character greatly to be respected. It is not an unusually great character, like Prince Albert's, nor a wonderfully masculine mind, like that of Queen Elizabeth. She is not a Semiramis, nor a Zenobia. She has not the charm of the latter or the genius of the former, and yet she has been a better Queen for England of to-day than either would have been. It was once said wisely of monarchs that the world must thank them if they escape being great monsters.

"That great white light which shines upon a throne" is a hard light to live in. Had Queen Victoria been a great genius and a great beauty, she might have ruined England. A too pronounced personality in a monarch, especially a female one, is to be regretted. The Empress Eugenie improved the dress of the world, but it is to be regretted she did it at the expense of France. The queen has suited the eminently home-loving genius of healthy England. They like to read that she walked yesterday on the terrace with the Prince Leopold; the day before with the Princess Beatrice, by the way is the prettiest of her daughters.

Her spotless morality is the brightest jewel in her crown; that and her undoubted love for England, her devotion to her husband, living and dead, and her love for her children, and her faithful devotion to her kindred and old friends, will remain to praise Queen Victoria when even the glories of her Indian Empire and the splendid pageants which she summons at Windsor when she entertains an emperor, or in London when she drives to her famous old church of St. Paul's—nay even when the last grand pageant of all takes her to Westminster Abbey to lay her beside her royal sisters, Mary and Elizabeth—yes, when all these glories shall have faded from the pages of history and the minds of men, it will be remembered that Queen Victoria was a good woman, and that she passed through the terrible ordeal of her court, through the deprecating influence of flattery and envoys, and bore the temptations of enormous power, without losing the respect of herself or her subjects.—Appleton's Journal.

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A torn ja'ket is soon mended, but harsh words bruise the heart of a child.

Random Readings.

What a person has experienced within cannot be argued out.

He who preaches Christ crucified must himself be ready for crucifixion.—Gosner.

To the mariner in the wild sea experience is everything. To have only studied maps at school will prove of little account.—Tibid.

Christ criticized, the preacher's Alpha and Omega. Away with finery and feathers! Let the Spirit of God speak to thee. He knows how to hit the heart.—Hedinger.

Science has no faith-begetting power. Therefore a Christian faith should not rest upon scholastic wisdom, but on the power of God renewing his heart.—Hedinger.

"Wisdom, wisdom, ready understanding, science, learning out of a thousand books!" Such is the cry of the world. An evil sound is in the Churches and the schools. One thing is needful—one book, one Christ.—Hedinger.

To be always intending to live a new life, but never to find time to set about it; this is as if a man should put off eating and drinking and sleeping from one day and night to another till he is starved and destroyed.—Tillotson.

NONE of the loftiest and most learned of this world ought to be ashamed of the simplicity of the Gospel, for God Himself, the highest and wisest of all, left Himself down to it. Sufficient is it for us that an infinite power resides in the Cross, to deliver us out of all our deep depravity.—Starke.

It is a question whether ministers do not try too much to conceal their weakness and fear, and are not too assiduous in filling up the gaps and pauses with artificial efforts—whether they do not shrink too much from the criticism of the world, when it intrudes so strenuously upon calmness, flouted, and cast aside in a speaker.—Rieger.

WOULDST thou know the lawfulness of the action which thou desirous to undertake? Let the devotion recommend it to divine blessing; if it be lawful thou shalt find thy prayers discouraged by thy heart. That action is not warrantable, which either blushes to beg a blessing, or, having succeeded, dares not present thanksgiving.—Quarle.

LOVE.—For many and wonderful things are spoken of thee, thou great virtue. To love is given the covering of sins. 1 Pet. iv. 8; and the forgiveness of sins, Matt. vi. 14, Luke vii. 47; the fulfilling of the law, Rom. xiii. 10; the life of faith, James ii. 26; the blessings of this life, Prov. xxii. 9, Ps. xli. 2; and the reward of the next, Matt. xxv. 35. In brief, is the body of religion, John xiii. 25; and the top of Christian virtues, 1 Cor. xiii.—George Herbert