

that is sublime in the perfections of God? And what are the perfections of God, but the qualities in his nature which render him the loveliest pattern of moral excellence of which the mind can form a conception? In adoring God, we are just contemplating, with awful reverence, the principles of the highest morality, exercised in the amplest and most efficient manner. Imagine the Creator divested of wisdom, and benevolence, and justice, three attributes which enter into, and indeed constitute the elements, not the elements merely, but the very essence of morality, which constitute, when in operation, morality itself; imagine the Creator divested of these attributes, and he would no longer be the fit object of reverence and love; while the worship of such a being, could worship be paid Him by rational creatures, would have no connection whatever with the promotion of right conduct, that is, of morality among men. On the contrary, worship of this kind would deteriorate the moral character of the worshipper: it would sink instead of elevating man as a social being. But the mind when occupied in fearing God, in dwelling with love and gratitude upon his unremitting goodness, or in trusting, with humble confidence, upon the rectitude of his decisions as the judge of human beings, is certainly, employed in an exercise that is in its tendency virtuous. Put an end to this communion with God then, as we undoubtedly should, among all who are much engaged in the business of the world, by proscribing the public assembling of ourselves together, and the encouragement afforded to morals by devotion would speedily cease, while the finely combined principles of morality, would be thrown into a state of complete disorganization.

But, in the second place, were the public ordinances of religion deserted, a consequence somewhat different in its nature, but not less pernicious in its effects than those we have already mentioned, would ensue. There are minds so formed that devotion may be said to be necessary to their very being. By this we mean that there are minds which are continually receiving deep and solemnizing impressions from the view of their present condition, and the thought of the condition for which they may be destined, as well as from the appearances of the world around them, and the general aspect of Providence.

Now these are the minds that take most delight both in private and public devotion, and they derive most advantage from it. Suppose, then, that there were no place where the name of God was publicly recorded amongst us, the effect with persons of the character we now refer to, would be that their devotion would degenerate into superstition.

Public devotion has a powerful tendency to prevent the mind from adopting extravagant notions of things, from running into crude and unwarrantable fancies respecting the object of worship. But conceive of an ardent but untutored mind left entirely to its own feelings in regard to the service which it is to pay to its Maker, and you will not fail to conclude that there is great danger of its falling into superstitious notions, and if once these notions acquire a hold of the mind, they will increase in strength till at last rational piety be altogether extinguished and a set of notions be substituted in its room adverse alike to individual comfort, and to the progress of the species in general, in all that is improving and beneficial.

Such, then, would be the evil consequence were the public services of religion forsaken by all. The greater part of mankind would fall into a state of thoughtless impiety; this, again, would prepare the way for the widest diffusion of dissoluteness, and immorality of conduct and manners; while minds of a more retiring and sober cast, alive to the sublimities and extacies of devotion, would gradually sink down into the most abject and irrational superstitions which, in their turn, would become the parent of all those miseries that superstition has never failed to produce wherever it has taken root in the world.

Some, however, who will readily admit that all this would unquestionably occur, were public devotion and public religious instruction entirely laid aside, may still be inclined to deny that as matters are managed among us at present, there can be no great detriment either to the individual himself or to the community, in forsaking the assembling themselves together at those stated times which are set apart by the church for the worship of God; that, in short, many a one who absents himself from our assembly, may be as advantageously employed elsewhere.

In the remarks we made upon devotion in general, at the commencement of this discourse, it was shewn, we think, upon just and acknowledged principles, that it is the duty of all men to worship God, and to attend with the profoundest reverence, to those instructions which God has graciously caused to be recorded for their moral and religious improvement.

Now the point at present before us is, whether any individual can be sure that his religious state shall prosper, if he desert the house of God, either habitually or for an insufficient reason, a reason which he cannot assign as an apology to his own conscience, or which is more important still, and ought never to be overlooked, cannot assign to God himself, the judge of all?