

first, is indulged in for pleasure, and doubtless there is a kind of enjoyment in its commission. I do not deny that, for it would be both irrational and absurd to do so; neither do I ignore it. I admit it in the frankest and fairest manner; but my question is, What are the characteristics of such pleasure? Take it at its best, and suppose you have the greatest joy that it is possible for sin to furnish, of what sort is it and what is it worth? My answer is that its value is what mathematicians would call a negative quality—it has the minus sign before it; that is to say, “it costs more than it comes to;” in the equation of life it does not add to, but rather takes from, the sum total of your happiness, and leaves you less truly yourself than you were before you enjoyed it. That you may judge for yourselves I will give you the data from which I have worked out this result, and that you may better remember them I will put them in the form of a few simple propositions:

1. In the first place, then, take note that the pleasures of sin are short-lived. In the expressive symbolism of Scripture, they are like water in a broken cistern which speedily runs out; or like the blaze of thorns, which crackle and flame up for a little and then die down into a heap of ashes; and the experience of all who have indulged in them will corroborate this statement. There is in them, at best, only an emporary thrill which vibrates for a moment and needs to be reproduced again and again. They are not joys forever. They do not live within a man, sounding a ceaseless undertone of happiness in his “secret soul” wherever he may be. They cannot be said to give pleasure, save for the brief season that the excitement lasts. Take intemperance, for example. There must be some kind of exhilaration in the state of intoxication, even though it should be produced by the dethronement of reason and conscience for the time; but how long does that ecstasy continue? Ask those who know best from their own experience, and they will tell you that even when they have seemed to secure it, their joy has passed away from their embrace, and they have been left in deeper misery than before. Nor is this true of that sin only. It holds alike of all. The plea-

sure of iniquity in any form is confined to the moment of indulgence in it. It is a thing which you can catch and keep any length of time. You have, if I may so express it, to manufacture it anew every occasion, and each time it will found to be as volatile as before. You can only recall the enjoyment by repeating the sin; and with each repetition the same discovery of the fleeting nature of the joy is made. It is not a fountain sending ever forth its sparkling water, but it is a leaky pitcher which is empty before we can drink out even that which it at first contained. Do not suppose this is an exaggeration, or that I am straining my very utmost to make a case, and so representing the matter unfairly. You suspect the preacher, perhaps, of undue prejudice against the enjoyments, and in spite of all his protestations to the contrary, you are inclined to take a large discount from his word. Listen then to another witness, whose testimony I give in lines which are more exquisitely beautiful than they are strictly true:

Pleasures are like poppies spread;
You seize the flower, the bloom is shed;
Or like the snow-fall in the river,
A moment white, then melts forever;
Or like the borealis race
That flit ere ye can point their place,
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Evanishing amidst the storm.

Now these are the words of a man who had no great liking for ministers of the Gospel, and who, on occasion, could hold them up to merciless scorn and lash them with the scorpion-scourge of his stinging satire. You cannot therefore suspect him of any bias in favor of their way of putting things. They are, besides, the expressions of one who spoke from personal experience. He had indulged in the pleasures of sin; he had taken from them that they had to give, and yet this is his testimony regarding them. But why need I call up the shade of that gifted poet here? I make any appeal to yourselves. Have you got that amount of pleasure out of sin which you expected from it when you began to yield to it? You know you have not. Think not to say within yourselves that though your little indulgence in it has brought you only disappointment, a greater would give you satisfac-