

why the gate that leadeth unto life is called strait.

From the gate that leadeth unto life being called strait, let it not be understood that any of the duties which God requires are difficult, considered in themselves. His commandments are not grievous, saith one apostle; and another calls religion a reasonable service. Indeed, we may appeal to the common sense of all, whether it be not more reasonable to love God, who hath so loved us, and to worship Him who continually supports us, than to despise His benefits and forget His service. We may make even the enemies of virtue judges whether temperance and sobriety be not more reasonable than intemperance and dissipation. We may leave it to the determination even of the worst of men, whether benevolence and peace be not infinitely preferable to inhumanity and contention. But although religion and its duties be thus recommended by their reasonableness, they are not, on that account, easy to be practised by us. We are the heirs of a frail and degenerate nature. Our understandings are darkened and our affections alienated from the life of God. We are prone to what is evil and averse to what is good. Our passions betray us into numberless transgressions. Evil habits acquire a dominion over us, and we are brought under captivity to sin. To will may be present with us, but to do good we often know not. It is thus that religion and its duties come to be regarded by us as hard. It is in this view that the way that leadeth unto life is said to be strait. And, indeed, when the frailty and corruption of our nature, the strength of evil passions, and the power of evil habits are considered, we may well wonder that any of the sinful descendants of Adam should ever be permitted to enter into the presence of the living God. When we read the sayings of the Saviour, we may well be astonished, and cry out with his disciples, Who then shall be saved? Indeed, it is distinctly asserted in the Scripture, that the righteous are scarcely saved; and if the righteous be scarcely saved, where shall the wicked and ungodly appear? The Lord is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and He cannot look upon sin without abhorrence. Evil shall not dwell with Him, neither shall the foolish stand in His sight; and without holiness no man shall see the Lord. The way to be happy hereafter is to be holy here. This is the gate through which we must enter into life. We must break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by doing good. We must repent, or we perish. We must check our evil passions, and abandon our sinful habits: for whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin; but he that is born of God doth not commit sin.

Now, it is as difficult as it is necessary to forsake sin. It is easy, indeed, to see and rail at the evil and deformity of sin—to back-

bite others—and even to blame ourselves—for committing it. But fairly and utterly to renounce it is not so easy. To forsake what the constitution of our bodies, the corruption of our hearts, and long custom may have rendered in some measure natural to us, is not so easy. The chains of sin are hard to break. What a sacrifice does the sensualist feel it to give up his pampering, and keep the body in subjection! What care and watchfulness does it require of the malicious to check the smile that comes unbidden over his cheek, and to stop the whisper that issues almost involuntarily from his lips! How hard it is for the passionate to bridle his rage, and to keep within him the foamings of that torrent to which he hath been accustomed to give ready vent! How shall the proud man dismiss his swelling thoughts, and learn to think humbly of himself! How shall the covetous man turn from his glittering idol, and, blind to the lustre of gold, set his whole heart upon the favor of his Maker! What a small spark will sometimes kindle a conflagration within us! How does the throwing of a little pebble stir up a storm in that mind which seemed like a vast ocean reposing in tranquility! What a trifling circumstance will awaken evil passions which we thought to have been extinguished, and show us, that while we fancied ourselves to be free, we are still the servants of corruption! How do all our virtuous resolutions vanish before the power of temptation, like the morning cloud or early dew! None but they who have struggled hard against their evil inclinations and practices can truly tell how difficult it is to subdue or abandon them. In Scripture, the forsaking of an evil habit is spoken of as next to a natural impossibility; and it is written that the Ethiopian may as soon change his skin, or the leopard his spots, as they who have long accustomed themselves to do evil may learn to do well. The giving up of a beloved sin is compared by our Saviour to the plucking out of a right eye, and casting it from us: and he who turns from a careless and wicked to a religious and holy life, enters upon a state of difficulty and exertion, which can only be adequately set forth by the emphatic language of crucifying the old man with his affections and passions. He is put at variance with himself, and has to struggle against the whole bent of his former inclinations and habits. He has the Anakim to kill, before he can enter into Canaan. He has his giant sins to slay, before he can sit down to his inheritance.

And if it be thus hard to forsake the love and practice of sin, it is no less hard to acquire the virtues and graces of the gospel. Salvation is not a mere arbitrary and mechanical translation from a state of condemnation into a state of security. It implies a preparation and fitness on the part of those who are saved. Indeed, without a previous pre-