

wicked is represented in the Word of God as proceeding from themselves, from their own perverted wills, and contumacious behaviour,—from their pursuing a course of sin avoidable in itself, and in plain and direct opposition to the most faithful warnings, and the most tender exhortations of their loving Lord. In our circumstances, then, as fallen, and depraved, and sinful beings, immortality does not necessarily imply happiness, but may be associated with the keenest sufferings. Now, this future condemnation and misery are to be guarded against, and their opposites, approbation and happiness provided for, *in the present life only*. “There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave” whither we go. Hence the force of the exhortation, founded upon the view of the case, addressed to every human being capable of moral action, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.”

Now, only now, against that hour
We may a place provide;
Beyond the grave, beyond the power
Of hell, our spirits hide.

Firm in the all-destroying shock,
May view the final scene:
For lo! the everlasting Rock
Is cleft to take us in.

Viewed in these aspects, the bearing of the present life upon the future state becomes affectingly apparent: and the solemn lesson should be learnt by every person, to use life for the purposes for which it was given, to employ diligently every opportunity of receiving good from God, and in the great duty of personal salvation, to “work while it is called day, for the night cometh when no man can work.” The right improvement of the present state of being, is a matter of infinite importance: in the manner in which life is employed, depends an eternity of happiness or misery. This should not only be theoretically believed, but practically acted upon:—and this life should be primarily employed in preparing for another.

“The time which we occupy in the present state is that which God allots for our personal probation and trial. All God’s dispensations in respect to us, whether of providence or grace, refer to this period, and have their limits fixed by it. This suggests a most important thought, that, in this respect there is not an action we perform in our present probationary state, but has some reference to eternity, but will, in some measure contribute to our eternal joy, or our eternal pain.” To the reader of this article, I would earnestly and affectionately address an exhortation clothed in the words of the late Rev. Richard Watson, “Redeem then, the opportunity while you have it, and let the consideration of the rapid flight of time, and, as to you, its short duration, induce you, without delay, to flee to the refuge set before you; to secure your best interests by faith in Christ; and having done this, to take care that all your future days, whether they be many or few, be entirely devoted to him, and be spent in working out your own salvation.”

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SCRIPTURE ILLUSTRATIONS.

ISAIAH XXII. 22. “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder.” “The commentators,” says a celebrated writer, “are much embarrassed as to the meaning of this passage, not understanding how a *key* can be carried on the shoulder; which is by no means applicable to the keys which are now in use. This difficulty will cease when they know, that in the early ages they made use of certain crooked keys, having an ivory or wooden handle.

This is evident from the testimony of Homer, where he says, Penelope wanting to open a wardrobe, took a brass key, very crooked, hafted with ivory.

“A brazen key she held, the handle turn’d,
With steel and polished *elephant* adorn’d.”

Odyss. xxi. 9.

On which Eustatius remarks, that this kind of key was very ancient, and differed from the keys having several wards, which have been invented since, but that those ancient keys were still in use in his time. These crooked keys were in the shape of a sickle. But such keys, not being easily carried in the hand, on account of their inconvenient form, they were carried on the shoulder, as we see our reapers carry their sickles on their shoulders, joined and tied together. The key was an emblem of prayer.

“*Thou wast not salted.*” Ezekiel xvi. 4. It was an ancient custom to salt the bodies of new-born infants. It is probable that they only sprinkled them with salt, or washed them with salt water, which they imagined would dry up all superfluous humours. Galen says, “A little salt being sprinkled upon the infant, its skin is rendered more dense and solid.” It is said the inhabitants of Tartary still continue in the practice of salting their children as soon as they are born.

The Greeks in the Crimea preserve the custom of sprinkling a new-born infant with salt.—*Holderness on the Manners and Customs of the Crime Tartars*, p. 20 *Burder’s Orient. Lit.*, vol. 2, p. 183.

“Is it not wheat harvest to-day? I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive that your wickedness is great.” 1 Samuel xii. 17.

“And what was there extraordinary in this? may the mere English reader ask. Does it not often thunder and rain in wheat harvest? True, in England it does; but not in Judea; and when it does so there, it is deemed pernicious, as is evident from Prov. xxvi. 1. Josephus, *Art. lib.* vi. cap. 5. 6, paraphrasing the passage, makes Samuel say, ‘But that I may prove to you that God is displeased and angry with you for desiring a kingly government, I will manifest by strange signs, for what none of you ever saw before in this country, a storm in the midst of summer, this by my prayers will I move God to shew unto you.’ And in another place, *De Bel. lib.* iii. cap. 7. 12, speaking of Galilee, he observes, ‘In this country it rarely, if ever, rains during the summer.’ Volney says, ‘In the plain of Palestine, thunder is exceedingly uncommon in summer, and more frequent in winter.’