

to be sure, that the instinctiveness, accuracy, and certainty of this judgment are not extended to spiritual interests and relations, and promptly acted upon in regard to them! Men may be very wise or very foolish with respect to this world: they are all supremely wise or supremely foolish with respect to the world to come. The choice of objects makes all the difference. And the transposition of objects makes a wonderful inversion of personal qualities. That which is accounted, and justly, the greatest wisdom according to the human standard, is, in and by itself, the greatest foolishness. They whom the world frequently condemns as foolish, become, through the hearing and doing of the word, the approved servants of the Allwise One. The wisdom, which thus brings to naught the wisdom of this world, will one day be openly justified of all her holy and happy children.

But let us look more narrowly into the parable of the wise and foolish ones. Observe the exact point and line of action ascribed to each, the particular manifestation of wisdom and foolishness respectively. Out of the many ways and departments in which mankind exhibit these qualities in a worldly sense, one is chosen to embody the moral, and simplify its application. The Lord pictures their representatives in this instance as builders. Both propose for their ultimate object a good work, that is, if they have the means of carrying it through. The end of their plan is the same. Each would have a house of his own—a homestead for himself and family. The execution of the laudable project would have many advantages, such as necessary shelter and comfort, with an increase of independence. The inconveniences of being a mere tenant would be at an end. And it would be worth much to think that if sickness come, the father cannot be served with an ejection, or if death remove him from his wife and children, they will have a roof over their heads at any rate.

Each is further represented as *having built* his house, and nothing is said in either case as to the wisdom or foolishness shown in the plan, in the style of construction, in the internal arrangements, in the amount and utility of accommodation, or in the general appearance when finished. In all these respects the measure of wisdom may have been displayed. Perhaps there was a prevailing standard of taste and utility, as is sometimes the case in particular localities, and the builders conformed thereto; or, it is even supposable that the foolish man excelled the wise one in these particulars, and had the satisfaction of entering into a finer and grander house than his neighbour's. In reference to all these points the Lord is silent. His silence is significant and instructive. Doubtless his design is to rivet our attention upon what he does notice. Yet we need to learn that the best things may not only cease to be for our good, but may become positively hurtful and ruinous through improper hand-

ling. That which is right in all particulars save one may be entirely wrong because of that one. The best of materials may be misplaced. The greatest talents may be misapplied. The Gospel of peace becomes the savour of death to the unprofitable hearer. The superstructure of the foolish man, as well as that of the wise, may be without a flaw. Everything may indicate the very perfection of architectural design and sufficient workmanship, until the assailing elements discover its fundamental weakness; just as the hearing of the word may produce in two different persons the same appearance of the fruits of profession, until the day of trial discloses the reality of the one and the unsoundness of the other.

There is at least one particular in which the situation of the houses was the same. That particular is exposure to the elements of nature. Foolishness as well as wisdom may build a house to look secure in the calm, and beautiful in the sunshine; but wisdom takes the occurrence of storms into account. The very same causes played upon each building—the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house.

Here is a combination of assailing elements resulting in a commotion not uncommon under the peculiar physical character of eastern countries. There storms frequently burst forth with great suddenness and violence; and no doubt many who listened to our Lord recognized the force of the natural similitude he employed. The attack is made from every quarter—from above by the rain beneath by the winds. The strain is upon the roof, walls, and foundation all at once. If there be weakness any where it will surely be discovered. If the foundation is good, well; if not, the greatest strength of materials and the wisest application of skilled labour will not give a sufficient resistance, to oppose the confederate elements.

In both cases the house is exposed to the operation of physical causes, natural ordinances,—falling rains, rising floods, beating winds—and these verily, cannot be altered from their course. Wisdom equally with foolishness is impotent to prevent them. Nevertheless, wisdom is distinguished from foolishness in this respect, that it takes what precautions it may to resist what it cannot remove. It is the same in the moral world. There are appointments and dispensations as inevitable as the phenomena of nature. The day of judgment is one of these; it is fixed and certain. The hour of death is another; it is sure to befall all men sooner or later; and it oftentimes cometh like a whirlwind, with startling and overwhelming suddenness. The happening of such dispensations cannot be arrested, cannot be evaded by any amount of skill or power. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." The only mitigation of their fearfulness, which is possible to mortals, is a timely and