

who had wished so fervently to die the death of the righteous was involved in the destruction of the guilty and profligate Midianites, because 'he loved the wages of unrighteousness.'

Nor need we be surprised at the inconsistency of Balaam's wishes and hopes with his actual course of conduct. It is what, in substance, we often see displayed. What is more common in Christian congregations than "good desires," along with a prevailing love of the world? Who is not met with cases of high religious profession associated with a laxity of moral principle which has at length betrayed itself by conduct tending to discredit religion itself in public estimation? Who has not known instances in which those who are fairly set out for the kingdom of heaven yielded to temptation, and gradually fell away, till they even plunged intoagrant sin? We have seen youthful religion give way to worldliness in youth, and profligacy in old age. We have known establishments commenced with prayer, and carried on for many years with the character of piety, which have ended in moral as well as commercial bankruptcy; and the crash has involved multitudes in sudden embarrassment and ruin.—All men desire to die the death of the righteous; and yet how few, comparatively, follow out that course which alone lead to such a result! The majority either deceive themselves, as to the character of their actions, though not without many checks of conscience and Divine reproofs; or they persuade themselves that they can at any time return from the deviant path on which they venture,—resolving at some time to do this. But the real nature of men's actions is not altered by the false opinions of them which they are tempted to indulge. As Bishop Butler says, "Things and actions are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be. Why, then, should we desire to be deceived?" Again. He who yields to temptation and commits a sin, depending on his own ability to retrace his steps, and so avert the evil consequences, is not only guilty of a presumptuous disregard of *His* providence in whose hand our breath is, and with whom are the issues of life and death; but he manifests, at the same time, great ignorance of himself, and he is in great danger of being "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," his conscience is scared and he is given up "to strong delusion to believe lies;" because he "loved not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Our estimate of Balaam's character shall be concluded with three remarks.

1. How little will the noblest gifts of nature, the greatest power of genius, and even the advantages of Divine revelation, avail us, without a thorough honesty of purpose, and a persevering regard to the obligations of morality and religion? We see that the most brilliant endowments of knowledge, eloquence, and zeal, and even great advances in piety, and many labours and sacrifices in the cause of truth, may be counteracted and neutralized by some weakness of the soul, some sinful indulgence, or some deviation from the path of duty. And the more eminent the individual who thus betrays his trust, the more extensive will be the mischief occasioned by his influence and example: "as when a standard-bearer falls," or a champion yields to the enemy. "Wherefore let him who is assured that he standeth take heed lest he fall."

2. We learn, from this example, the danger of trifling with moral and