

happy there and thus? Because, whatever men had thought of them, they knew that they had done right, for they were in God's service, and had kept their consciences void of offence to God and to man. Paul was happy though he stood a prisoner before Agrippa, and when he lifted his chained hands in his appeal to his noble auditor, and said "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." He did not court afflictions and persecutions, for no doubt if he could have fulfilled his mission and been free from them he would have preferred it, but in spite of them all he was happy. Now we are not to despise what are called temporal blessings—though it is often hard to tell what in the end may be such—the joys of the friendly circle, the comforts of easy circumstances, nor even wealth if Providence bestows it, but at the same time we are to remember that worldly things do not in themselves bring real and lasting joys, and that while the body may be pampered to the full the immortal spirit may be perishing in want, and a great void be there which all the world cannot fill. First, then, satisfy the soul; seek for joy and peace in believing, and you will have that which earth can neither give nor take—enjoyment which is the Lord's portion for the poor as well as the rich, and a precious antepast of the pleasures at the right hand of God for evermore.

V.—THERE IS THE WORLDLY MAN'S UNEXPECTED SUMMONS.

"God said unto him, *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?*" How soon can man's sinful projects and expectations be blasted? Our first parents preferred their pleasure to the law of God; they were to rise higher and be happier still, but the next moment they were trembling culprits. Belshazzar sat in his palace, with the nobility and beauty of Babylon around him at the carnival; he held high the wine cup and praised his gods as he drank sacrilegiously and defiantly from the sacred vessels which had been taken from the temple of Jerusalem. He had no fear of Cyrus: he stood in no awe of Jehovah. It was with him long life and enjoyment; and Babylon for ever; but that mysterious hand, tracing those inscrutable letters over against him on the wall, paralyzed him in an instant, and he felt that God was bringing him to a solemn account. How many have their dream of life stretching far beyond, when they are awakened to behold that there is but one step between them and death; and they have to take it now! We picture our future all brilliant, with grand schemes, great works and flashing pleasures, but, at the time of highest expectancy, we may feel the arrow of the dark archer at our heart. We see men in the ardent bustle of business, and they have to leave all for a sickbed, and from which they shall rise up no more for ever. We find some hurrying by steam on land and sea; for amusement or gain; on errands of mercy or avarice: and there is a crash, a scream; and torn corpses are scattered on the land, or terrified and imploring voyagers are swallowed by the devouring wave. One feels, let him be what he may, good or bad, that, when death comes, he desires timely warning, a lingering illness, or the failing of nature by age, any time, indeed, rather than a hurried moment, or hour, or day. Death strikes us with greater solemnity and dread when we think of a man in healthy activity yesterday, and to-day he is dead.