

walk in the paths of piety. The Psalmist said, "Depart from me ye wicked men; for I will keep the commandments of my God." As if he had said, I cannot keep those commandments and associate with you; but I will keep them; therefore we must part. On the other hand, to cherish intimate acquaintance with those who are strangers to religion is represented as the way to destruction. "A companion of fools shall be destroyed." The history of Lot affords one of the most affecting examples possible of the effects of evil society. When Abraham departed from his country at God's command Lot accompanied him, and probably then, was influenced by a similar love of piety; but when attracted by the beauty and fertility of the plain of Jordan, he went to dwell in the cities of the plain, how dire was the result! Part of his family perished at the burning of Sodom, and his only surviving daughters, infected with all the depravity of that guilty city, debased their father by making him drunk, and committing with him the most atrocious incest. They became the parents of a guilty and idolatrous race, and he stands upon record, a monument of the bitter fruits of plunging into the society of the evil for the sake of transitory worldly advantage.

But you may inquire, What company is evil? Not that only of the profligate and profane, of the dissolute and abandoned: but that of all those who are strangers to vital piety. The vain, giddy, thoughtless multitude, who disregard the interests of eternity, and live without God in the world, however moral in their conduct or amiable in their manners, are associates that would be ruinous to your best interests.

There is no snare by which young professors of religion are more likely to be undone than this. I urge you, therefore, to shun this snare, consider its numerous evils. Consider that evil company is the root of all evil.

Should you make any that are strangers to religion your bosom friends, you will probably soon become like them. If they are lewd and debauched, they will lead you to the same guilty excesses. Though at first your soul may tremble at their abominations, you will soon join in their revelry and partake of their crimes. If they are scoffers and infidels, though you may think your faith too firm to be shaken, you will soon find your confidence weaken, your hope decline your value for the gospel and religion lessen, and you will go on, step by step, till Jesus and salvation are forsaken, and you sit in the seat of the scorner. But if your companions are of a less openly wicked kind, yet their influence and example will be immediately and eternally mischievous to you. Religion will languish and decline. When you see your favourite friends neglecting that one thing needful, and perhaps representing devout attention to eternal things enthusiasm, you will most probably imitate their spirit. At first, perhaps, be silent, then laugh with them at what they deem preciseness, then venture on the sinful follies they call harmless pleasures. Your soul will grow cold and dead to the Saviour and his love. With such companions you will learn to profane your Sabbaths. Devotion will become burdensome; and then perhaps be altogether neglected. Your mind will be alienated from its sacred exercises, and have no longer any relish for its pleasures. Can you imagine that when you have spent perhaps all your evening with those whose chief concern seems levity, laughter, and mirth, you can retire to read, to meditate, and pray? Ah, no! the duties of devotion will become a burdensome task: its most important exercises dull and tedious; your heart will be estranged from God, and fixed upon vain and destructive companions. With them, too, you will incur the heavy guilt of wasting many precious hours—hours given you by God to secure a happy eternity—and which, when this scene of vanity is ending, you would give worlds to purchase.

4. But, if you associate with worldly companions, you will not stop here. When you have lost the power of religion, you will most probably go on from sin to sin. Perhaps, as thousands have been, you may be drawn into crimes which may ruin your reputation, blast your prospects, destroy your comforts, and even shorten your days. If this should not be the case, when drawn aside from religion there will be little hope of your ever enjoying its blessings again. Few backsliders are restored. You may live forsaken by God; with a heart hardened in impenitence: by your example you may train up your children, and at last, without hope, meet death, and under the frown of your judge, enter eternity.

Then those thoughtless creatures that were your beloved companions upon earth will be your companions in hell. But their hours of sinful pleasure will then be past; their delights will have reached an eternal close; their laughter at religion and their cheerful songs will have terminated, and all that rendered their intercourse delightful will have come to an end. Then will be published the dreadful declaration, "The companion of fools shall be destroyed."

5. Were you sure that you should not be drawn

altogether from religion by worldly companions, yet there would be many reasons to forbid such unhalloved intimacies. All that are strangers to converting grace have the carnal mind, which is enmity against God; "and should you love them that hate the Lord?" Should you take your chief pleasure in those in whom God takes no pleasure? Should you find your chief delight in them who have no delight in your Saviour, and in whom he has no satisfaction? Is it right that they should have your heart, while the world and the wicked one have theirs? What though their friendship should not be ruinous to your best interests, yet, what pleasure should you find in them who are hastening to eternal death? Shortly there must be an eternal separation between the children of this world and the children of light. They must soon part, and part forever. As thus, after a moment of time, they must separate, and never, never meet again, it is best for the Christian to begin this separation now, and not to set his heart and affections upon those who must be torn from him, and placed at an impassable distance through all eternity. It is best for the Christian to form those friendships now which may be renewed in heaven, and perpetuated forever and ever.

Choose those, therefore, for your friends, who are the friends of God—friends that will be forever. They can sympathise with you in your sorrows—the world can not; they may obtain blessings for you by their prayers—the gay and thoughtless will gain you none, but rather deprive you of the blessings your prayers might obtain. They would do you good in your pilgrimage, and you might indulge the comfortable hope of meeting them in heaven, and in joining them there in all the noble employments and exalted pleasures of that happy, holy work. How much better, how much happier, to travel to heaven with beloved companions, heirs with you of the grace of life, than to have associates that are without hope, without God, and without Christ!

Besides all these motives for shunning evil company, the blessed God has graciously furnished a motive, wonderfully endearing and encouraging. He promises you his own friendship, if you renounce the friendship of the world. When he says "Come out from among them and be ye separate," he graciously adds, "and ye shall be my sons and daughters." With such a promise in your hearing, can you hesitate whether to choose the friendship of God, or the attachment of some, perhaps amiable, but ungodly and perishing companions? His friendship for eternity, or theirs for an inch of time? His, that would bless you with eternal life, or theirs, that would rob you of that prize, and sink you in destruction? His favour, that would fill your soul with present peace, and enrich you with the blessings that will be enjoyed without intermission through an eternal day of glory or theirs, which when it does its utmost, can but please a few short hours with vain mirth, that is like a transient blaze followed by eternal darkness?

#### THE CONSTELLATION.

One of the first objects that attracted my infant attention was the constellation of Orion. There is no personal event of any moment within my recollection—no change, in a life replete with sudden and unexpected changes—that I cannot in some way connect with the principal stars of Orion. To ascertain upon a starlight night, at bedtime, what was the relative position of my sparkling friend, ever formed a matter of careful investigation, when I happened, as a child, to be domiciled beyond the paternal roof; and I believe it is the case to the present time. No scientific inquiries, no stores of astronomical knowledge, are concerned. It is one of those predilections, involuntary associations, that neither time nor change can affect; unless as the lapse of the one, and the bereavements of the other, draw closer the tie, that endearing recollections have strengthened with every passing year. Many a wild and beautiful thought of childhood, many a romantic idea of opening youth, many a soothing reflection of riper years, seems to hang in clusters on the magic form of Orion; revealing themselves to me, while I gaze "in dreamy mood" upon its familiar outline.—In all there is a sweetness known only to such as love to look into the past; but more than the mere luxury of reveries I have found in that constellation.

I can realise the scene with heart-thrilling accuracy, when one glimpse of that bright phantom, as it then seemed, was worth to me all the splendour of a thousand noontide suns. My nominal home was then in another hemisphere; the Atlantic rolled between me and all that could constitute a home. Winter, such as our England knows not, nor can conceive of, had set in with a severity unusual even in that climate. At a very late hour I was returning from a scene of giddy mirth, when the laugh and the song had fettered a youthful party round the supper table until midnight struck unheeded, and a reluctant separation sent them on their respective paths. Mine

lay along a track sufficiently defined by the tread of many feet, and the pressure of many sleighs; but on either side the unbroken, though undulating surface of snow stretched off in the dearest monotony imaginable. To the right it terminated in low lands and the undistinguishable course of a river; on the left, a drift, that covered with its swell the interesting views of wooden fences—for no hedge rows blossom there—became by degrees level with a higher range of fields; then, sinking for a space, it rose again at the horizon, not in the flat line that marked the opposite extremity, but in those peculiar masses that shew a forest, or rather an impenetrable wood of low thick trees, to be buried beneath them. We had ascended a rising ground, which shut out the cluster of houses recently quitted; and the onward path was lost in a confused distance.

Perhaps there is no time when the mind so eagerly turns inward, to brood again over an habitual sorrow, as at the close of a sustained effort to appear light hearted and serene. It was my case, with many aggravations, just then; and the consciousness of that frozen scenery was but a type of the dreary waste that I soon displayed. I walked forward, endeavouring to fancy myself alone; and with gloomy satisfaction, if such a word was then admissible, I secretly claimed the character of an outcast from all that was pleasant, all that was cheering, all that was allied to joy, or hope, or consolation, in a cold and comfortless world. In this mood I looked slowly around me, then raised my eyes, in listless abstraction, above the heavy line of snow-capped woods, and there sparkling among myriads of stars, with an effulgence as indescribable as was the piercing keenness of the atmosphere, I beheld Orion.

And in Orion I beheld my distant, long lost home; I remembered the magnificent lines that shaded my favourite walk; I saw the tall spire of the venerable minster, from behind which the constellation used to steal upon my sight; I beheld the purple clusters of the vine that mantled my father's house, and the smiling faces that rejoiced beneath them.—What though the above was now another's home, and the party scattered, and the paternal head laid low in the dust beneath that massive cathedral roof, and in the scenes that rose to my mental view, I could never, never more rejoice; still, for a moment—and such a moment too, of mid-winter without and within—they were again my own, with all their sunbeams and flowers, glad looks and loving smiles.—My heart beat freely, my step rose lightly, and when the short, sweet vision dissolved in tears, they were tears of resignation, almost of thankfulness. Any sensation is preferable to that of a warm and loving heart striving against its nature, to become a misanthropic icicle; and from such a wretched struggle Orion had delivered me.

It will be evident, that at the time referred to, I had not learned to take heed to the light shining in a dark place, nor to watch for the rising of the day-star in my heart. I considered the heavens the work of God's fingers, but without a reference to the vileness of man, or the amazing love of God in Christ to him. In fact, I knew neither the one nor the other, I grieved not as a sinner, but as a sufferer; and the consolation to be drawn from visible things well suited an earthly nature. Far higher and holier thoughts are now interwoven with those splendid monuments of Divine power—the architecture of the heavens. But though sin atoned for, and salvation wrought out, and an incorruptible, undefiled, unfading inheritance laid up for God's people, are the substance of the tale which the heavens are telling to earth, still a soft and shadowy recollection of all that sweetened or that saddened bygone times, cleaves to the starry forms that won my childish attention, and have hovered around my path to this hour. They are chroniclers of much that would otherwise be forgotten, and which it is profitable to remember. They tell a tale of sin, of ingratitude, rebellion and presumptuous pride, on the one side; of long-suffering mercy, forbearance, forgiveness, and blessing on the other; of dangers wantonly dared, and deliverances miraculously wrought. With a voice more eloquent than angel's tongue could utter, they deliver the admonitory words "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart and whether thou wouldst keep his commandment, or no."—*Passing Thoughts*—by Charlotte Elizabeth.

CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT.—It is the usual plea of poverty to blame misfortune, when the ill finished cause of complaint is a work of their own forging. I will either make my fortunes good, or be content they are no worse. If they are not so good as I would they should have been, they are not so bad as I know they might have been. What though I am not so happy as I desire? it is well I am not so wretched as I deserve.—WARWICK. (spare minutes.)