

and painstaking cultivation. In carrying this process forward also to a successful issue, there is and must be a perpetual warfare with that tendency in nature to originate and exhaust its powers of productiveness upon the wild vine, the thorn, the thistle, and the weed. Nature's cultivated productions also, even when brought to their highest perfection, can be perpetuated in this state but by the most assiduous care. All of our perfected vines, fruit trees, vegetables, and grains come under the law of degeneracy and extinction as soon as they are subject to neglect. How soon would all our habitations become tenanted if the breaches resulting from this universal tendency to decay and dissolution were not repaired! How soon would all our wealth become corrupted, and our garments moth-eaten, and iron and gold and silver cankered, if they were not carefully guarded against such universal tendencies! All our productive machinery, also, would not only rust and rot where it is, but would remain utterly unproductive if simply neglected. We must harness and guide our steeds and carriages, or they will carry us no whither. We must handle our knives and forks, and spoons and cups, or they will convey no food to our mouths. The engine will lead no train along the track unless the steam is applied, and the engineer directs the course. The winds and the waves will dash the vessel upon some rockbound coast, and not wait it to the desired haven, unless the commandant takes his observations, and consults his chart, and the pilot stands fast at the wheel. The principle is universal throughout the wide domain of external nature, that the attainment of real good is immutably conditioned on intelligent foresight, watchful diligence, and painstaking care and labour, and that neglect is as destructive in its results as violence.

Shall we suppose that a principle which holds so universally in the domain of external nature does not hold equally in that of mind? We must carefully cultivate nature, or it will yield no fruits adapted to the wants of external life. Should we not infer from this that the fruits of knowledge, goodness, and well-being will not be induced in mind, but by assiduous care and ever-wakeful cultivation. The uncultivated garden produces nothing but weeds. Will the neglected mind spontaneously adorn itself with the beauties and graces of virtue and goodness? Will it become luxuriant in anything but ignorance and vice? The neglected field becomes a wild waste of brambles, thistles, and weeds. What, then, shall be the character and destiny of neglected mind?

Let us turn our thoughts for a few moments to the facts of the case. What is man physically? On what conditions can he become strong and healthy? Wholesome food and drink are the first condition, and vigorous exercise the next. Without either the system becomes not only weak, but the victim of disease and early dissolution. If we will not exercise our physical powers so that they may become strong and healthy, the vital forces will so act as to generate weakness and disease. The intellect follows the same law. To possess an intelligence strong and vigorous, the mental powers must be habituated to reading, to study, to contemplation, and to the endurance of the weight of great thoughts. Let the development of the intellectual powers be simply neglected for the first twenty or thirty years of life, and the capacity for solid thinking, and for the appreciation of the beauties and excellencies of thought, dies out in the mind, and it will become fruitful only of thoughts trifling, low, grovelling, and debased, just as your garden, left without careful cultivation, will become fruitful only of weeds. So a mind, educated to an appreciation of the beautiful, the true, and the good, in thought, in speech, in nature, and in art, becomes also instinct with emotions of a corresponding character. A mind not thus educated, not only remains void of such feelings, but becomes the abode of vulgar and debasing emotions and sentiments. So in the formation of good principles and habits. If an individual does not carefully cherish good principles and habits by the assiduous practice of useful industry and habits of temperance and purity, his mind will spontaneously educate itself to a state of fixed subjection—to evil principles and bad habits. Some form of activity the mind will take on for itself. If we give a right direction to its activities, in our experience we shall reap the happy fruits of truth and goodness. If we simply neglect to do this, then the mind will of itself take on a lawless form of activity, which will land the soul in destruction and perdition.

Let us now turn our thoughts to the formation of moral and religious principles and habits. Let us suppose that a man utterly repudiates the serious consideration of religion, wholly neglects the study, and even the reading of the Scrip-

tures, and suspends all attendance upon Christian duties, and ordinances of every kind. At first thought, we should suppose that such a man would have no fixed religious principles or sentiments. This will be far from being the case, however. This man will have a system of belief relatively to God, duty, probation, and immortality. Human thinking cannot confine itself to the circle of the present and the visible. It must ascend to the invisible, the eternal, and the infinite. The certain result of a neglect to improve the light vouchsafed will be, that nothing but the seeds of error will germinate in the mind under such circumstances. The man will have many opinions, but none of them will be true. Serious thought, earnest and honest research, a careful study of the chart of existence, and that only will lead to a correct knowledge of the truth and of the way of life. If it was the fixed purpose of the mind to form none but false principles and opinions on the subject of religion, it could not be more certain of such a result, than by neglecting earnest, sober, and honest inquiry, and leaving its religious convictions to be determined by the conflictive thoughts which will then spontaneously arise in the heart, and float into it from the world around.

The same holds equally of the formation of religious character and habits. The Christian virtues are not native in the human heart. They are exotic, and can be introduced there but by transplantation. Simple neglect will render their non-appearance just as certain there, as the non-planting of your garden will insure the absence in it of the cultivated vine and vegetable. The grace of pardon, and the gift of life in Christ, descends to the mind but through the avenue of "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." No man, until he thinks on his ways, ever repents of sin, and turns his feet unto God's testimonies. A thoughtless mind never entrusts its immortal interests to Him who alone is mighty to save. The man who neglects giving thought to the fact of sin, and to his need of redemption from it, is just as certain of dying in his sins, as if it was the fixed aim of his life to meet death in no other state. So also when the seeds of virtue and of the Christian life have begun to germinate in the heart, they can no more be developed to full maturity without watchful cultivation, than the seeds in your garden will blossom on to full productiveness if left to be choked by weeds, and trodden down, and rooted up by the swine.

My hearer, what do you think of heaven? What does the Bible say of it? Must not the mind somehow attain to a ripened meetness for it before it can attain admittance there? Do you see any rational connection between a thoughtless and religiously neglectful life, and the attainment of a meetness for that kingdom of light and purity? One other aspect of this subject should not be overlooked in this connection. Persons in health, as we well know, may destroy themselves by taking poison, or by the use of other means of self-destruction; while those who are already affected with a deadly disease, may occasion their own death by neglecting the use of known sovereign remedies. Now man, as a sinner, has already received a fatal stroke from the hand of the second death. If the effects of sin in him are not remedied, the certain result is the loss of the soul. The Gospel is the only possible remedy for sin, and Christ the only Saviour from its death penalty, and death tendencies. The question also whether the sinner shall receive the grace of Christ depends upon the free choice of the creature. The creature therefore need do no more to ensure his death than simply to neglect this great salvation. Such neglect leaves the soul still under the death penalty, in the first instance, and imparts additional force to all the death tendencies already operating in it, and that with fatal power in the next. I need not dwell longer upon this subject, and will conclude with a few brief reflections.

When men think of their own sins, or the sins of others, they very commonly, let me say, in the first instance, take into the account only their acts of open and positive violations of the law of duty. Here we meet with but a very small part of human criminality. Men are not so guilty in the sight of God for what they do, as for what they neglect to do. In the presence of the revelations of God, duty, and immortality, who can estimate the criminality involved in a disregard of the infinite interests and responsibilities which they unveil to our supreme regard? Any temporal wrongs done to self, or to a fellow creature, are of comparatively little account, when weighed in the balance against such criminality as that.

We all have in ourselves strong tendencies towards sinful acts, and visible evils. We have, also, still stronger ten-