

THE CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD AND THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT.

The words which form the basis of our present remarks are these—Luke xvi. 8—“The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.” We derive from them this general truth—The men of this world in their own sphere of effort, act more prudently for gaining earthly objects, than the professed subjects of religion do for attaining spiritual good. In illustration of this, we observe—

The children of this world are more *practical* in their principles of action. In matters connected with the present life, men do not suspend efforts on the settlement of abstract questions. This is not because there is no mystery in natural things. In the recondite principle of gravitation, holding in mutual relation every particle of matter in the universe; in the springing of a corn stalk out of the buried seed; in the wonderful laws of human thought and belief—what profound mystery is involved, and what room is there for endless speculation! Here, however, instead of remaining inactive, till fresh explanation is gained, men yield to the testimony of their senses and of their consciousness. And whatever knowledge of these hidden things they thus acquire, they proceed to act on it, in the business and duties of daily life. It is worthy of special notice, that the line of mystery bounding the unknown, touches on many of the very same points in the path of earthly action as it does in heavenly things. Yet the practical tendency of men in present pursuits is exemplified in their conduct. The husbandman admits that the decrees of God determine whatsoever shall come to pass in the coming harvest. He does not, however, sit still in the seed-time, speculating about the connection between God’s purposes and his own freedom. But he is active in sowing the seed in the earth, hoping that heaven will bless the springing thereof, and that he, “first laboring, shall be partaker of the fruits.” The philosopher admits that the inspiration of the Almighty must every moment give him understanding. He does not, however, abandon all mental effort, waiting passively for the divine light in him to shine. But he searches for knowledge as for hidden treasure, assured that they alone find wisdom who wait at the post of her doors. The mariner who sails a stormy sea, admits that he cannot act so as to control the designs of divine Providence. He does not, however, relinquish all means which promise deliverance, carelessly saying—If I am to be saved, I shall be so, and if heaven has determined otherwise, all effort is in vain. But he gives earnest heed to the chart of his course, he sets the most skilful hand at the helm, and employs every possible effort to save all from destruction. In these cases men are guided by observation of facts, by experience, by the known fitness of means to attain the ends they desire, by the practical rules of action, and they never doubt that God will work with them, “according to the counsel of his will.”

In these respects they are wiser in their generation than the children of light. With regard to the duties and pursuits of religion, men are prone to waste the time of privilege, in useless speculation in matters too high for them. It would seem as if the first sinful desire of our progenitors were a ruling passion in their race. Not content with the enjoyment of the tree of life, our first parents would have also the fruit of the tree of knowledge. And so it is still. As if dissatisfied with possessing the offered life of God, apart from a full knowledge of God, men refuse to accept of salvation, if it is not given them to understand all its mysteries. A gracious offer of mercy is made in Christ to all men, and a faithful promise is given them, if they will but accept it, it is theirs for ever. But they hear, at the same time, of a purpose in the divine mind, which defines the effects of this universal offer, and, instead of taking God at his revealed word, they occupy their thoughts with his secret decree, though Scripture assures them that, while a purpose of election exists, there is no positive decree shutting any soul out of heaven, if that soul earnestly desires to enter therein, by the open door of mercy through Christ. This is the testimony of Scripture—