

your heart? Is it not true that you can fully enjoy your portion in this life *only away from God*? That you can delight yourself in your chosen pursuits and pleasures *best when God is farthest from your thoughts*? Nay, that you find it needful to *banish* the thoughts of your Father in heaven, if *you are to enjoy them at all*? Just like him in the parable, who gathered all together, and went into a far country, and there "wasted his substance with riotous living." This suggests to us that *Life without God*, which is

SIN IN ITS CONSUMMATION.

Far now from his father's house, far from underneath his eye; beyond the reach of his authority and influence, among strangers, in a land of strangers, this apostate son feels at liberty. Now, he can live the life he has pined for, a life, the very zest of which consists in the liberty from all home influence, in the wretched freedom gained by that far separation from the father's house. And what is the difference between this, and that round of pleasure which men call *Life*? What gives the relish to all those expedients for spending time pleasantly, such as the ball-room, the theatre, the jovial meeting with kindred spirits, which have received the stamp of the world's approbation? Is it not the unrestrained freedom of such a far separation from every holy influence? Is it not because, for the time, they come between the soul and God? Is it not the broad brand of *ungodliness* upon them which gives them their zest and relish?—There is an utter incongruity between such scenes and fellowship with God.—Let a child of God for once stray among them, one whose heart still beats with filial love, and whose joy consists in the presence and fellowship of his heavenly Father.—Let him by word or deed recal the thought of Him who is his chief joy, and, straightway, the flow of mirth is checked, the *jest* remains half uttered, a shadow darkens every countenance, until some one gathers courage to make, in a tone of rebuke, the bold confession, that all such things are *out of place there*. Indeed! Then it is the far country, far from the father's house, away from his presence and influence, where all things help to banish the very thought of Him from the heart: those dwelling there love to have it so, for on this depends the very zest of all their pleasure.

Life without God is sin in its consummation. The intense word, here translated "riotous living," might be rendered "a

self-destroying life." The idea conveyed is that of *wasting* life, not *using* it. We need not confine the meaning to a life of open riot, abandoned profligacy. These are of course included in the idea of a wasted life, and heart-apostacy from God is often consummated by such a life. A life without God, a *Godless life*, is emphatically a wasted and *lost life*. Such a life may be accompanied with honour among men; it may leave you all your energies to heap up riches, and you may succeed; it may be spent in company with troops of friends who cheer you on, but, without God, you have never risen to the conception of what *life* really is. You are "wasting your substance" In a little while all shall be gone. In forsaking God, you give up your place in the Father's house, you sell your birthright: and whatever may be that other portion you have chosen as the price, sooner or later it shall be spent, the *whole* of it, and a great eternity shall remain behind utterly unprovided for.

We see here then the beginning of sin in the heart-apostacy of the sinner, its process in the gradual forsaking of God; and its consummation in a life without God, an ungodly life may not be characterised by glaring sin. It may be a life adorned with all outward proprieties, what men call a successful life, leading to worldly fortune and honour, for "men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." But reader if your life is spent *not for God*, then emphatically it is a wasted life, *you are destroying yourself*.

And now, in successive steps, the misery to which sin leads is exhibited to us.—First,

THE BEGINNING OF WANT.

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want." In a short time all he had gathered together was scattered and wasted. Just at that point, giving force to the similitude, it is said, "there arose a mighty famine in *that land*," the far country, far from the father's house.—There is and must always be a famine there, a lack of the true bread, the proper nourishment for an immortal soul. Perhaps for a while and with large means to command earthly pleasures, there is little sense of want in the soul far from God.—Pleasure has not yet palled upon the taste, its full round has not yet been run. When the banquet is set, and the chosen guests assembled, it is not the time for carking care. The hall resounds with mirth, with the song, and the jest, and the light laugh;

the shadows flee away in that hour of light and thoughtless gaiety. But the morning light looks in upon another scene. The guests are fled; the footstep sounds hollow in the empty hall; the remnants of the feast, the extinguished tapers, the empty vessels, are the relics of departed joys. The silent void around drives back the soul to commune with itself, and then the sense of inward want makes itself felt. In those intervals of pleasure, when the soul, lost to its own companionship, engages in the unwonted exercise of reflection, it *begins to feel want*. Those intervals, to the soul without God, are dull, dark seasons, fruitful of sad thoughts and low spirits: for, when the soul thus turns within, it is like one passing through an empty banquet hall; a dull and dreary void is all it finds. That soul has "*begun to be in want*."

RECOURSE TO FALSE HELP.

This is the next step in the progress of the sinner's misery. When he began to be in want, this apostate son "went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." He does not think of returning to his father's house; he seeks help in his own way, persisting still in his apostacy. He draws closer the bonds of fellowship with those who dwell in that land of famine. And now that impatience of restraint, that lust for independence, which had driven him from home, results in the vilest servitude. Thus is it with the soul far from God. To drive away the dull, aching sense of want, which he begins to feel, the sinner seeks a larger measure of those earthly pleasures which have thus declared their insufficiency; he draws closer his connection with those who are like-minded with himself; he ever requires to seek *new* pleasures and new companionships; these become absolute necessities for him, he must *have them*, to save him from himself, from being left alone with his empty soul; he must have them to keep the sense of want at arms length away.—And thus, the *freedom* of sin, that *liberty* for which men forsake God, resolves itself at the last into a bitter, a *profitless*, and degraded servitude. For his utmost efforts cannot preserve him from the last stage of misery.

UTTER DESTITUTION.

Sent into the fields to feed swine, "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him." He is left by those among whom he dwells, whose help he has