

THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECT.

A SERMON BY THE REV. ASA MAHAN, D.D.

"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding: And lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instructions. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep, so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man."—PROV. xxiv. 30-34.

IN the New Testament we read that "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." In the passage before us we find an individual reaping on earth, or the fields of an individual producing what he had not sowed. There is no contradiction in these two passages. In the first, the great doctrine of retribution is set forth under the analogy which exists between the character which men voluntarily form for themselves in this life and their future destiny, and the fixed relation which does obtain between the kind of grain which the husbandman sows and reaps. No man sows wheat with the expectation of reaping oats or barley. On the other hand, he expects that each of his fields, if it returns him anything, will yield him the specific kind of grain which he has sown upon it. Just such a fixed relation, we are informed, will obtain between moral character and immortal destiny, between moral conduct and the state of the soul hereafter. In the text, another and different aspect of immortal destiny is set before us by another and different figure of speech. The husbandman not only reaps what he sows, but if he neglects the proper cultivation of his fields, they will yield him what he did not sow, to wit, a destructive harvest of thorns, thistles, and weeds. So in respect to moral character. Whenever there is a neglect to cultivate with watchful care, and wakeful diligence, the virtues of truth, goodness, temperance, and purity, there will be a luxurious development in the character and the life of evil principles, poisonous sentiments, and noxious habits. Fields left uncultivated produce, spontaneously, nothing good—nothing but the wild vine and the weed. Fence and hedges uncared for rot of themselves—are prostrated by the winds, or broken down by unruly cattle. So mind, in which there is not a careful cultivation of the virtues, becomes not only void of goodness, but as luxuriantly fruitful of error, corrupt sentiments, vicious principles, and habits. The object of the present discourse is an elucidation of the thought here presented, to wit, the ruinous results of neglecting the great Salvation of God.

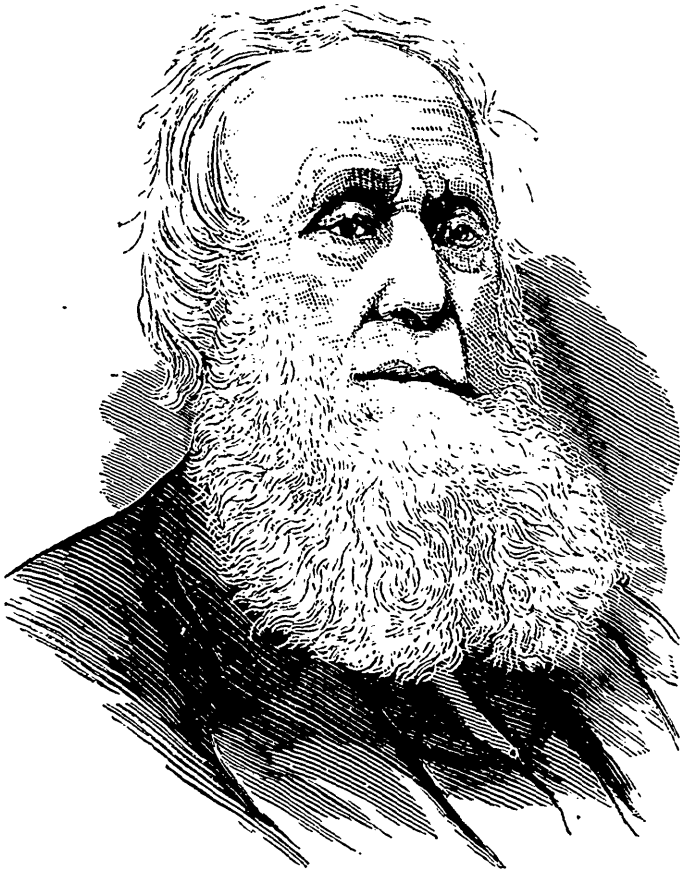
The general principle of God's eternal government over the destiny of His rational offspring is this: nothing of permanent value comes to man but through great painstaking on his part. All our interests, temporal and spiritual, are endangered, and almost equally so from two causes—violent wrong-

doing on the one hand, and simple neglect on the other. I shall speak on the present occasion of the imperilment of these interests from the cause last named. A. and B. both lost their lives, A. from an act of violence intentionally self-inflicted, and B. from a thoughtless neglect of the known means of self-preservation, when his life was imperilled. Which will be regarded as most guilty in the sight of God it would be difficult to determine. Yet with men A. is remembered as the suicide, and B. as a compassionated sufferer who lost his life by a stroke of Providence. C. and D. each lost his fortune, the one through reckless dissipation, and the other by carelessly neglecting the means which Providence had put in his power to render it secure. With men, C. is held as an excuseless criminal, and D. as suffering from the inflictions of an overruling Providence. In God's balances both are subjects of common reprobation. E. and F. lived without God in the world, and died without hope. The former was an open scoffer at sacred things, and led a life of vice and crime. The latter had adorned his character with all the

decenties of well-ordered society, and yet neglected the great salvation. In God's estimation, each alike is a self-destroyer. In the one case, remediless destruction is just as certain to follow as in the other. The loss of the soul's immortal interest is equally inevitable in both cases. Men may spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not, and thus perish through perverted activity; or they may waste time in idleness, and thus pine away in poverty and want. The same principle holdsequally in regard to the interests of the soul.

In elucidating this great subject, let us first of all turn our attention to some analogous facts which everywhere meet us in the world of nature and of mind. Let us suppose that all cultivation of the earth should cease on the part of all its inhabitants. What would the certain result be? The speedy extermination of the whole of the human race from off the face of the globe, and that for want of provisions to meet their necessities.

The reason for this result would not be this—that nature would cease to be productive, and luxuriantly so. All nature is in a state of perpetual activity, and must produce something. The real cause would be this: Nature, in the case supposed, would not produce that which is adapted to the wants of man. The spontaneous productions of nature are adapted to the wants of the brute, and would perpetuate upon the surface of the earth a numerous progeny of the irrational creation. Not so with the human race. Cultivated nature, and that only, yields those productions necessary to the wants of man. Even the savage must obtain his food by labour, and then prepare it by labour, before he can partake of it. Much more is this true of man in a civilised state. Nature originates those productions adapted to man's wants in this state only through assiduous



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