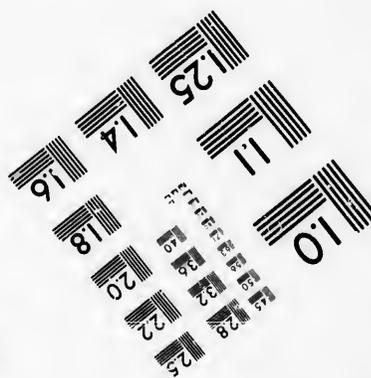
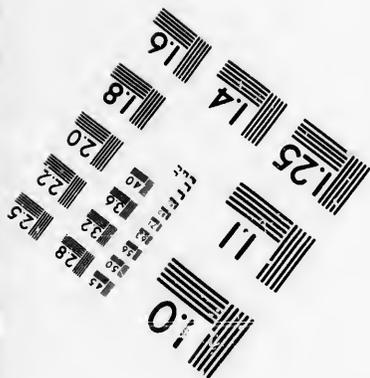
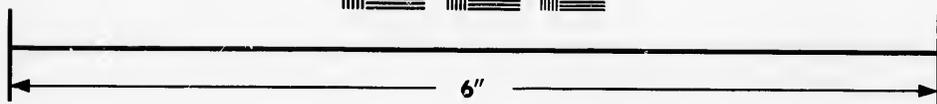
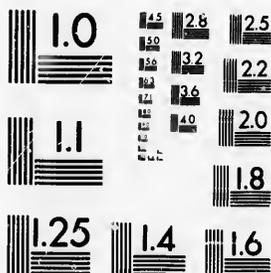


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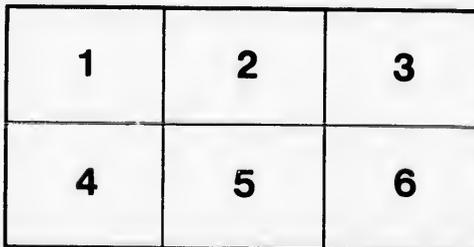
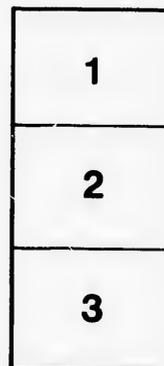
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V.

BY  
ONE OF THE  
PROFESSORS  
IN

# SERMONS,

ON

## VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

---

BY HUGH BLAIR, D. D. F. R. S.  
ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH, AND  
PROFESSOR OF RHETORIC AND BELLES LETTRES  
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

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# SERMON I.

## ON THE TRUE HONOR OF MAN.

---

PROVERBS, iv. 8.

*Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honor.*—

**T**HE love of honor is one of the strongest passions in the human heart. It shows itself in our earliest years; and is coeval with the first exertion of reason. It accompanies us through all the stages of subsequent life; and in private stations discovers itself no less than in the higher ranks of society. Their ideas of what constitutes honor, men greatly vary, and often grossly err. But of somewhat which they conceive to form pre-eminence and distinction, all are desirous. All wish, by some means or other, to acquire respect from those among whom they live; and to contempt and disgrace, none are insensible.

Among the advantages which attend religion and  
 ue, the honor which they confer on man is fre-  
 quently mentioned in scripture as one of the most  
 considerable. *Wisdom is the principal thing, says  
 Solomon, in the passage where the text lies, there-  
 fore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get un-  
 derstanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee;  
 she shall bring thee to honor, when thou dost embrace  
 her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of  
 grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.*

MAN.

It is evident that throughout all the sacred writings,  
 particularly in the book of Proverbs, by *wisdom*  
 is to be understood a principle of religion producing  
 virtuous conduct. *The fear of the Lord* is said to  
 be the beginning of wisdom: And by this fear of the  
 Lord men are said to depart from evil; to walk in  
 the way of good men, and to keep the path of right-  
 eousness.\* Man is then regulated by the *wisdom*  
 which is from above, when he is formed by piety to  
 the duties of virtue and morality; and of the wisdom  
 which produces this effect, it is asserted in the text,  
 that it bringeth us to honor.

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On this recommendation of religion it is the more  
 necessary to fix our attention, because it is often re-  
 garded to it by men of the world. Their notions of  
 honor are apt to run in a very different channel.  
 Wherever religion is mentioned, they connect with  
 ideas of melancholy and dejection or of mean and  
 feeble spirits. They perhaps admit that it may be  
 useful to the multitude, as a principle of restraint  
 in disorders and crimes; and that to persons of  
 peculiar turn of mind, it may afford consolation  
 under the distresses of life. But from the active  
 scenes of the world, and from those vigorous exer-  
 tions which display to advantage the human abili-  
 ties, they incline totally to exclude it. It may both

\* Proverbs ii. 20.

the timid or the sad: But they consider it as having no connection with what is proper to raise men to honor and distinction. I shall now endeavor to remove this reproach from religion; and to show that in every situation of human life, even in the highest stations, it forms the honor, as well as the happiness of man.

But first, let us be careful to ascertain what true religion is. I admit that there is a certain species of religion, (if we can give it that name,) which has no claim to such high distinction; when it is placed wholly in speculation and belief, in the regularity of external homage, or in fiery zeal about contested opinions. From a superstition inherent in the human mind, the religion of the multitude has always been tinctured with too much of this spirit. They serve God as they would serve a proud monarch, who may be flattered by their prostrations, appeased by their gifts, and gained by loud professions of attachment to his interests, and of enmity to all whom they suppose to be his foes. But this is not that *wisdom* to which Solomon ascribes, in the text, such high prerogatives. It is not the religion which we preach, nor the religion of Christ. That religion consists in the love of God and the love of man, grounded on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Redeemer of the world, the Intercessor for the penitent, and the patron of the virtuous; through whom we enjoy comfortable access to the Sovereign of the universe in the acts of worship and devotion. It consists in justice, humanity, and mercy; in a fair and candid mind, a generous and affectionate heart; accompanied with temperance, sobriety, government and a perpetual regard in all our actions to conscience and to the law of God. A religion of this kind, and a thoroughly virtuous character, therefore, I consider as the same.

the true honor of man is to be understood, not merely commands external respect, but what commands the respect of the heart; what raises one to acknowledged eminence above others of the same species; always creates esteem, and in its highest degree excites veneration. The question now before us is, what cause this eminence arises? By what means is it to be attained?

It may, first, from riches it does not arise. These, we know, may belong to the vilest of mankind. Providence has scattered them among the crowd with an uncalculating hand, as of purpose to show of what small value they are in the sight of God. Experience everywhere proves that the possession of them is consistent with the most general contempt. On this point, therefore, I think it not necessary to insist any longer.

Neither does the honor of man arise from mere dignity of rank or office. Were such distinctions always, when generally, obtained in consequence of uncommon merit, they would indeed confer honor on the character.

But, in the present state of society, it is too well known that this is not the case. They are often the consequence of birth alone. They are sometimes the fruit of mere dependence and assiduity. They may be the recompence of flattery, versatility, and intrigue; or be conjoined with meanness and baseness of character.

To persons graced with noble birth, or placed in high stations, much external honor is due. This is the subordination of society necessarily requires; and what every good member of it will cheerfully yield.

How often has it happened that such persons, when externally respected, are, nevertheless despised by men; and their hearts; nay, sometimes execrated by the public. Their elevation, if they have been unworthy of it, is far from procuring them true honor, that it only increases their insignificance, perhaps their infamy, and renders them obnoxious.

By drawing attention to their conduct, it shews, in the most glaring light, how little they deserve the station which they possess.

I must next observe, that the proper honor of arises from some of those splendid actions and abilities which excite high admiration. Courage and professional military renown, signal victories and conquests, render the name of a man famous, without rendering his character truly honorable. To many brave men, to many heroes renowned in story, we look up with wonder. Their exploits are recorded. Their praises are sung. They stand as on an eminence above the rest of their kind. Their eminence, nevertheless, may not be of that sort before which we bow with inward esteem and respect. Something more is wanted for that purpose, the conquering arm and the intrepid mind. The laurel of the warrior must at all times be dyed in blood, and bedewed with the tears of the widow and the orphan. But if they have been stained by rapine and inhumanity, if sordid avarice has marked his character; or if low and gross sensuality has degraded his life; the great man sinks into a little man.—What at a distance, or on a superficial view we admired, becomes mean, perhaps contemptible when we examine it more closely. It is like the colossal statue, whose immense size struck the spectator off with astonishment; but when nearly viewed, appears disproportioned, unshapely and rude.

Observations of the same kind may be applied to the reputation derived from civil accomplishments, from the refined politics of the statesman; or the literary efforts of genius and erudition. These bestow, within certain bounds, ought to bestow, eminence and distinction on men. They discover talents which themselves are shining; and which become highly valuable, when employed in advancing the good of the world. Hence they frequently give rise to fame. A distinction is to be made between fame and true honor. The former is a loud and noisy applause: The latter, a more silent and internal homage. Fame flows from the breath of the multitude: Honor rests on the consent of the thinking. Fame may give praise without withholding esteem: True honor implies esteem and

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h respect. The one regards particular distinguished  
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 nce the statesman, the orator, or the poet, may be  
 nous; while yet the man himself is far from being  
 nored. We envy his abilities. We wish to rival  
 em. But we would not chuse to be classed with him  
 no possessed them. Instances of this sort are too often  
 und in every record of ancient or modern history.  
 From all this it follows, that in order to discern where  
 an's true honor lies, we must look, not to any adventi-  
 ous circumstance of fortune; not to any single spark-  
 g quality; but to the whole of what forms a man;  
 hat intitles him, as such, to rank high among that class  
 beings to which he belongs; in a word, we must look  
 the mind and the soul.—A mind superior to fear,  
 selfish interest and corruption; a mind governed by  
 e principles of uniform rectitude and integrity; the  
 me in prosperity and adversity; which no bribe can  
 duce, nor terror overawe; neither by pleasure melted  
 to effeminacy, nor by distress sunk into dejection;  
 ach is the mind which forms the distinction and emi-  
 nence of man. One, who in no situation of life is either  
 hamed or afraid of discharging his duty, and acting his  
 roper part with firmness and constancy; true to the  
 God whom he worships, and true to the faith in which  
 e professes to believe; full of affection to his brethren  
 f mankind; faithful to his friends, generous to his en-  
 nies, warm with compassion to the unfortunate; self-  
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 ous for public interest and happiness; magnanimous with-  
 out being proud; humble without being mean; just  
 without being harsh; simple in his manners, but manly  
 in his feelings; on whose word you can entirely rely;  
 whose countenance never deceives you; whose profes-  
 sions of kindness are the effusions of his heart: One, in  
 ue, whom independent of any views of advantage, you  
 would chuse for a superior, could trust in as a friend,  
 and could love as a brother:—This is the man, whom  
 in your heart, above all others, you do, you must, honor.

Such a character, imperfectly as it has now been drawn, all must acknowledge to be formed solely by the influence of steady religion and virtue. It is the effect of principles which operating on conscience, determine it uniformly to pursue *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise.\** By these means wisdom, as the text asserts, *bringeth us to honor.*

In confirmation of this doctrine it is to be observed that the honor which man acquires by religion and virtue is more independent, and more complete, than what can be acquired by any other means. It is independent of any thing foreign or external. It is not partial, but entire respect, which it procures. Where ever fortune is concerned, it is the station or rank which commands our deference. Where some shining quality attracts admiration, it is only to a part of the character that we pay homage. But when a person is distinguished for eminent worth and goodness, it is the man, the whole man, whom we respect. The honor which he possesses is intrinsic. Place him in any situation of life, even an obscure one; let room only be given for his virtues to come forth and show themselves, and you will reverence him; as a private citizen; or as the father of a family. If in higher life he appear more illustrious, this is not owing merely to the respect created by rank. It is, because there a nobler sphere of action is opened to him, because his virtues are brought forth into more extended exertion; and placed in such conspicuous view, that he appears to grace and adorn the station which he fills. Even in the silence of retirement, or in the retreat of old age, such a man sinks not into forgotten obscurity. His remembered virtues continue to be honored, when their active exertions are over; and to the last stage of life he is followed by public esteem and respect. Where

\* Philip. iv. 8.

if genuine worth be wanting, the applause which  
 have attended a man for a while, by degrees dies  
 away. Though, for a part of his life, he had dazzled  
 the world, this was owing to his deficiency in the essen-  
 tial qualities having not been suspected. As soon as the  
 imposture is discovered, the falling star sinks in dark-  
 ness.—There is therefore a standard of independent, in-  
 trinsic worth, to which we must bring in the end what-  
 ever claims to be honorable among men. By this we  
 must measure it; and it will always be found, that  
 nothing but what is essential to man, has power to com-  
 mand the respect of man's heart.

It is to be farther observed, that the universal consent  
 of mankind in honoring real virtue, is sufficient to show  
 that the genuine sense of human nature is on this sub-  
 ject. All other claims of honor are ambulatory and  
 changeable. The degrees of respect paid to external sta-  
 tions vary with forms of government, and fashions of  
 times. Qualities which in one country are highly  
 honored, in another are lightly esteemed. Nay, what  
 some regions of the earth distinguishes a man above  
 others, might elsewhere expose him to contempt or ri-  
 icule. But where was ever the nation on the face of  
 the globe, who did not honor unblemished worth, unaf-  
 fected piety, stedfast, humane, and regular virtue? To  
 whom were altars erected in the Heathen world, but to  
 those who by their merits and heroic labours, by their  
 invention of useful arts, or by some signal acts of ben-  
 evolence to their country, or to mankind, were found  
 worthy, in their opinion, to be transferred from among  
 men, and added to the number of the gods?—Even  
 the counterfeited appearances of virtue, which are so  
 often found in the world, are testimonies to its praise.  
 The hypocrite knows that, without assuming the garb  
 of virtue, every other advantage he can possess is insuf-  
 ficient to procure him esteem. Interference of interest,  
 perversity of disposition, may, occasionally lead indi-  
 viduals to oppose, even to hate, the upright and the good.  
 But however the characters of such persons may be mis-

taken, or misrepresented, yet, as far as they are acknowledged to be virtuous, the profligate dare not traduce them. Genuine virtue has a language that speaks to every heart through the world. It is a language which is understood by all. In every region, every clime, the homage paid to it is the same. In no one sentiment were ever mankind more generally agreed.

Finally, the honor acquired by religion and virtue is honor divine and immortal. It is honor, not in the estimation of men only, but in the sight of God; whose judgment is the standard of truth and right; whose approbation confers a *crown of glory that fadeth not away*. All the honor we can gain among men is limited and confined. Its circle is narrow. Its duration is short and transitory. But the honor which is founded on true goodness, accompanies us through the whole progress of our existence. It enters with man into a future state; and continues to brighten throughout eternal ages. What procured him respect on earth, shall render him estimable among the great assembly of angels and *spirits of just men made perfect*; where, we are assured, they who have been eminent in righteousness shall *shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever*.<sup>\*</sup> Earthly honors are both short lived in their continuance, and, while they last, tarnished with spots and stains. On some quarter or other, their brightness is obscured; their exaltation is humbled. But the honor which proceeds from God, and virtue, is unmixed and pure. It is a lustre which is derived from heaven; and is likened, in scripture, to the *light of the morning, when the sun riseth; even a morning without clouds; to the light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*.<sup>†</sup> Whereas the honors which the world confers resemble the feeble and twinkling flame of a taper; which is often clouded by the smoke it sends forth; is always wasting; and soon dies totally away.

<sup>\*</sup> Daniel xii. 3.

<sup>†</sup> 2 Sam. xxiii. 4. Prov. iv. 18.

et him, therefore who retains any sense of human-  
 nity; who feels within him that desire of honor  
 which is congenial to man, aspire to the gratification of  
 passion by methods which are worthy of his nature.  
 him not rest on any of those external distinctions  
 which vanity has contrived to introduce. These can-  
 cure him no more than the semblance of respect.—  
 et him not be flattered by the applause which some oc-  
 sional display of abilities may have gained him.—  
 at applause may be mingled with contempt. Let him  
 k to what will dignify his character as a man: Let  
 cultivate those moral qualities which all men in their  
 arts respect. *Wisdom shall then give to his head an*  
*ament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to*  
*h.* This is an honor to which all may aspire. It is  
 rize, for which every one, whether of high or low  
 nk, may contend. It is always in his power so to dis-  
 guish himself by worthy and virtuous conduct, as to  
 mmand the respect of those around him; and, what  
 highest of all, to obtain praise and honor from God.  
 Let no one imagine that in the religious part of this  
 aracter there is any thing which casts over it a gloomy  
 ade, or derogates from that esteem which men are ge-  
 rally disposed to yield to exemplary virtues. False i-  
 as may be entertained of religion; as false and imper-  
 ct conceptions of virtue have often prevailed in the  
 orld. But to true religion there belongs no sullen  
 oom; no melancholy austerity, tending to withdraw  
 en from human society, or to diminish the exertions of  
 tive virtue. On the contrary, the religious principle,  
 ightly understood, not only unites with all such virtues,  
 at supports, fortifies, and confirms them. It is so far  
 om obscuring the lustre of a character, that it height-  
 ns and ennobles it. It adds to all the moral virtues a  
 enerable and authoritative dignity. It renders the vir-  
 ous character more august. To the decorations of a  
 lace, it joins the majesty of a temple.  
 He who divides religion from virtue, understands nei-  
 er the one, nor the other. It is the union of the two

which consummates the human character and state. is their union which has distinguished those great and illustrious men, who have shone with so much honor in former ages; and whose memory lives in the remembrance of succeeding generations.—It is their union which forms that *wisdom which is from above*; the wisdom to which the text ascribes such high effects and to which belongs the sublime encomium given of by an author of one of the apocryphal books of Scripture with whose beautiful and emphatical expressions I conclude this discourse. *The memorial of virtue is immortal. It is known with God, and with men. When it is present, men take example at it; and when it is gone they desire it. It weareth a crown, and triumpheth forever; having gotten the victory; striving for undefiled rewards. Wisdom is the breath of the power of God and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty. Therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. She is the brightness of the everlasting light; the unspotted mirror of the power of God; and the image of his goodness. Remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages, entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God, and prophets: For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom. She is more beautiful than the sun; and above all the order of the stars. Being compared with light, she is found before it.\**

\* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 2, 3.—vii. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29—

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## SERMON II.

### ON SENSIBILITY.

ROMANS, XIV. 15.

*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

THE amiable spirit of our holy religion appears in nothing more than in the care it hath taken to enforce on us the social duties of life. This is one of the clearest characteristics of its being a religion whose origin is divine: For every doctrine which proceeds from the Father of mercies, will undoubtedly breathe benevolence and humanity. This is the scope of the two exhortations in the text, *to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep*; the one calculated to promote the happiness, to other, to alleviate the sorrows of our fellow creatures; both concurring to form that temperance which interests us in the concerns of our brethren; which disposes us to feel along with them, to take part in their joys, and in their sorrows. This temper is denoted by the name of Sensibility; a word, which in modern times we hear in the mouth of every one; a quality, which every one affects to possess; in itself, a most amiable and worthy disposition of mind; but often mistaken and abused; employed as a cover, sometimes, for a capricious humor; sometimes, to selfish passions. I shall endeavor to explain the nature of true sensibility. I shall consider its effects: and after showing its advantages, shall point out the abuses, and mistaken forms of its virtue.

The original constitution of our nature with respect to the mixture of selfish and social affections, discovers this, as in every other part of our frame, profound

and admirable wisdom. Each individual is, by his Creator, committed particularly to himself, and his own care. He has it more in his own power to promote his own welfare, than any other person can possibly have to promote it. It was therefore fit, it was necessary, that in each individual self-love should be the strongest and most active instinct. This self-love, if he had been alone, might have proved sufficient for the purpose, both of his preservation, and his welfare. But such is not the situation of man. He is mixed among multitudes of the same nature. In these multitudes, the self-love of one man, or attention to his particular interest, encountering the self-love and the interests of another, could not but produce frequent opposition, and innumerable mischiefs. It was necessary therefore, to provide a counterbalance to this part of human nature; which is accordingly done, by implanting in him those social and benevolent instincts which lead him, in some measure out of himself, to follow the interest of others. The strength of these social instincts is, in general, proportioned to their importance in human life. Hence that degree of sensibility which prompts us to *weep with them that weep*, is stronger than that which prompts us to *rejoice with them that rejoice*: for this reason, that the unhappy stand more in need of our fellow-feeling and assistance than the prosperous. Still, however, it was requisite, that in each individual the quantity of self-love should remain in a large proportion, on account of its importance to the preservation of his life and well-being. But as the quantity requisite for this purpose is apt both to engage his attention, and to carry him into criminal excess, the perfection of his nature is measured by the due counterpoise of those social principles which, tempering the force of the selfish affection, render man equally useful to himself, and to those with whom he is joined in society. Hence the use and the value of that sensibility which we now treat.

That it constitutes an essential part of a religious character, there can be no doubt. Not only are the words of the text express'd to this purpose, but the whole New Testament abounds with passages which enjoin the cultivation of this disposition. Being *all one body, and members one of another*, we are commanded to *love our neighbour as ourself; to look every man not on his own things only, but on those of others also; to be pitiful, to be merciful, to be tender-hearted; to bear one another's burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ.\** The dispositions opposite to sensibility are, cruelty, hardness of heart, contracted attachment to worldly interests; which every one will admit to be directly opposite to the Christian character. According to the different degrees of constitutional warmth in men's affections, sensibility, even among the virtuous, prevail in different proportions. For all derive not from nature the same happy delicacy, and tenderness of feeling. With some, the heart melts, and relents, in kind emotions, much more easily than with others. But with every one who aspires to the character of a good man, it is necessary that humane and compassionate dispositions should be cultivated. There must be that within him which shall enable him to feel in some degree with the heart of a brother; and when he beholds others enjoying happiness, shall see them sunk in sorrow, shall bring his affections to sympathize with theirs. This is to *rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep*. How much this temper belongs to the perfection of our nature, we learn from one who exhibited that perfection in its highest degree. When our Lord Jesus, on a certain occasion, came to the grave of a beloved friend, and saw his relations mourning around it, he presently caught the impression of their sorrow; *he groaned in spirit, and was troubled*. He knew that he was about to remove the

\* Luke x. 27. Philip ii. 4. 1 Peter iii. 8. Ephes. iv. 23.  
Gal. vi. 2.

cause of their distress, by recalling Lazarus to life : in the moment of grief, his heart sympathised theirs ; and, together with the weeping friends, *wept.\**

Let us next proceed to consider the effect of this tuous sensibility on our character, and our state. I consider it in two views ; its influence on our conduct, and its influence on our happiness.

First, It powerfully influences the proper discharge all the relative and social duties of life. Without discharge of those duties there could be no comfort security in human society. Men would become how of savages, perpetually harrassing one another. In way or other, therefore the great duties of social must be performed. There must be among mankind some reciprocal co-operation and aid. In this, all formed from different principles, and in different ways. Sometimes they are performed merely from decency regard to character ; sometimes from fear, and sometimes from selfishness, which obliges men to show kindness in order that they may receive returns of it. In some cases, the exterior of fair behaviour may be preserved. But all will admit, that when from constraint only, offices of seeming kindness are performed, little dependence can be placed on them, and little value allowed them.

By others, these offices are discharged solely from principle of duty. They are men of cold affections, perhaps of an interested character. But, overawed by sense of religion, and convinced that they are bound to be beneficent, they fulfil the course of relative duties with regular tenor. Such men act from conscience and principle. So far they do well, and are worthy of praise. They assist their friends ; they give to the poor they do justice to all. But what a different complexion is given to the same actions, how much higher flavor

\* John ii. 35.

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acquire, when they flow from the sensibility of a  
ng heart? If one be not moved by affection, even  
ng him influenced by principle, he will go no  
ner than strict principle appears to require. He  
advance slowly and reluctantly. As it is justice,  
generosity, which impels him, he will often feel as  
fk what he is required by conscience to perform.  
ereas, to him who is prompted by virtuous sensibili-  
every office of beneficence and humanity is a plea-  
e. He gives, assists, and relieves, not merely because  
s bound to do so, but because it would be painful for  
to refrain. Hence, the smallest benefit he confers  
s in its value, on account of its carrying the affection  
he giver impressed upon the gift. It speaks his heart ;  
the discovery of the heart is very frequently of great-  
consequence than all that liberality can bestow. How  
en will the affectionate smile of approbation gladden  
humble, and raise the dejected? How often will  
look of tender sympathy, or the tear that involunta-  
falls, impart consolation to the unhappy? By means  
this correspondence of hearts, all the great duties  
which we owe to one another are both performed to  
ore advantage, and endeared in the performance.  
om true sensibility flow a thousand good offices, ap-  
rently small in themselves, but of high importance to  
e felicity of others; offices which altogether escape  
e observation of the cold and unfeeling, who, by the  
rdness of their manner, render themselves unamiable,  
en when they mean to do good. How happy then  
ould it be for mankind, if this affectionate disposition  
eailed more generally in the world! How much  
ould the sum of public virtue and public felicity be in-  
eased, if men were always inclined to *rejoice with*  
*them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep.*  
But, besides the effect of such a temper on general  
tue and happiness, let us consider its effects on the  
ppiness of him who possesses it, and the various plea-  
es to which it gives him access. If he be master of  
hes or influence, it affords him the means of increas-

ing his own enjoyment, by relieving the wants, or increasing the comforts of others. If he commands these advantages, yet all the comforts which he feels the possession of the deserving become in some sort his; his rejoicing in the good which they enjoy. Even the face of nature yields a satisfaction to him which the sensible can never know. The profusion of good which he beholds poured forth on the universe, diffuses his heart with the thought that innumerable multitudes around him are blest and happy.—When he sees the laborers of men appearing to prosper, and views a country flourishing in wealth and industry; when he beholds the spring coming forth in its beauty, and reviving the faded face of nature; or in autumn beholds the field loaded with plenty, and the year crowned with autumnal fruits; he lifts his affections with gratitude to the Father of all, and rejoices in the general felicity and harmony.

It may indeed be objected, that the same sensibility lays open the heart to be pierced with many wounds from the distresses which abound in the world; exposed us to frequent suffering from the participation which we communicate of the sorrows, as well as of the joys of friendship. But let it be considered, that the tenderness and melancholy of sympathy is accompanied with a sensibility which they who feel it would not exchange for the gratifications of the selfish. When the heart is stirred and moved by any of the kind affections, even when it pours itself forth in virtuous sorrow, a secret attractive charm mingles with the painful emotion; there is a joy in the midst of grief. Let it be farther considered, that the sorrows and griefs which sensibility introduces are counterbalanced by pleasures which flow from the same source. Sensibility heightens in general the human powers, and is connected with acuteness in all our feelings. If it make us sensible to some painful sensations, in return, it renders the pleasing ones more vivid and animated. The selfish man languishes in his narrow circle of pleasures. The generous is confined to what affects his own interest. He is obliged to repeat the same gratifications, till they become insupportable.

the wants, or the man of virtuous sensibility moves in a wider  
of the command of felicity. His powers are much more frequent-  
s which he feels called forth into occupations of pleasing activity.  
in some sort his numberless occasions open to him of indulging his fa-  
enjoy. Every taste, by conveying satisfaction to others. Often  
him which the in his power, in one way or other, to sooth the af-  
fusion of good heart; to carry some consolation into the house  
the universe, dis-oe. In the scenes of ordinary life, in the domestic  
ncreable multi- social intercourses of man, the cordiality of his affec-  
men he sees the cheers and gladdens him. Every appearance,  
l views a cou- description of innocent happiness, is enjoyed by  
en he behold- Every native expression of kindness and affection  
l reviving the- ing others is felt by him, even though he be not the  
beholds the fr- ct of it. Among a circle of friends, enjoying one  
wned with all- her, he is as happy as the happiest. In a word, he  
titude to the- in a different sort of world from what the selfish  
l felicity, and- inhabits.—He possesses a new sense, which enables  
e same sensib- to behold objects which the selfish cannot see. At  
h many wor- same time, his enjoyments are not of that kind which  
e world; exp- in merely on the surface of the mind. They pene-  
icipation whic- the heart. They enlarge and elevate, they refine  
as of the joy- ennoble it. To all the pleasing emotions of affec-  
that the ten- they add the dignified consciousness of virtue.  
with a sensa- dren of men! Men formed by nature to live and to  
nge for the- as brethren! How long will ye continue to estrange  
heart is stro- selves from one another by competitions and jeal-  
n when it p- s, when in cordial union ye might be so much more  
attractive ch- ? How long will ye seek your happiness in selfish  
e is a joy in- fications alone, neglecting those purer and better  
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has had considerable influence. It has abated the force of persecution : It has even tempered the horrors of war ; and man is now more ashamed than he was in some former ages, of acting as a savage to man. Hence, sensibility has become so reputable a quality, that the appearance of it is frequently assumed when the quality is wanting. Softness of manners must not be taken for true sensibility. Sensibility indeed tends to produce gentleness in behavior ; and when such behavior flows from native affection, it is valuable and amiable. But the exterior manner alone may be learned in the school of the world ; and often, too often, is found to cover much unfeeling hardness of heart. Professions of sensibility on every trifling occasion, joined with the appearance of excessive softness, and a profusion of sentimental language, afford always much ground for distrust. They create the suspicion of a studied character. Frequently, under a negligent and seemingly rough manner, there lies a tender and feeling heart. Manliness and sensibility are so far from being incompatible, that the truly brave are, for the most part, generous and humane ; while the soft and effeminate are hardly capable of any vigorous exertion of affection.

As sensibility supposes delicacy of feeling with respect to others, they who affect the highest sensibility are apt to carry this delicacy to excess. They are, perhaps, incapable of the warmth of disinterested friendship ; they are become so refined in all their sensations ; they entertain such high notions of what ought to correspond in the feelings of others to their own ; they are mightily hurt by every thing which comes not up to their ideal standard of reciprocal affection, as to produce inquiet and uneasiness to all with whom they are connected. Hence, unjust suspicions of their friends ; hence, groundless upbraidings, and complaints of unkindness ; hence, a proneness to take violent offence at trifles. In consequence of examining their friends with a microscopic eye, what to an ordinary observer would not be displeasing, to them is grating and disgusting.

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the bottom of the character of such persons there al-  
 y lie much pride, and attention to themselves. This  
 indeed a false species of sensibility. It is the substitu-  
 n of a capricious and irritable delicacy, in the room  
 of that plain and native tenderness of heart, which  
 prompts men to view others with indulgent eye, and to  
 make great allowances for the imperfections which are  
 sometimes adherent to the most amiable qualities.  
 There are others who affect not sensibility to this ex-  
 treme, but who found high claims to themselves upon  
 the degree of interest which they take in the concerns of  
 others. Although their sensibility can produce no be-  
 nefit to the person who is its object, they always con-  
 ceive that it intitles themselves to some profitable re-  
 turns. These, often, are persons of refined and artful  
 character ; who partly deceive themselves, and partly  
 employ their sensibility as a cover to interest. He who  
 starts from genuine affection, when he is feeling along  
 with others in their joys or sorrows, thinks not of any  
 recompence to which this gives him a title. He follows  
 the impulse of his heart. He obeys the dictate of his  
 nature ; just as the vine by its nature produces fruit,  
 and the fountain pours forth its streams. Wherever  
 views of interest, and prospects of return, mingle with  
 the feelings of affection, sensibility acts an imperfect  
 part, and entitles us to a small share of praise.  
 But supposing it to be both complete and pure, I must  
 caution you against resting the whole merit of your cha-  
 racter, on sensibility alone. It is indeed a happy consti-  
 tution of mind. It fits men for the proper discharge of  
 many duties, and gives them access to many virtuous  
 pleasures. It is requisite for our acceptance either with  
 God or man. At the same time, if it remain an in-  
 sensitive feeling alone, it will form no more than an  
 imperfect character. Complete virtue is of a more ex-  
 tended and dignified nature. It supposes sensibility, good  
 temper, and benevolent affections : It includes them as  
 essential parts ; but it reaches farther : it supposes them  
 to be strengthened and confirmed by principle ; it re-

quires them to be supported by justice, temperance, fortitude, and all those other virtues which enable us to act with propriety, in the trying situations of life.

It is very possible for a man to possess the kind affections in a high degree, while at the same time, he is carried away by passion and pleasure into many criminal deeds. Almost every man values himself on possessing virtue in one or other of its forms. He wishes to be esteem'd to some quality which will render him estimable in his own eye, as well as that of the public. Hence it is common for many, especially for those in the higher classes of life, to take much praise to themselves on account of their sensibility, though it be, in truth, a sensibility of a very defective kind. They relent at the view of misery when it is strongly fet before them. Often too, affected chiefly by the powers of description, they are at feigned and pictured distress, more than at real misery, that they relent. The tears which they shed upon these occasions they consider as undoubted proofs of virtue. They applaud themselves for the goodness of their hearts; and conclude that with such feelings they cannot fail to be agreeable to Heaven. At the same time, these transient relentings make slight impression on their conduct. They give rise to few, if good deeds; and soon after such persons have wept at some tragical tale, they are ready to stretch forth the hand of oppression, to grasp at the gain of injustice, or to plunge into the torrent of criminal pleasures. This sort of sensibility affords no more than a fallacious claim to virtue, and gives men no ground to think highly of themselves. We must inquire not merely how they feel, but how their feelings prompt them to act, in order to ascertain their real character.

I shall conclude with observing, that sensibility, when genuine and pure, has a strong connection with piety. That warmth of affection, and tenderness of heart, which lead men to feel for their brethren, and to enter into their joys and sorrows, should naturally dispose them to reflect at the remembrance of the divine goodness; to glow with admiration of the divine majesty; to send up the

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of praise and adoration to that Supreme Being who  
 his creatures happy. He who pretends to great  
 ability towards men, and yet has no feeling for the  
 objects of religion, no heart to admire and adore  
 great Father of the universe, has reason to distrust  
 truth and delicacy of his sensibility. He has reason  
 to suspect, that in some corner of his heart there lodges  
 that depravity, an unnatural hardness and callousness,  
 which vitiates his character.—Let us study to join all  
 parts of virtue in proper union; to be consistently  
 uniformly good; just and upright, as well as pitiful  
 and courteous; pious, as well as sympathising. Let us  
 thank him who made the heart, that he would fill it  
 with all proper dispositions; rectify all its errors; and  
 make it the happy abode of personal integrity and social  
 honesty; of purity, benevolence, and devotion.

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### SERMON III.

#### ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF TIME.

GENESIS XLVII. 8.

*And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?*

TIME is of so great importance to mankind, that it  
 must not too often employ religious meditation. There is  
 something in the management of which wisdom is more  
 requisite, or where mankind display their inconsistency  
 more than in any other. In its particular parcels, they appear entirely  
 ignorant of its value; throw it away with thoughtless profusion.  
 When collected into some of its great portions, and  
 considered as the measure of their continuance in life, they  
 are not sensible of its value, and begin to regard it with  
 indifference. While day after day is wasted in a course  
 of dissipation or vicious pleasure, if some incident shall oc-

cur which leads the most inconsiderate man to think of his age, or time of life; how much of it is gone; what period of it he is now arrived; and to what portion of it he can with any probability look forward as yet to come; he can hardly avoid feeling some compunction, and reflecting seriously upon his life. Happy, if that virtuous impression were not of momentary continuance, but retained its influence amidst succeeding cares and pleasures of the world! To the good old Patriarch mentioned in the text we have reason to believe that such impressions were habitual. In the question put to him by the Egyptian monarch produced in his answer, such reflections as were naturally formed to his time of life, *And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage.* But the peculiar circumstances of the Patriarch, or the number of his years, are not to be the subject of our present consideration. My purpose is to show how we should be affected in every period of our man life, by reflection upon our age, whether we are young, or advanced in years; in order that the question *How old art thou?* may never be put to any of us without some good effect. There are three different divisions of our life which such a question naturally calls to view; that part of it which is past; that which is present; and that to which we fondly look forward as future. Let us consider in what manner we ought to be affected by attending to each of these.

I. Let us review that part of our time which is past. According to the progress which we have made in our journey of life, the field which past years present to our review will be more or less extensive. But to every man they will be found to afford sufficient matter of humiliation and regret. For where is the person, who has not acted for any time in the world, remembers not his errors, and follies; in his past behavior? Who dare

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that he has improved, as he might have done, the  
 us advantages which were afforded him ; and that  
 recalls nothing for which he has reason, either to  
 re, or to blush ? When we recollect the several  
 es of life through which we have passed ; the suc-  
 ve occupations in which we have been engaged, the  
 ns we have formed, and the hopes and fears which  
 nately have filled our breast ; how barren for most  
 is the remembrance ; and how few traces of any  
 g valuable or important remain ? Like characters  
 wn on the sand, which the next wave washes totally  
 y, so one trivial succession of events has effaced the  
 nory of the preceding ; and though we have seemed  
 along to be busy, yet for much of what we have act-  
 we are neither wiser nor better than if such actions  
 never been. Hence, let the retrospect of what is  
 produce, as its first effect, humiliation in our own  
 s, and abasement before God. Much do human  
 e and self-complacency require some correction ;  
 that correction is never more effectually administer-  
 than by an impartial and serious review of former  
  
 But though past time be gone, we are not to con-  
 r it as irredeemably lost. To a very profitable pur-  
 e it may yet be applied, if we lay hold of it while it  
 nains in remembrance, and oblige it to contribute to  
 ure improvement. If you have gained nothing more  
 the years that are past, you have at least gained ex-  
 ience ; and experience is the mother of wisdom.  
 u have seen the weak parts of your character ; and  
 y have discovered the chief sources of your miscon-  
 ct. To these let your attention be directed ; on  
 se, let the proper guards be set. If you have trifled  
 g, resolve to trifle no more. If your passions have  
 en betrayed and degraded you, study how they may  
 kept in future, under better discipline. Learn, at the  
 e time, never to trust presumptuously in your own  
 dom. Humbly apply to the Author of your being,  
 beseech his grace to guide you safely through those

slippery and dangerous paths, in which experience shown that you are so ready to err, and to fall.

In reviewing past life, it cannot but occur, that many things now appear of inconsiderable importance, which once occupied and attached us, in the highest degree. Where are those keen competitions, those mortifying disappointments, those violent enmities, those eager pursuits, which we once thought were to last forever, and on which we considered our whole happiness or misery as suspended? We look back upon them now, as upon a dream which has passed away. None of those mighty consequences have followed which we had predicted. The airy fabrick has vanished, and left no trace behind it. We smile at our former violence; and wonder how such things could have ever appeared so significant and great. We may rest assured, that what hath been, shall again be. When Time shall once have laid his lenient hand on the passions and pursuits of the present moment, they too shall lose that imaginary value which heaven's fancy now bestows upon them. Hence, let them not ready begin to subside to their proper level. Let wisdom infuse a tincture of moderation into the eagerness of contest, by anticipating that period of coolness, which the lapse of time will, of itself, certainly bring. When we look back on years that are past, how swiftly do they appear to have fled away? How insensibly has one period of life stolen upon us after another, like the successive incidents in a tale that is told? Before we were aware, childhood had grown up into youth; youth had passed into manhood; and manhood now, perhaps, begins to assume the grey hair, and to decline into old age. When we were carrying our views forward, months and years to come seem to stretch through a long and extensive space. But when the time shall arrive of looking back, they shall appear contracted within narrow bounds. Time, when yet before us, seems to advance with slow and tardy steps; no sooner is it past, than we discern its wings.

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is a remarkable peculiarity in the retrospect of form-  
 se, that it is commonly attended with some measure  
 eaviness of heart. Even to the most prosperous, the  
 nory of joys that are past is accompanied with secret  
 ow. In the days of former years, many objects arise  
 ew, which make the most unthinking, grave; and  
 er the serious, sad. The pleasurable scenes of youth,  
 objects on which our affections had been early plac-  
 the companions and friends with whom we had  
 t many happy days, even the places and the occu-  
 ons to which we had been long accustomed, but to  
 ch we have now bid farewell, can hardly ever be re-  
 ed, without softening, nor sometimes, without pierc-  
 the heart. Such sensations, to which few, if any,  
 ay hearers, are wholly strangers, I now mention, as  
 rding a strong proof of that vanity of the human  
 e, which is so often represented in the sacred writ-  
 : And vain indeed must that state be, where shades  
 grief tinge the recollection of its brightest scenes.  
 , at the same time, though it be very proper that  
 n meditations should sometimes enter the mind, yet  
 hem I advise not the gentle and tender heart to  
 ell too long. They are apt to produce a fruitless  
 ancholy; to deject, without bringing much improve-  
 nt; to thicken the gloom which already hangs over  
 an life, without furnishing proportionable assistance  
 ir.  
 et I  
 e you, rather to recall to view such parts  
 former duct, if any such there be, as afford  
 he remembrance a rational satisfaction. And what  
 s of conduct are these? Are they the pursuits of  
 ual pleasure, the riots of jollity, or the displays of  
 w and vanity? No; I appeal to your hearts, my  
 nds, if what you recollect with most pleasure be not  
 innocent, the virtuous, the honorable parts of your  
 life; when you were employed in cultivating your  
 ds, and improving them with useful knowledge;  
 en, by regular application and persevering labor, you  
 e laying the foundation of future reputation and ad-

vancement; when you were occupied in discharge with fidelity the duties of your station, and acquired the esteem of the worthy and the good; when in a trying situation you were enabled to act your part with firmness and honor; or had seized the happy opportunity of assisting the deserving, of relieving the distressed and bringing down upon your heads the  *blessings of heaven that were ready to perish*. These, these are the pleasures of your former life which are recalled with most satisfaction. On them alone, no heaviness of heart attends. You enjoy them as a treasure which is now stored up, and beyond all danger of being lost. These cheer the heart of sadness, lighten the burden of old age, and, through the mortifying remembrance of much of the past, send a ray of light and joy. From the review of these, the comparison of them with the deceitful pleasures of sin, let us learn how to form our estimate of happiness. Let us learn what is true, what is false, in human affairs; and from experience of the past, judge of the quarter to which we must in future turn, if we would lay a foundation for permanent satisfaction. After having thus reviewed the former years of our life, let us consider,

II. What attention is due to that period of our life which we are at present placed in. Here lies the immediate and principal object of our concern. For the recollection of the past is only as far of moment, as it has upon the present. The past, to us now is little more than a future, as yet, is nothing. Between these two gulphs of time subsists the present, as an isthmus or bridge, along which we are all passing. With heedless and inconsiderate steps let us not pass along it; but remember well, how much depends upon our holding it steady, and properly conducted course. *What thy hand findeth to do, do it now with all thy might; for now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.* Many directions might be given for the wise and pious improvement of the present; a few of which I shall hint.

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Let us begin with excluding those superfluous avoca-  
 ns which unprofitably consume it. Life is short;  
 ch that is of real importance remains to be done. If  
 suffer the present time to be wasted either in absolute  
 eness, or in frivolous employments, it will hereafter  
 l for vengeance against us. Removing therefore  
 at is merely superfluous, let us bethink ourselves of  
 at is most material to be attended to at present: As,  
 st and chief, the great work of our salvation; the dis-  
 arge of the religious duties which we owe to God  
 r Creator, and to Christ our Redeemer.  *God waiteth*  
 yet to be gracious; whether he will wait longer, none  
 us can tell. Now, therefore,  *seek the Lord while he*  
 y be found,  *call upon him while he is near.* Our spir-  
 al interests will be best promoted by regular perform-  
 ce of all the duties of ordinary life. Let those, there-  
 re, occupy a great share of the present hour. What-  
 er our age, our character, our profession, or station in  
 e world, requires us to do, in that let each revolving  
 y find us busy. Never delay till to-morrow what rea-  
 n and conscience tell you ought to be performed to-  
 y. To-morrow is not yours; and though you should  
 e to enjoy it, you must not overload it with a burden  
 t its own.  *Sufficient for the day will prove the duty*

*proof.*  
 The observance of order and method, is of high con-  
 quence for the improvement of present time. He who  
 rforms every employment in its due place and season,  
 ffers no part of time to escape without profit. He  
 ultiplies his days; for he lives much in little space.  
 hereas he who neglects order in the arrangement of  
 occupations, is always loosing the present in return-  
 upon the past, and trying, in vain to recover it when  
 ne. Let me advise you frequently to make the pres-  
 employment of time an object of thought. Ask  
 urself, about what are you now busied? What is  
 ultimate scope of your present pursuits and cares?  
 n you justify them to yourselves? Are they likely to  
 oduce any thing that will survive the moment, and

bring forth some fruit for futurity? He who can give no satisfactory answer to such questions as these, may reasonably reason to suspect that his employment of the present is not tending either to his advantage, or his honor. I would naturally, let me admonish you, that while you study to improve, you should endeavor also to enjoy the present hour. Let it not be disturbed with groundless discourses, or poisoned with foolish anxieties about what is to come: But look up to Heaven, and acknowledge, with a grateful heart, the actual blessings you enjoy. If you must admit, that you are now in health, peace, and safety; without any particular or uncommon evils to afflict your condition; what more can you reasonably look for in this vain and uncertain world? How little can the greatest prosperity add to such a state? Will any future situation ever make you happy, if now, with so few causes of grief, you imagine yourselves miserable? The evil lies in the state of your mind, not in your condition or fortune; and by no alteration of circumstances is likely to be remedied. Let us now,

III. Consider with what dispositions we ought to look forward to those years of our life that may yet be to come. Merely to look forward to them, is what requires no admonition. Futurity is the great object to which the imaginations of men are employed; for the sake of which the past is forgotten, and the present is often neglected. All time is in a manner swallowed up by it. On futurity, men build their designs; on futurity, they rest their hopes; and though not happy in the present, they always reckon on becoming so, at some subsequent period of their lives. This propensity to look forward, was for wise purposes implanted in the human breast. It serves to give proper occupation to the active powers of the mind, and to quicken all its exertions. But it is too often immoderately indulged, and grossly abused. The curiosity which sometimes prompts persons to enquire, by unlawful methods, into what is to come, is equally foolish and sinful. Let us restrain all desire of penetrating farther than is allow-

He who can get into that dark and unknown region. Futurity be-  
 gins to God : And happy for us is that mysterious veil  
 of the present with which his wisdom has covered it. Were it in our  
 his honor. power to lift up the veil, and to behold what it conceals,  
 you study to enjoy any and many a thorn we would plant in our breasts.  
 enjoy the present the proper and rational conduct of men with regard to  
 boundless discov- futurity, is regulated by two considerations : First, that  
 about what is much of what it contains, must remain to us absolutely  
 knowledge, which known ; next, that there are also some events in it  
 enjoy. If which may be certainly known and foreseen.  
 peace, and First, much of futurity is, and must be, entirely un-  
 evils to affil- known to us. When we speculate about the continu-  
 sonably look- ance of our life, and the events which are to fill it, we  
 we little can hold a river which is always flowing ; but which soon  
 With any futu- escapes out of our sight, and is covered with mists and  
 th so few cau- darkness. Some of its windings we may endeavor to  
 able ? The trace ; but it is only for a very short way that we are able  
 ur condition to pursue them. In endless conjectures we quickly  
 tances is like and ourselves bewildered ; and, often, the next event  
 e ought to lo- that happens baffles all the reasonings we had formed  
 may yet be concerning the succession of events. The consequence  
 m, is what which follows from this is, that all the anxiety about fu-  
 great object turity, which passes the bounds of reasonable precaution,  
 oyed ; for is unprofitable and vain. Certain measures are indeed  
 he present necessary to be taken for our safety. We are not to  
 swallowed sh- forward inconsiderate and headlong. We must  
 gns ; on fu- make, as far as we are able, provision for future welfare ;  
 not happy and guard against dangers which apparently threaten.  
 ng so, at for- ut having done this, we must stop ; and leave the rest  
 propensity to Him who disposeth of futurity at his will. *He who*  
 planted in *saith in the heavens laughs at the wisdom and the plans*  
 of worldly men. Wherefore, *boast not thyself of to-mor-*  
 occupation *row ; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.*  
 quicken all for the same reason, despair not of to-morrow ; for it  
 ely indulge may bring forth good as well as evil. Vex not your-  
 ch sometim- selves with imaginary fears. The impending black  
 methods, cloud, to which you look up with so much dread, may  
 nful. Let us be by harmless ; or though it should discharge the  
 an is allow

storm, yet, before it breaks, you may be lodged in the lonely mansion which no storms ever touch.

In the next place, there are in futurity some even which may be certainly foreseen, by us, through all darkness. First, it may be confidently predicted, that no situation into which it will bring us, shall ever answer fully to our hopes, or confer perfect happiness. This is as certain as if we already saw it, that life, in future periods, will continue to be what it has heretofore been; that it will be a mixed and varied state; a chequered scene of pleasures and pains, of fugitive joys and transient griefs, succeeding in a round to one another. Whether we look forward to the years of youth or to those of manhood and advanced life, it is all the same. The world will be to us, what it has been to generations past. Set out, therefore, on what remains of your journey under this persuasion. According to this measure, estimate your future pleasures; and calculate your future gains. Carry always along with you a modest and a temperate mind. Let not your expectations from the years that are to come rise too high, and your disappointments will be fewer, and more easily supported.

Farther; this may be reckoned upon as certain, that in every future situation of life, a good conscience, a well ordered mind, and a humble trust in the favor of Heaven, will prove the essential ingredients of your happiness. In reflecting upon the past, you have found this to hold. Assure yourselves that in future, the case will be the same. The principal correctives of human vanity and distress, must be sought for in religion and virtue. Entering on paths which to you are new and unknown, place yourselves under the conduct of a vine guide. Follow the great *Shepherd of Israel*, who amidst the turmoil of this world, leads his flock to *green pastures, and by the still waters*.—As you advance in life, study to improve both in good principles, and in good practice. You will be enabled to look to futurity without fear, if, whatever it brings, it shall find you

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ly employed in *doing justly, loving mercy, and walk-  
humbly with the Lord your God.*

Lastly, Whatever other things may be dubious in fu-  
turity, two great events are undoubtedly certain, death  
and judgment. These we all know, are to terminate  
the whole course of time ; and we know them to be not  
entirely certain, but to be approaching nearer to us, in con-  
sequence of every day that passes over our heads. To  
avoid therefore, let us look forward, not with the dread  
of children, but with that manly seriousness which be-  
comes to men and christians. Let us not avert our view  
from them, as if we could place them at some greater  
distance by excluding them from our thoughts. This  
refuge is the refuge of too many ; but it is the refuge  
of fools, who aggravate thereby the terrors they must  
encounter. For *he that cometh, shall come, and will not  
tarry.* To his coming, let us look with a steady eye ;  
and as life advances through its progressive stages, pre-  
pare for its close, and for appearing before him who  
will judge us.

Thus I have endeavored to point out the reflections  
proper to be made, when the question is put to any of  
us, *How old art thou ?* I have shown with what eye we  
should review the past years of our life ; in what light  
we should consider the present ; and with what disposi-  
tion we should look forward to the future : In order that such a  
reflection may always leave some serious impression be-  
hind it ; and may dispose us *so to number the years of  
our life, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

## SERMON IV.

ON THE DUTIES BELONGING TO MIDDLE AGE

I CORINTHIANS XIII. 11.

—When I became a man, I put away childish things

TO every thing, says the wise man, there is a season and a time to every purpose under Heaven.\* As there are duties which belong to particular situations of fortune, so there are duties also which result from particular periods of human life. In every period of it, indeed that comprehensive rule takes place, *Fear God and keep his commandments*; for this is the whole duty of man. Piety to God, and charity to men, are incumbent upon persons of every age, as soon as they can think and act. Yet these virtues, in different stages of life, assume different forms; and when they appear in that form which is most suited to our age, they appear with peculiar gracefulness; they give propriety to conduct, and a dignity to character.—In former discourses I have treated of the virtues which adorn youth, and of the duties which specially belong to old age.† The circle of those duties which respect middle age is indeed much larger. As that is the busy period in the life of man, it includes in effect the whole compass of religion, and therefore cannot have its peculiar character so distinctly marked and ascertained. At the same time, during those years wherein one is sensible that he has advanced beyond the confines of youth, but has not yet passed to the region of old age, there are several things which reflection on that portion of human life suggests, or at least ought to suggest, to the mind. Inconsiderate

\* Eccles. iii. 1.

† Eccles. xii. 13.

‡ See vol. I. Sermons 11, 12.

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xii. 13.

be, who, in his gradual progress throughout middle  
pauses not, at times, to think, how far he is now  
ding from youth; how near he draws to the borders  
declining age; what part it is now incumbent on him  
ct; what duties both God and the world have a title  
spect from him. To these, I am at present to call  
r attention; as what materially concern the greatest  
of those who are now my hearers.

I begin with observing, that the first duty of those  
to are become men is, as the text expresses it, *to put*  
*childish things.* The season of youthful levities,  
ies, and passions, is now over. These have had their  
n; a reign perhaps to long; and to which a termi-  
ion is certainly proper at last. Much indulgence is  
to youth. Many things admit of excuse then, which  
erwards become unpardonable. Some things may  
n be graceful in youth, which, if not criminal, are at  
ridiculous, in persons of mature years. It is a great  
of wisdom, to make out retreat from youth with  
propriety; to assume the character of manhood, with-  
out exposing ourselves to reproach, by an unseasonable  
remainder of juvenility, on the one hand, or by precise  
and disgusting formality, on the other. Nature has  
ced certain boundaries, by which she discriminates  
pleasures, actions, and employments, that are suited  
the different stages of human life. It becomes us,  
either to overleap those boundaries by a transition too  
ty and violent; nor to hover too long on one side of  
e limit, when nature calls us to pass over to the other.  
There are particularly two things in which middle  
e should preserve its distinction and separation from  
uth; these are, levities of behavior, and intemperate  
ulgence of pleasure. The gay spirits of the young  
gen prompt an inconsiderate degree of levity, some-  
nes, amusing, sometimes offensive; but for which,  
ough betraying them occasionally into serious dangers,  
eir want of experience may plead excuse. A more  
mposed, and manly behavior is expected in riper  
ers. The affectation of youthful vanities, degrades

the dignity of manhood ; even renders its manners agreeable ; and by aukward attempts to please, produces contempt. Cheerfulness is becoming in every age. The proper cheerfulness of a man is as different from the levity of the boy, as the flight of the eagle is from the fluttering of a sparrow in the air.

As all unseasonable returns to the levity of youth ought to be laid aside,—an admonition which equally belongs to both the sexes,—still more are we to guard against those intemperate indulgences of pleasure, which the young are unhappily prone. From these cannot too soon retreat. They open the path to ruin in every period of our days. As long, however as the excesses are confined to the first stage of life, hope is left, that when this fever of the spirits shall abate, sobriety may gain the ascendant, and wiser counsels be able to influence the conduct. But after the season of youth is past, if its intemperate spirit remain ; instead of listening to the calls of honor, and bending attention to the cares, and the business of men, the same course of idleness and sensuality continue to be pursued, the case becomes more desperate. A sad presumption arises, that long immaturity is to prevail ; and that the pleasures and passions of the youth are to sink and overwhelm the man. Difficult, I confess, it may prove to overcome the attachments which youthful habits had for a long while been forming. Hard, at the beginning, is the task, to impose on our conduct restraints which are altogether unaccustomed and new. But this is a trial which every one must undergo, in entering on new scenes of action, and new periods of life. Let those who are in this situation bethink themselves, that all is now at stake. Their character and honor, their future fortune and success in the world, depend in a great measure on the steps they take, when first they appear on the stage of active life. The world then looks to them with an observing eye. It studies their behaviour ; and interprets all their motions, as presages of the line of future conduct which they mean to hold. Now, the

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put away childish things ; dismiss your former tri-  
 amusements, and youthful pleasures ; blast not the  
 which your friends are willing to conceive of you.  
 her occupations, more serious cares, await you.  
 in your mind to the steady and vigorous discharge of  
 part you are called to act—This leads me,  
 To point out the particular duties which open on  
 who are in the middle period of life. They are  
 come forward to that field of action where they  
 to mix in all the stir and bustle of the world ; where  
 the human powers are brought forth into full exer-  
 ; where all that is conceived to be important in hu-  
 affairs is incessantly going on around them. The  
 of youth was the preparation for future action. In  
 age our active part is supposed to be finished, and  
 is permitted. Middle age is the season when we  
 expected to display the fruits which education had  
 pared and ripened. In this world, all of us were  
 ned to be assistants to one another. The wants of  
 ety call for every man's labor, and require various  
 artments to be filled up. They require that some be  
 ointed to rule, and others to obey ; some, to defend  
 ociety from danger, others to maintain its internal  
 r and peace ; some, to provide the conveniencies of  
 others to promote the improvement of the mind ;  
 y, to work ; others to contrive and direct. In  
 t, within the sphere of society there is employment  
 every one ; and in the course of these employments,  
 y a moral duty is to be performed ; many a religious  
 ce to be exercised. No one is permitted to be a mere  
 nk in the world. No rank, nor station, no dignity of  
 h, nor extent of possessions, exempt any man from  
 tributing his share to public utility and good. This  
 he precept of God. This is the voice of nature. This  
 he just demand of the human race upon one another.  
 One of the first questions, therefore, which every man  
 o is in the vigour of his age should put to himself is,  
 What am I doing in this world ? What have I yet  
 one, whereby I may glorify God, and be useful to my

“ fellows ? Do I properly fill up the place which  
 “ longs to my rank and station ? Will any memorial  
 “ main of my having existed on the earth ? Or are  
 “ days passing fruitless away, now when I might be  
 “ some importance in the system of human affairs ?

Let not any man imagine that he is of no importance and has, upon that account, a privilege to trifle with his days at pleasure. *Talents* have been given to all, some, *ten* ; to others, *five* ; to others, *two*. *Others* with *these*\* till I come. The command of the Master, to all.—Where superior abilities are possessed, or distinguished advantage of fortune are enjoyed, a larger range is afforded for useful exertion, and the world is intitled to expect it. But among those who fill up the inferior departments of society, though the sphere of usefulness be more contracted, no one is left entirely insignificant. Let us remember, that in all stations and conditions, the important relations take place, of masters or servants, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and friends, citizens and subjects. The discharge of the duties arising from those various relations forms a great portion of the work assigned to the management of man. Though the part we have to act may be confined within a humble line, yet if it be honestly acted, it will be always found to carry its own reward.

In fine, industry, in all its virtuous forms, ought to inspire and invigorate manhood. This will add to both satisfaction and dignity ; will make the current of our years, as they roll, flow, along in a clear and agreeable stream, without the putrid stagnation of sloth and idleness. Idleness is the great corruptor of youth ; the bane and dishonor of middle age. He who, in the prime of life, finds time to hang heavy on his hands, may with much reason suspect, that he has not considered the duties which the consideration of his age imposes upon him ; assured he has not consulted his own happiness. But amidst all the bustle of the world, do not forget,

\* Luke xix. 13.

To guard with vigilance against the peculiar dangers which attend the period of middle life. It is much regretted, that in the present state of things, there is a period of man's age in which his virtue is not exposed to perils. Pleasure lays its snares for youth; and the season of youthful follies is past, other temptations, no less formidable to virtue, presently arise. The passion of pleasure is succeeded by the passion for interest. In this passion the whole mind is too often absorbed; the change thereby induced on the character is of a pernicious kind.—Amidst the excesses of youth, virtuous affections often remain. The attachments of friendship, the love of honor, and the warmth of sensibility, add a degree of lustre to the character, and cover many of its defects. But interest, when it is become the ruling principle, both debases the mind, and hardens the heart. It deadens the feeling of every thing that is sublime or noble. It contracts the affections within a narrow circle, and extinguishes all those sparks of generosity and benevolence which once glowed in the breast. In proportion as worldly pursuits multiply, and competitors rise, ambition, jealousy and envy, combine with interest to excite bad passions, and to increase the corruption of the heart. At first, perhaps, it was a man's intention to advance himself in the world by none but honest and laudable methods. He retained for some time a reverence to whatever appeared dishonorable. But when he is encountered by the violence of an enemy, or when he is supplanted by the address of a rival. The insolence of a superior insults him. The ingratitude of a friend provokes him.—Animosities ruffle his temper. He finds, or imagines that he is surrounded, the artful and designing surrounding him on every hand. He views corruption and iniquity prevailing in the modest neglected; the forward and the crafty rising to distinction. Too easily, from the example of the world, he learns that mystery of vice, called the way of the world. What he has learned he fancies necessary to practise for his own defence; and of course af-

sumes that supple and versatile character, which he serves to be frequent, and which often has appeared him successful.

To these, and many more dangers of the same kind is the man exposed who is deeply engaged in a worldly life. No small degree of firmness in religious principles and of constancy in virtue is requisite, in order to prevent his being assimilated to the spirit of the world, and carried away by the *multitude of evil doers*. Let him therefore call to mind those principles which ought to fortify him against such temptations to vice. Let him often recollect that, whatever his station in life may be, he is a man; he is a christian. These are the characters which he has to support; characters sufficient, or far, if they be supported with dignity, to any titles with which courts can decorate him; superior to all that can be acquired in the strife of a busy world. Let him think, that though it may be desirable to increase his opulence, or to advance his rank, yet what he ought to hold much more sacred is, to maintain his integrity and honor. If these be forfeited, wealth or distinction will have few charms left. They will not be able to protect him long from sinking into contempt in the eye of an observing world. Even to his own eyes he will at last appear base and wretched.—Let not the amusements of the world entirely engross his time and thoughts. From that contagious air which he breathes in the midst of it, let him sometimes retreat into the salutary solitude consecrated to devotion and to wisdom. There, conversing seriously with his own soul, and looking up to the Father of spirits, let him study to calm those unquiet passions and to rectify those internal disorders, which intercourse with the world had excited and increased. In order to render this medicine of the mind most effectual, it will be highly proper,

IV. That as we advance in the course of years, we often attend to the lapse of time and life, and to the mutations which these are ever affecting. In this meditation, one of the first reflections which should occur

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how much we owe to that God who hath hitherto helped us; who hath brought us on so far in life; hath led us through the slippery paths of youth, and now enables us to flourish in the strength of manhood. Look, my friends, to those who started along with yourselves in the race of life. Think how many of them are fallen around you. Observe how many blank spaces you can number in the catalogue of those who were once your companions. If, in the midst of so much devastation, you have been preserved and blessed; consider seriously what returns you owe to the goodness of Heaven. Inquire whether your conduct has corresponded to these obligations; whether, in public and in private, you have honored, as became you, the God of your fathers; and whether, amidst the unknown occurrences that are yet before you, you have ground to hope for the continued protection of the Almighty.

Bring to mind the various revolutions which you have witnessed in human affairs, since you became actor on this great theatre. Reflect on the changes which have taken place in men and manners, in opinions and customs, in private fortunes, and in public conduct. By the observations you have made on these, and the experience you have gained, have you improved proportionably in wisdom? Have the changes of the world which you have witnessed, loosened all unreasonable attachment to it? Have they taught you this great lesson, that while *the revolution of the world is ever passing away*, only in God, in virtue, stability is to be found? Of great use, amidst the whirl of the world, are such pauses as these in which we can calmly and deliberately look back on the past; and anticipate the future.

In the future, we are often casting an eager eye, and anxiously storing it, in our imagination, with many a pleasing scene. But if we would look to it, like wise men, we should be under the persuasion that it is nearly to resemble the past, in bringing forward a mixture of alternate pleasures and fears, of griefs and joys. In order to be pre-

pared for whatever it may bring, let us cultivate manly fortitude of mind, which, supported by a trust in God, will enable us to encounter properly vicissitudes of our state. No quality is more necessary than this, to them who are passing through that stormy season of life of which we now treat. Softness, and feminacy, let them leave to the young and unexperienced, who are amusing themselves with florid prospects of bliss. But to those who are now engaged in the middle of their course, who are supposed to be well acquainted with the world, and to know that they have to struggle in it with various hardships, firmness, vigor, and resolution, are dispositions more suitable. They must buckle well this armour of the mind, if they would issue into the contest with any prospect of success. While they thus study to correct the errors, and to provide against the dangers, which are peculiar to this stage of life, let us

V. Lay foundation for comfort in old age. This is a period which all expect and hope to see; and in which, amidst the toils of the world, men sometimes look forward, not without satisfaction, as to the period of retreat and rest. But let them not deceive themselves. A joyless and dreary season it will prove, if they arrive at it with an unimproved, or corrupted mind. For old age, as for every other thing, a certain preparation is requisite; and that preparation consists chiefly in three particulars; in the acquisition of knowledge, of friends, of virtue. There is an acquisition of another kind, of which it is altogether needless for me to say any recommendation, that of riches. But though it is by many, will be esteemed a more material acquisition than all the three I have named, it may be confidently pronounced, that, without these other requisites, all the wealth we can lay up in store will prove insufficient in making our latter days pass smoothly away.

First, He who wishes to render his old age comfortable, should study betimes to enlarge and improve his mind; and by thought and inquiry, by reading and reflecting to acquire a taste for useful knowledge.

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I provide for him a great and noble entertainment,  
 when other entertainments leave him. If he bring into  
 the solitary retreat of age a vacant, uninformed mind,  
 where no knowledge dawns, where no ideas rise, which  
 he has nothing to feed upon within itself, many a heavy  
 and comfortless day he must necessarily pass. Next,  
 when a man declines into the vale of years, he depends  
 more on the aid of his friends, than in any other period  
 of his life. Then is the time, when he would especially  
 wish to find himself surrounded by some who love and  
 respect him; who will bear with his infirmities, relieve  
 him of his labors, and cheer him with their society. Let  
 him, therefore, now, in the summer of his days, while  
 yet active and flourishing, by acts of reasonable kindness  
 and beneficence ensure that love; and by upright and  
 honorable conduct, lay foundation for that respect,  
 which in old age he would wish to enjoy. In the last  
 place, Let him consider a good conscience, peace with  
 God, and the hope of heaven, as the most effectual con-  
 solations he can possess, when the *evil days* shall come,  
 herein, otherwise, he is likely to find little pleasure.  
 It is not merely by transient acts of devotion that such  
 consolations are to be provided. The regular tenor of a  
 virtuous and pious life, spent in the faithful discharge of  
 all the duties of our station, will prove the best prepara-  
 tion for old age, for death, and for immortality.

Among the measures thus taken for the latter scenes  
 of life, let me admonish every one, not to forget to put  
 his worldly affairs in order, in due time. This is a du-  
 ty which he owes to his character, to his family, or to  
 those, whoever they be, that are to succeed him; but a  
 duty too often unwisely delayed, from a childish aversion  
 to entertain any thoughts of quitting the world. Let  
 him not trust much to what he will do in his old age.  
 Sufficient for that day, if he should live to see it, will be  
 the burden thereof. It has been remarked, that as men  
 advance in years, they care less to think of death. Per-  
 haps it occurs oftener to the thought of the young, than  
 of the old. Feebleness of spirit renders melancholy i-

deas more oppressive ; and after having been so long accustomed and inured to the world, men bear with any thing which reminds them that they must soon part with it. However, as to part with it is the doom of all, let us take measures betimes for going the stage, when it shall be our turn to withdraw, with decency and propriety ; leaving nothing unfulfilled which it is expedient to have done before we die. To live long, ought not to be our favorite wish, so much to live well. By continuing too long on earth, we may only live to witness a greater number of melancholy scenes, and to expose ourselves to a wider compass of human woe. He who has served his generation faithfully in the world, has duly honored God, and been beneficent and useful to mankind ; he who in his life has been respected and beloved ; whose death is accompanied with the sincere regret of all who knew him, and whose memory is honored ; that man has sufficiently fulfilled his course, whether it was appointed by Providence to be long or short. *For honorable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years ; but wisdom is the grey hair to man ; and an unspotted life is old age.\**

## SERMON. V.

### ON DEATH.

ECCLESIASTES XII. 5.

— *Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.*

THIS is a sight which incessantly presents itself. Our eyes are so much accustomed to it, that it hardly makes any impression. Throughout every season of the year

Wisdom iv. 8. 9.

been so long during the course of almost every day, the funerals, which pass along the streets show us *man goeth to his home*. Were death a rare and uncommon object; were it only once in the course of a man's life, that he beheld one of his fellow-creatures carried to the grave, solemn awe would fill him; he would stop short in the midst of his pleasures; he would even be chilled with secret horror. Such impressions, however, would prove unsuitable to the nature of our present state. When they became so strong as to render men unfit for the ordinary business of life, they would in a great measure defeat the intention of our being placed in this world. It is better ordered by the wisdom of Providence, that they should be weakened by the frequency of their recurrence; and so tempered by the mixture of other passions, as to allow us to go on freely in acting our parts on earth.

Yet, familiar as death is now become, it is undoubtedly fit, that by an event of so important a nature, some impression should be made upon our minds. It ought not to pass over, as one of those common incidents which are beheld without concern, and awaken no reflection. There are many things which the funerals of our fellow-creatures are calculated to teach; and happy were for the gay and dissipated, if they would listen more frequently to the instructions of so awful a monitor. In the context, the wise man had described, under a variety of images suited to the eastern style, the growing infirmities of old age, until they arrive at that period which concludes them all; when, as he beautifully expresses it, *the silver cord being loosened, and the golden bowl broken, the pitcher being broken at the fountain, and the wheel at the cistern, man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets*. In discoursing from these words, it is not my purpose to treat, at present, of the instructions to be drawn from the prospect of our own death. I am to confine myself to the death of others; to consider death as one of the most frequent and considerable events that happen in the course of human

affairs; and to show in what manner we ought to be affected, first, by the death of strangers, or indifferent persons; secondly, by the death of friends; and thirdly, by the death of enemies.

I. By the death of indifferent persons; if any can be called indifferent, to whom we are so nearly allied as brethren by nature, and brethren in mortality. When we observe the funerals that pass along the streets, or when we walk among the monuments of death, the first thing that naturally strikes us is the undistinguishing blow, with which that common enemy levels all. We behold a great promiscuous multitude all carried to the same abode; all lodged in the same dark and silent mansions. There, mingle persons of every age and character, of every rank and condition in life; the young and the old, the poor and the rich, the gay and the grave, the renowned and the ignoble. A few weeks ago, most of those whom we have seen carried to the grave, walked about as we do now on the earth; enjoyed their friends, beheld the light of the sun, and were forming designs for future days. Perhaps, it is not long since they were engaged in scenes of high festivity. For them, perhaps, the cheerful company assembled; and in the midst of the circle they shone with gay and pleasing vivacity. But now—to them, all is finally closed. To them, no more shall the seasons return, or the sun arise. No more shall they hear the voice of mirth, or behold the face of man. They are swept from the universe, as though they had never been. They are carried away as with a flood: *The wind has passed over them, and they are gone.*

When we contemplate this desolation of the human race; this final termination of so many hopes; this silence that now reigns among those who, a little while ago, were so busy, or so gay; who can avoid being touched with sensations at once awful and tender. What heart but then warms with the glow of humanity? In whose eyes does not the tear gather, on revolving the fate of passing and short-lived man? Such sen-

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ions are so congenial to human nature; that they are attended with a certain kind of sorrowful pleasure. Even voluptuaries themselves, sometimes indulge a taste of funeral melancholy. After the festive assembly is dismissed, they chuse to walk retired in the shady grove, or to contemplate the venerable sepulchres of their ancestors. This melancholy pleasure arises from two different sentiments meeting at the same time in the breast; a sympathetic sense of the shortness and vanity of life, and a persuasion that something exists after death, sentiments, which unite at the view of the house appointed for all living. A tomb, it has been justly said, is a monument situated on the confines of both worlds. It, once, presents to us the termination of the inquietudes of life, and sets before us the image of eternal rest. *There, in the elegant expressions of Job, the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; and the want is free from his master.* It is very remarkable, that in all languages, and among all nations, death has been described in a style of this kind; expressed by figures of speech, which convey every where the same idea of rest, or sleep, retreat from the evils of life. Such a simile perfectly agrees with the general belief of the soul's immortality; but assuredly conveys no high idea of the pleasures of the world. It shows how much all mankind have felt this life to be a scene of trouble and care; and have agreed in opinions, that perfect rest is to be expected only in the grave.

*There, says Job, are the small and the great.* There the poor man lays down at last the burden of his wearisome life. No more shall he groan under the load of poverty and toil. No more shall he hear the loud commands of the master, from whom he received his scanty wages. No more shall he be raised from needful slumber on his bed of straw, nor be hurried away from his solitary meal, to undergo the repeated labors of the day. While his humble grave is preparing, and a few poor

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and decayed neighbors are carrying him thither, it is good for us to think, that this man too was our brother; that for him the aged and destitute wife, and the needy children now weep; that, neglected as he was by the world, he possessed perhaps both a sound understanding and a worthy heart; and is now carried by angels to rest in Abraham's bosom. At no great distance from him, the grave is opened to receive the rich and proud man. For, as it is said with emphasis in the parable, *the rich man also died, and was buried.*\*—He also died. His riches prevented not his sharing the same fate with the poor man; perhaps, through luxury, they accelerated his doom. Then, indeed, *the mourners go about the streets*; and while, in all the pomp and magnificence of woe, his funeral is prepared, his heirs, in the mean time, impatient to examine his will, are looking on one another with jealous eyes, and already beginning to quarrel about the division of his substance. One day, we see carried along the coffin of the smiling infant; the flower just nipped as it began to blossom in the parents' view: and the next day, we behold the young man, or young woman, of blooming form and promising hopes, laid in an untimely grave. While the funeral is attended by a numerous, unconcerned company, who are discoursing to one another about the news of the day, or the ordinary affairs of life, let our thoughts rather follow to the house of mourning, and represent to themselves what is going on there. There, we would see a disconsolate family, sitting in silent grief, thinking of the sad breach that is made in their little society, and, with tears in their eyes, looking to the chamber that is now left vacant, and to every memorial that presents itself of their departed friend. By such attention to the woes of others, the selfish hardness of our hearts will be gradually softened, and melted down into humanity.

Another day, we follow to the grave one, who, in old age, and after a long career of life, has in full ma-

\* Luke xvi. 22.

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erty sunk at last into rest. As we are going along to the mansion of the dead, it is natural for us to think, and to discourse of all the changes which such a person has seen during the course of his life. He has passed, and is likely, through varieties of fortune. He has experienced prosperity, and adversity. He has seen families and kindreds rise and fall. He has seen peace and war succeeding in their turns; the face of his country undergoing many alterations; and the very city in which he dwelt rising, in a manner, new around him. After he has beheld, his eyes are now closed for ever. He has become a stranger in the midst of a new succession of men. A race who knew him not, had arisen to inhabit the earth. Thus passes the world away. Throughout all ranks and conditions, *one generation passeth, and another generation cometh*: and this great inn is by turns evacuated, and replenished, by troops of succeeding pilgrims.—O vain and inconstant world! O fleeting and transient life! When will the sons of men begin to think of thee, as they ought? When will they learn humility from the afflictions of their brethren; or moderation and wisdom, from the sense of their own fugitive state? But, now to come nearer to ourselves, let us, I. Consider the death of our friends. Want of reflection, or the long habits, either of a very busy, or a very dissipated life, may have rendered men insensible to such objects as I have now described. The stranger, and the unknown, fall utterly unnoticed at their side. He proceeds with them in its usual train, without being affected by events in which they take no personal concern. But the dissolution of those ties which had bound men together; in intimate and familiar union, gives a painful shock to every heart. When a family, who, for years had been living in comfort and peace, is suddenly shattered, by some of their most beloved or respected members being torn from them; when the husband or the spouse are separated for ever from the companion who, amidst every vicissitude of fortune, supported their life; who had shared all their joys, and par-

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participated in all their sorrows; when the weeping parent is folding in his arms the dying child whom he tenderly loved; when he is giving his last blessing, receiving the last fond adieu, looking for the last time on that countenance, now waning and faded, which he had once beheld with much delight; then is the time, when the heart is made to drink all the bitterness of human woe. —But I seek not to wound your feelings by dwelling on these sad descriptions. Let us rather turn our thoughts to the manner in which such events ought to be received and improved, since happen they must in the life of man.

Then, indeed, is the time to weep. Let not a false idea of fortitude, or mistaken conceptions of religious duty, be employed to restrain the bursting emotion. Let the heart seek its relief, in the free effusion of just and natural sorrow. It is becoming in every one to show, on such occasions, that he feels, as a man ought to feel. At the same time, let moderation temper the grief of a good man and a christian. He must not *sorrow like those who have no hope*. As high elation of spirits befits not the joys, so continued and overwhelming dejection suits not the griefs of this transitory world. Grief, when it goes beyond certain bounds, becomes unreasonably when it lasts beyond a certain time, becomes unreasonable. Let him not reject the alleviation which time brings to all the wounds of the heart, but suffer excessive grief to subside, by degrees, into a tender and affectionate remembrance. Let him consider, that it is in the power of Providence to rise him up other comforts in the place of those he has lost. Or, if his mind, at present, rejects the thoughts of such consolation, let him return for relief to the prospect of a future meeting in a happier world. This is indeed the chief soother of affliction; the most powerful balm of the bleeding heart. Let us assist us to view death, as no more than a temporary separation of friends. They whom we have loved still live, though not present to us. They are only removed to a different mansion in the house of the common-

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morally maintained. It requires adventitious prop  
support it; and in some hour of trial, always fails.  
There can be no true courage, no regular persevering  
constancy but what is connected with principle, and  
founded on a consciousness of rectitude of intention.  
This, and this only, erects that brazen wall which we  
oppose to every hostile attack. It cloaths us with  
armour, on which fortune will spend its shafts in vain.  
It is found within: There is no weak place, where  
particularly dread a blow. There is no occasion for  
colours to be hung out. No disguise is needed to  
cover us. We would be satisfied if all mankind could  
look into our hearts. What has he to fear, who not on-  
ly acts on a plan which his conscience approves, but  
who knows that every good man, nay, the whole unbi-  
ased world, if they could trace his intentions, would  
praise and approve his conduct?

He knows, at the same time, that he is acting under  
the immediate eye and protection of the Almighty. *Be-  
hold my witness is in heaven; and my record is on high,*  
God opens a new source of fortitude to every virtuous  
man. The consciousness of such an illustrious specta-  
cle, invigorates and animates him. He trusts, that the  
eternal lover of righteousness not only beholds and ap-  
proves, but will strengthen and assist; will not suffer  
him to be unjustly oppressed, and will reward his con-  
sistency in the end, with glory, honor, and immortality.  
A good conscience, thus supported, bestows on the heart  
a much greater degree of intrepidity, than it could other-  
wise inspire. One who rests on the Almighty, though  
invisible Protector, exerts his powers with double  
force; acts with vigor not his own. Accordingly, it  
is from this principle of trust in God, that the Psalmist  
derived that courage and boldness, which he expresses  
in the text. He had said immediately before, *The Lord  
is my light and my salvation; the Lord is the strength of  
my life.* The consequence which directly follows is, of

\* Job xvi. 19.

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*whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.* It remains,

III. That I suggest a few considerations, which may prove auxiliary to the exercise of virtuous fortitude, in the midst of dangers.

From what was just now said, it appears, first, that it is of high importance to every one who wishes to act his part with becoming resolution, to cultivate a religious principle, and to be inspired with trust in God.—The imperfections of the best are indeed so numerous, as to give them no title to claim, on their own account, the protection of Heaven. But we are taught to believe, that the merciful God, who made us, and who *knows our frame*, favors the sincere and upright; that the supreme administration of the universe is always on the side of truth and virtue; and, that, therefore, every worthy, character, and every just and good cause, though for a while it should be depressed, is likely to receive countenance and protection in the end. The more firmly this belief is rooted in the heart, its influence will be more powerful, in surmounting the fears which arise from a sense of our own weakness or danger. The records of all nations afford a thousand remarkable instances of the effect of this principle, both on individuals, and on bodies of men. Animated by the strong belief of a just cause, and a protecting God, the *feeble have waxed strong*, and have despised dangers, sufferings, and death. *Handfuls of men have defied hosts that were encamped against them*; and have gone forth, conquering and to conquer. *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon*, have called forth a valour which astonished the world; and which could have been exerted by none but those who fought under a divine banner.

In the next place, let him who would preserve fortitude, in difficult situations, fill his mind with a sense, of what constitutes the true honor of man. It consists not in the multitude of riches, or the elevation of rank; for experience shows, that these may be possessed by the worthless, as well as by the deserving. It consists, in

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deterred by no danger when duty calls us forth ;  
 filling our allotted part, whatever it may be, with  
 fulness, bravery; and constancy of mind. These  
 virtues never fail to stamp distinction on the character.  
 They confer on him who discovers them, an honorable  
 priority, which all, even enemies, feel and revere.—  
 Every man; therefore, when the hour of danger  
 is, bethink himself, that now is arrived the hour of  
 ; the hour which must determine whether he is to  
 or to sink for ever, in the esteem of all around him.  
 When put to the test, he discover no firmness to main-  
 his ground, no fortitude to stand a shock, he has  
 wasted every pretension to a manly mind. He must  
 on being exposed to general contempt; and what  
 worse, he will feel that he deserves it. In his own  
 he will be contemptible; than which, surely, no  
 ery can be more severe.

But in order to acquire habits of fortitude, what is of  
 highest consequence is to have formed a just esti-  
 mate of the goods and evils of life, and of the value of  
 himself. For here lies the chief source of our weak-  
 and pusillanimity. We overvalue the advantages of  
 one; rank and riches, ease and safety. Deluded by  
 opinions, we look to these as our ultimate goods,  
 hang upon them with fond attachment; and to for-  
 any hope of advancement, to incur the least discre-  
 with the world, or to be brought down but one step  
 in the station we possess, is regarded with consterna-  
 and dismay. Hence, a thousand weights hang up-  
 the mind, which depress its courage, and bend it to  
 and dishonorable compliances. What fortitude  
 we possess, what worthy or generous purpose can be  
 , who conceives diminution of rank, or loss of for-  
 , to be the chief evils which man can suffer? Put  
 into the balance with true honor, with conscious  
 prity, with the esteem of the virtuous and the wife,  
 the favor of Almighty God, with peace of mind,  
 hope of heaven; and then think, whether those  
 sed evils are sufficient to intimidate you from doing

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your duty. Look beyond external appearance to the inside of things. Suffer not yourselves to be imposed on by that glittering varnish, with which the surface of the world dazzles the vulgar. Consider how many are contented and happy without those advantages of fortune, on which you put so extravagant a value. Consider whether it is possible for you to be happy with them; if, for their sake, you forfeit all that is estimable in man. The favor of the great, perhaps, you think, is at stake; or that popularity with the multitude, on which you build plans of advancement. Alas! how precarious are the means which you employ in order to attain the end you have in view; and the end itself, how little is it worthy of your ambition? That favor which you pursue, of dubious advantage when gained, is frequently lost by servile compliance. The timid and abject are detected, and despised even by those whom they court; while the firm and resolute rise in the end to those honors, which the other pursued in vain.

Put the case at the worst. Suppose not your fortune only, but your safety, to be in hazard; your life itself to be endangered, by adhering to conscience and virtue. Think what a creeping and ignominious state you would render life, if, when your duty calls, you would expose it to no danger; if by a dastardly behavior, you would, at any expense preserve it. That life which you are so anxious to preserve, can at any rate be prolonged only for a few years more; and those years may be full of woe. He who will not risk death when conscience requires him to face it, ought to be ashamed to live. Consider, as a man and a Christian, for what purpose life was given thee by Heaven. Was it, that thou mightest pass a few years in low pleasures, and ignoble sloth; slipping into every corner to hide thyself, when the least danger rises to view? No: Life was given, that thou mightest come forth to act some useful and honorable part, on that theatre where thou hast been placed by Providence; mightest glorify him that made thee; and by steady perseverance in virtue, rise in the end to an immortal state.

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ther.—The toils of their pilgrimage are finished ; and they are gone to the land of rest and peace. They are gone from this dark and troubled world, to join the great assembly of the just ; and to dwell in the midst of everlasting light.—In due time we hope to be associated with them in these blissful habitations. Until this season of reunion arrive, no principle of religion discourages our holding correspondence of affection with them by means of faith and hope.

Meanwhile, let us respect the virtues, and cherish the memory, of the deceased. Let their little failings be now forgotten. Let us dwell on what was amiable in their character, imitate their worth and trace their steps. By this means, the remembrance of those whom we love shall become useful and improving to us, as well as sacred and dear ; if we accustom ourselves to consider them as still speaking, and exhorting us to all that is good ; if, in situations where our virtue is tried, we call to their respected idea to view, and, as placed in their presence, think of the part which we could act before them without a blush.

Moreover, let the remembrance of the friends whom we have lost, strengthen our affection to those that remain. The narrower the circle becomes of those we love, let us draw the closer together. Let the heart that has been softened by sorrow, mellow into gentleness and kindness ; make liberal allowance for the weaknesses of others ; and divest itself of the little prejudices that may have formerly prepossessed it against them. The great havoc that death has made among our friends on earth, let us cultivate connection more with God, and heaven, and virtue. Let those noble views which man's immortal character affords, fill and exalt our minds. Messengers only through this sublunary region, let our thoughts often ascend to that divine country, which we are taught to consider as the native seat of the soul. Here, we form connections that are never broken. Here, we meet with friends who never die. Among celestial things there is firm and lasting constancy, while

all that is on earth changes and passes away. Such some of the fruits we should reap from the tenderings excited by the death of friends.—But they are only our friends who die. Our enemies also must to their long home. Let us, therefore,

III. Consider how we ought to be affected, when they from whom suspicions have alienated, or rivalry has divided us; they with whom we have long contended, or by whom we imagine ourselves to have suffered wrong, are laid, or about to be laid, in the grave. How inconsiderable then appear those broils in which we have been long involved, those contests and feuds, which we thought were to last for ever? The awful moment that now terminates them, makes us feel their vanity. If there be a spark of humanity left in the breast, the remembrance of our common fate then awakens it. If there be a man, who, if he were admitted to stand by the death-bed of his bitterest enemy, and beheld him ending that conflict which human nature must suffer at the last, would not be inclined to stretch forth the hand of friendship, to utter the voice of forgiveness, and to wish for perfect reconciliation with him before he left the world? Who is there that, when he beholds the remains of his adversary deposited in the dust, feels not, in that moment, some relentings at the remembrance of the past animosities which mutually embittered their lives? —“There lies the man with whom I contended long, silent and mute for ever. He is fallen; and I am about to follow him. How poor is the advantage which I now enjoy? Where are the fruits of all our contests? In a short time we shall be laid together, and no remembrance remain of either of us, under the same sun. How many mistakes may there have been between us? Had not he his virtues and good qualities as well as I? When we shall both appear before the judgment-seat of God, shall I be found innocent, and free of blame, for all the enmity I have borne him?” —My friends, let the anticipation of these sentiments, serve now to correct the inveteracy of

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justice, to cool the heat of anger, to allay the fierceness  
 of resentment. How unnatural is it for animosities so  
 easily to possess the hearts of mortal men, that nothing  
 can extinguish them, but the cold hand of death? Is  
 there not a sufficient proportion of evils in the short span  
 of human life, that we seek to increase their number, by  
 rushing into unnecessary contests with one another?  
 When a few suns more have rolled over our heads,  
 our friends and foes shall have retreated together; and  
 their love and their hatred be equally buried. Let  
 our few days, then, be spent in peace. While we are  
 all journeying onwards to death, let us rather *bear one  
 another's burdens*, than harrass one another by the way.  
 —Let us smooth and cheer the road as much as we can,  
 rather than fill the valley of our pilgrimage with the  
 hateful monuments of our contention and strife.

Thus I have set before you some of those meditations  
 which are naturally suggested by the prevalence of death  
 around us; by the death of strangers, of friends, and of  
 enemies. Because topics of this nature are obvious, let  
 not be thought that they are without use. They re-  
 quire to be recalled, repeated, and enforced—Moral and  
 religious instruction derives its efficacy, not so much  
 from what men are taught to know, as from what they  
 are brought to feel. It is not the dormant knowledge  
 of any truths, but the vivid impression of them, which  
 has influence on practice. Neither let it be thought,  
 that such meditations are unreasonable intrusions upon  
 those who are living in health, in affluence, and ease.  
 There is no hazard of their making too deep or painful  
 an impression. The gloom which they occasion is tran-  
 sient; and will soon, too soon, it is probable, be dispell-  
 ed by the succeeding affairs and pleasures of the world.  
 To wisdom it certainly belongs that men should be im-  
 pressed with just views of their nature, and their  
 condition; and the pleasures of life will always be enjoyed to most  
 advantage when they are tempered with serious thought.  
 There is a time to mourn as well as a time to rejoice.  
 There is a virtuous sorrow, which is better than laugh-

ter. There is a sadness of the countenance, by which the heart is made better.

## SERMON VI.

### ON THE PROGRESS OF VICE.

I CORINTHIANS XV. 33.

*Be not deceived : Evil communications corrupt good manners.*

THOUGH human nature be now fallen from its original honor, several good principles still remain in the hearts of men. There are few, if any, on whose minds the reverence for a Supreme Being continues not, in some degree, impressed. In every breast, some benevolent affections are found ; and conscience still retains sense of the distinction between moral good and evil. These principles of virtue are always susceptible of improvement ; and, in favourable situations, might have a happy influence on practice. But such is the frailty of our nature, and so numerous are the temptations to evil, that they are in perpetual hazard of being either totally effaced, or so far weakened as to produce no effect on our conduct. They are good seeds originally sown in the heart ; but which require culture, in order to make them rise to any maturity. If left without assistance they are likely to be stifled, by that profusion of noxious weeds which the soil sends forth around them.

Among the numerous causes which introduce corruption into the heart, and accelerate its growth, none more unhappily powerful than that which is pointed out in the text, under the description of *evil communications* ; that is, the contagion which is diffused by

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examples, and heightened by particular connections with persons of loose principles, or dissolute morals.—This, in a licentious state of society, is the most common source of those vices and disorders which so much abound in great cities; and often proves, in a particular manner, fatal to the young; even to them whose beginnings were once auspicious and promising. It may therefore be an useful employment of attention, to trace the progress of this principle of corruption; to examine the means by which *evil communications* gradually undermine, and at last destroy *good manners*, or (which here is the proper signification of the original word) *good morals*. It is indeed disagreeable to contemplate human nature, in this downward course of its progress. But it is always profitable to know our own infirmities and dangers. The consideration of them will lead me to suggest some of the means proper to be used for preventing the mischiefs arising from *evil communications*.

Agreeably to what I observed of certain virtuous principles being inherent in human nature, there are few but who set out at first on the world with good dispositions. The warmth which belongs to youth, naturally exerts itself in generous feelings and sentiments, of honor; in strong attachment to friends, and the other emotions of a kind and tender heart. Almost all the plans with which persons who have been liberally educated begin the world, are connected with honorable views. At that period, they repudiate whatever is mean or base. It is pleasing to them to think of commanding the esteem of those among whom they live and of acquiring a name among men. But alas! how soon does this flattering prospect begin to be overcast. Desires of pleasures usher in temptation, and forward the growth of disorderly passions. Ministers of vice are seldom wanting to encourage, and flatter the passions of the young. Inferiors study to creep into favor, by servile obsequiousness to all their desires and humours.—I had to find any apology for the indulgences of which they are fond, the young too readily listen to the voice

of those who suggest to them, that strict notions of religion, order, and virtue, are old fashioned and illiberal; that the restraints which they impose are only fit to be prescribed to those who are in the first stage of pupilage; or to be preached to the vulgar, who ought to be kept within the closest bounds of regularity and subjection. But the goodness of their hearts, it is insinuated to them, and the liberality of their views, will fully justify their emancipating themselves, in some degree, from the rigid discipline of parents and teachers.

Soothing as such insinuations are to the youthful, and inconsiderate, their first steps, however, in vice, are cautious and timid, and occasionally checked by remorse. As they begin to mingle more in the world, and emerge into the circles of gaiety and pleasure, finding these loose ideas countenanced by too general practice, they gradually become bolder in the liberties they take. When they have been bred to business, they begin to tire of industry, and look with contempt on the plodding race of citizens. If they be of superior rank, they think it becomes them to resemble their equals; to assume that freedom of behavior, that air of forwardness, that tone of dissipation, that easy negligence of those with whom they converse, which appear fashionable in high life. If the affluence of fortune unhappily concur to favor their inclinations, amusements and diversions succeed in a perpetual round; night and day are confounded; gaming fills up their vacant intervals; they live wholly in public places; they run into many degrees of excess, disagreeable even to themselves, merely from weak complaisance, and the fear of being ridiculed by their lookers-on and associates. Among these associates, the most hardened and determined always take the lead. The rest follow them with implicit submission; and make proficiency in this school of iniquity, in exact proportion to the weakness of their understandings, and the strength of their passions.

How many pass away, after this manner, some of the most valuable years of their life, tossed in a whirlpool

what cannot be called pleasure, so much as mere giddiness and folly? In the habits of perpetual connection with idle or licentious company, all reflection is lost; while, circulated from one empty head, and one thoughtless heart, to another, folly shoots up into all its most ridiculous forms; prompts the extravagant, unmeaning, and impudic in private; or sallies forth in public into mad riot; impelled sometimes by intoxication, sometimes by mere levity of spirits.

All the while, amidst this whole course of juvenile infatuation, I readily admit, that much good nature may still remain. Generosity and attachments may be found; nay, some awe of religion may still subsist, and some remains of those good impressions which were made upon the mind in early days. It might yet be very possible to reclaim such persons, and to form them for useful and respectable stations in the world, if virtuous and improving society should happily succeed to the place of that idle crew with whom they now associate; if important business should occur, to bring them into a different sphere of action; or, if some seasonable stroke of affliction should in mercy be sent, recal to them to themselves, and to awaken serious and manly thoughts. But, if youth and vigor, and flowing fortune continue; if a similar succession of companions, go on to amuse them, to ingross their time, and to stir up their passions; the way of ruin,—let them take heed and beware!—the way of irrecoverable ruin, begins to draw nigh. Fortune squandered; health is broken: friends are offended, affronted, estranged; aged parents, perhaps, sent afflicted and mourning, to the dust.

There are certain degrees of vice which are chiefly stamped with the character of the ridiculous, and the contemptible: and there are also certain limits, beyond which if it pass, it becomes odious and execrable.—If, to other corruptions which the heart has already received, be added the infusion of sceptical principles, that sort of all the evil communications of sinners, the whole morals is then on the point of being overthrown.—

For, every crime can then be palliated to conscience every check and restraint which had hitherto remained is taken away. He who, in the beginning of his course soothed himself with the thought, that while he indulged his desires, he did hurt to no man; now, pressed by the necessity of supplying those wants into which his expensive pleasures have brought him, goes on without remorse to defraud, and to oppress. The lover of pleasure; now becomes hardened and cruel; violates his trust, or betrays his friend; becomes a man of treachery; or man of blood satisfying, or at least endeavouring all the while to satisfy himself, that circumstances form his excuse; that by necessity he is impelled; and that in gratifying the passions which nature had implanted within him, he does no more than follow nature.—Miserable and deluded man! to what art thou come at the last? Dost thou pretend to follow nature, when thou art contemning the laws of the God of nature? when thou art stifling his voice, within thee, which remonstrates against thy crimes? when thou art violating the best part of thy nature, by counteracting the dictates of justice and humanity? Dost thou follow nature, when thou renderest thyself an useless animal on the earth, and not useless only, but noxious to the society to which thou belongest, and to which thou art a disgrace; noxious, by the crimes thou hast committed; sacrificing innocence to thy guilty pleasures, and introducing shame and ruin into the habitations of peace; defrauding of their due the unsuspecting who have trusted thee; involving in the ruins of thy fortune many a worthy family; reducing the industrious and the aged to misery and want by all which, if thou hast escaped the deserved sword of justice, thou hast at least brought on thyself the reprobation, and the reproach of all the respectable and the worthy.—Tremble then at the view of the gulph which is opening before thee. Look with horror at the precipice, on the brink of which thou standest; and if yet

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conscience. Be left for retreat, think how thou mayest escape, and be saved.  
 This brings me to what I proposed as the next head of discourse to suggest some means that may be used for stopping in time the progress of such mischiefs; to point out some remedies against the fatal infection of all communications.  
 The first and most obvious is, to withdraw from all associations with bad men, with persons either of licentious principles, or of disorderly conduct. I have shown what issue such dangerous connections are apt to bring in at last. Nothing, therefore, is of more importance to the young, to whom I now chiefly address myself, than to be careful in the choice of their friends and companions. This choice is too frequently made without much thought; or is determined by some casual conjunction; and yet, very often, the whole fate of their future life depends upon it. The circumstances which chiefly attract the liking and the friendship of youth, are easy temper; good humor, engaging manners, and a cheerful temper; qualities, I confess, amiable in themselves, and useful and valuable in their place.—But I intend that you to remember, that these are not all the qualities requisite to form an intimate companion or friend. Something more is still to be looked for; a sound understanding, a steady mind, a firm attachment to principles, to virtue, and honor. As only solid bodies polish well, it is only on the substantial ground of these manly endowments, that the other amiable qualities can receive their proper lustre. Destitute of these essential requisites they shine with no more than a tinsel brilliancy, may sparkle for a little, amidst a few circles of the giddy and dissipated; but it imposes not on the discernment of the public. The world in general seldom, after a short trial, judges amiss of the characters of men. You may be assured, that its character of you will be determined by the company you frequent; and how agreeable soever they may seem to be, if nothing is to be found among them but hollow qualities, and external accom-

plishments, they soon fall down into the class, at  
of the insignificant, perhaps of the worthless; and  
sink of course, in the opinion of the public, into  
fame despicable rank.

Allow me to warn you, that the most gay and  
sing, are sometimes the most insidious and dangerous  
companions; an admonition which respects both  
sexes. Often they attach themselves to you from im-  
puted motives; and if any taint or suspicion lie on the  
character, under the cover of your rank, your fortune,  
or your good reputation, they seek protection for them-  
selves. Look round you then, with an attentive eye,  
and weigh characters well before you connect yourself  
too closely with any who court your society. *He that  
walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion  
of fools shall be destroyed. Wherefore, enter not thou  
to the counsel of the scorner. Walk not in the way of  
evil men; avoid it; pass not by it, turn from it, and  
pass away.\**

In order to prevent the influence of *evil communi-  
cations*, it is farther needful, that you fix to yourselves cer-  
tain principles of conduct, and be resolved and deter-  
mined on no occasion to swerve from them. Setting  
consideration of religion and virtue aside, and attending  
merely to interest and reputation, it will be found, that  
he who enters on active life without having ascertained  
some regular plan, according to which he is to govern  
himself, will be unprosperous in the whole of his subse-  
quent progress. But when conduct is viewed in a moral  
and religious light, the effect of having fixed no prin-  
ciples of action; of having formed no laudable stand-  
ard of character, becomes more obviously fatal. For he  
it is, that the young and thoughtless imbibe so readily  
the poison of *evil communications*, and fall a prey to  
every seducer. They have no internal guide whom they  
are accustomed to follow and obey; nothing within  
themselves, that can give firmness to their conduct.

\* Prov. xiii. 20. Prov. iv. 14.

class, at the mercy of course the victims of momentary inclination  
 caprice; religious and good by starts, when, during  
 absence of temptation and tempters, the virtuous  
 principle stirs within them; but never long the same;   
 changing and fluctuating according to the passion that  
 rises to rise, or the instigation of those with whom  
 they have connected themselves.—They are sailing on a  
 dangerous sea, which abounds with rocks; without  
 compass, by which to direct their course, or helm, by  
 which to guide the vessel. Whereas, if they acted on  
 a steady system, if their behaviour make it appear that they  
 are determined to conduct themselves by certain rules  
 and principles, not only would they escape innumerable  
 dangers, but they would command respect from the li-  
 berious themselves. Evil doers would cease to lay their  
 claims for one whom they saw moving above them, in a  
 higher sphere, and with a more steady course.  
 As a farther corrective of *evil communications*, and as  
 a foundation to those principles which you lay down for  
 your conduct, let me advise you sometimes to think seriously,  
 what constitutes real enjoyment and happiness. Your  
 life cannot be entirely spent in company and pleasure.  
 When you are closely soever you are surrounded and besieged by  
 companions, there must be some intervals, in which  
 you are left by yourselves; when, after all the turbu-  
 lence of amusement is over, your mind will naturally as-  
 sume a graver and more pensive cast. These are preci-  
 ous intervals to you, if you knew their value. Seize  
 these sober hours of retirement and silence. Indulge the  
 temptations which then begin to rise. Cast your eye  
 backwards on what is past of your life; look forward  
 on what is probably to come. Think of the part you  
 are now acting; and of what remains to be acted, per-  
 haps to be suffered, before you die. Then is the time  
 to form your plans of happiness, not merely for the  
 day, but for the general course of your life. Re-  
 member, that what is pleasing to you at twenty, will not  
 be equally so at forty or fifty years of age; and that  
 what continues longest pleasing, is always most valuable.

Recollect your own feelings in different scenes of life. Inquire on what occasions you have felt the truest satisfaction; whether days of sobriety, and rational employment, have not left behind them a more agreeable remembrance, than nights of licentiousness and riot. Look round you on the world; reflect on the different societies which have fallen under your observation; think who among them appear to enjoy life to most advantage; whether they who, encircled by gay companions, are constantly fatiguing themselves in quest of pleasure; or they to whom pleasure comes unsought, in the course of an active, virtuous, and manly life. Compare together these two classes of mankind, and ask your own hearts, to which of them you would choose to belong. If, in a happy moment, the light of truth begins to break in upon you, refuse not admittance to the ray. Let your hearts secretly reproach you for the wrong choices you have made, bethink yourselves that the evil is irreparable. Still there is time for repentance and retreat; and a return to wisdom, is always honorable.

Were such meditations often indulged, the *evil communications* of sinners would die away before them; the force of their poison would evaporate; the world would begin to assume in your eyes a new form and shape. Didstain not, in these solitary hours, to recollect what the wisest have said, and have written concerning human happiness, and human vanity. Treat not their opinions, as effusions merely of peevishness or disappointment: but believe them to be, what they truly are, the result of long experience, and thorough acquaintance with the world. Consider that the season of youth is passing fast away. It is time for you to be taking measures for an establishment in life; nay, it were wisdom to be looking forward to a placid enjoyment of old age. That is a period you wish to see; but how miserable when it arrives, if it yield you nothing but the dreary prospect of a life; and present no retrospect, except that of a thoughtless, and dishonored youth!

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Let me once more advise you, to look forward sometimes beyond old age ; to look to a future world. Abstain from *evil communications*, let your belief, and your character as Christians, arise to your view. Think of the sacred name in which you were baptized. Think of the God whom your fathers honored and worshipped ; of the religion in which they trained you up ; of the venerable rites in which they brought you to partake. Their paternal cares have now ceased. They have finished their earthly course ; and the time is coming when you must follow them. You know that you are not to be always here ; and you surely do not believe that your existence is to end with this life. Into what world are you next to go ? Whom will you meet with there ? Before whose tribunal are you to appear ? What account will you be able to give of your present trifling and irregular conduct to him who made you ?—Such thoughts may be treated as unseasonable intrusions. But I trust they sometimes will, whether you make them welcome or not. Better then, to allow them free reception when they come, and to consider fairly to what they lead. You have seen persons die ; at least, you have heard of your friends dying near you. Did it never enter into your minds, to think what their last reflections probably were in their concluding moments ; what your own, in such a situation, would be ?—What would be then your hopes and fears ; what part you would then wish to have acted ; in what light your judging eyes would then view this life, and this world ? These are thoughts, my friends, too important to be always excluded. These are things too solemn and awful to be trifled with. They are superior to all the ridicule of fools. They come home to every man's bosom, and are entitled to every man's highest attention. Let us regard them as becomes reasonable and mortal creatures ; and they will prove effectual antidotes to the *evil communications* of petulant scoffers. When vice or folly arise to tempt us under flattering forms, let the serious character which we bear as men, come also for-

ward to view; and let the solemn admonitions, which I conclude, sound full in our ears: *My sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Come out from among them, and be separate. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. The way of life is above to the wise; and he that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.\**

## SERMON VII.

### ON FORTITUDE.

PSALM XXVII. 3.

*Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.—*

THIS world is a region of danger, in which safety is possessed by no man. Though we live in the most of established tranquillity, when there is no ground to apprehend that an host shall, in the literal sense, encamp against us; yet every man, from one quarter or other, has somewhat to dread. *Riches often make to themselves wings, and flee away.* The firmest health may in a moment be shaken. The most flourishing family may unexpectedly be scattered. The appearances of our security are frequently deceitful.—When our sky is the most settled and serene, in some unobserved quarter gathers the little black cloud, in which the tempest collects its elements, and prepares to discharge itself on our heads. Such is the real situation of man in this world; and he who flatters himself with an opposite view of his situation, only lives in the paradise of fools.

\* Prov. i. 10.  
PROV. XV. 24.

2 Corinth. vi. 17.

Eccles. 4.

In this situation, no quality is more requisite than constancy, or fortitude of mind; a quality which the Psalmist appears, from the sentiment in the text, to have possessed in an eminent degree. Fortitude was justly classed by the ancient philosophers, among the cardinal virtues. It is indeed essential to the support of them all; and is most necessary to be acquired by every one who wishes to discharge with fidelity the duties of his station. It is the armor of the mind, which will fit him for encountering the trials, and surmounting the dangers that are likely to occur in the course of his life. It may be thought, perhaps, to be a quality, in some measure, constitutional; dependent on firmness of nerves, and strength of spirits. Though, partly, it is so, yet experience shows that it may also be acquired by principle, and be fortified by reason; and it is only when thus acquired, and thus fortified, that it can be accounted to carry the character of virtue.—Fortitude is opposed, as I know, to timidity, irresolution, a feeble and a wavering spirit. It is placed, like other virtues, in the middle between two extremes; standing at an equal distance from rashness on the one hand, and from pusillanimity on the other.—In discoursing on this subject, I propose, first, to show the importance of fortitude or constancy; next, to ascertain the grounds on which it must rest; and, lastly, to suggest some considerations for assisting the exercise of it.

I. The high importance of fortitude will easily appear, if we consider it as respecting either the happiness of human life, or the proper discharge of its duties. Without some degree of fortitude there can be no happiness; because, amidst the thousand uncertainties of life, there can be no enjoyment of tranquility. The man of feeble and timorous spirit, lives under perpetual alarms. He foresees every distant danger, and trembles. He explores the regions of possibility, to discover the dangers that may arise. Often he creates imaginary ones; and always magnifies those that are real. Hence, like a man haunted by spectres, he loses the free enjoyment of

ven of a safe and prosperous state. On the first shock of adversity, he desponds. Instead of exerting himself to lay hold on the resources that remain, he gives up all for lost; and resigns himself to abject and broken spirits. On the other hand, firmness of mind is the parent of tranquillity. It enables one to enjoy the present without disturbance; and to look calmly on dangers that approach or evils that threaten in future. It suggests good hopes. It supplies resources. It allows a man to retain the full possession of himself, in every variation of fortune. Look into the heart of this man, and you will find composure, cheerfulness, and magnanimity. Look into the heart of the other, and you will see nothing but confusion, anxiety, and trepidation. The one is the castle built on a rock, which defies the attack of surrounding waters. The other is a hut placed on the shore, which every wind shakes, and every wave overflows.

If fortitude be thus essential to the enjoyment of life, it is equally so, to the proper discharge of all its most important duties. He who is of a cowardly mind is, in fact, a slave to the world. He fashions his whole conduct according to its hopes and fears. He smiles and fawns, and betrays from abject considerations of personal safety. He is incapable of either conceiving or executing, any great design. He can neither stand the clamor of the multitude, nor the frowns of the mighty. The wind of popular favor, or the threats of power, are sufficient to shake his most determined purpose. The world always knows where to find him. He may pretend to have principles; but on every trying occasion it will be seen, that his pretended principles bend to convenience and safety.—The man of virtuous fortitude, again, follows the dictates of his heart, unembarrassed by those restraints which lie upon the timorous. Having once determined what is fit for him to do, no threatenings can shake, nor dangers appal him. He rests upon himself, supported by a consciousness of inward dignity. I do not say that this disposition alone, will secure

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against every vice. He may be lifted up with pride. He may be seduced by pleasure. He may be hurried away by passion. But at least on one quarter, he will be safe; by no object fears misled into evil.

Without his temper of mind, no man can be a thorough Christian. For his profession, as such, requires him to be superior to that *fear of man which bringeth a snare*; enjoins him, for the sake of a good conscience, to encounter every danger; and to be prepared, if called, even to lay down his life in the cause of religion and truth. All who have been distinguished as servants of God, or benefactors of men; all who, in perilous situations, have acted their part with such honor as to render their names illustrious through succeeding ages, have been eminent for fortitude of mind. Of this we have one conspicuous example in the Apostle Paul, whom it will be instructive for us to view in a remarkable occurrence of his life. After having long acted as the apostle of the Gentiles; his mission called him to go to Jerusalem, where he knew that he was to encounter the utmost violence of his enemies. Just before he set sail, he called together the elders of his favorite church at Ephesus, and in a pathetic speech, which does great honor to his character, gave them his last farewell. Deeply affected by their knowledge of the certain dangers to which he was exposing himself, all the assembly were filled with distress, and melted into tears. The circumstances were such, as might have conveyed dejection even into a resolute mind; and would have totally overwhelmed the feeble. *They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him; sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.* What were then the sentiments, what was the language, of this great and good man? Hear the words which spoke his firm and undaunted mind. *Behold, I go bound in the spirit, unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto*

myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.\* There was uttered the voice, there breathed the spirit, of a brave, and virtuous man. Such a man knows not what it is to shrink from danger, when conscience points out his path. In that path he is determined to walk; let the consequences be what they will. *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live †* "For me, there is a part appointed to act as I live † "I go to perform it. My duty I shall do to day, Let *to-morrow take thought for the things of itself.*"— Having thus shown the importance, I proceed,

II. To show the proper foundations of constancy and fortitude of mind. They are principally two; a good conscience, and trust in God.

A corrupted and guilty man, can possess no true firmness of heart. He who by crooked paths, pursues dishonest and honorable ends, has many things to dismay him. He not only dreads the disappointment of his designs, by some of those accidents to which all are exposed; but he has also to dread the treachery of his confederates, the discovery and reproach of the world, and the just displeasure of Heaven. His fears he is obliged to conceal; but while he assumes the appearance of intrepidity before the world, he trembles within himself; and the bold and steady eye of integrity, frequently darts terror into his heart. There is, it is true, a sort of constitutional courage, which sometimes has rendered men daring in the most flagitious attempts. But this foolhardiness of the rash, this boldness of the ruffian, is altogether different from real fortitude. It arises merely from warmth of blood, from want of thought, and blindness to danger. As it forms no character of value, so it appears only in occasional sallies; and never can be

\* Acts xx. 22, 23, 24, 37, 38.

† Job. xxvii. 5, 6.

Son of man ! Remember thine original honors. Ac-  
 cept the dignity of thy nature. Shake off this pusillani-  
 mous dread of death ; and seek to fulfil the ends for  
 which thou wert sent forth by thy Creator. — The  
 sentiment of a noble mind is, *I count not my life dear  
 to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.* To  
 finishing of his course, let every one direct his eye ;  
 let him now appreciate life according to the value  
 it will be found to have, when summed up at the close.  
 What is the period which brings every think to the test.  
 Judgments may formerly have imposed on the world ; may  
 be imposed on the man himself. But all illusion then  
 vanishes. The real character comes forth. The esti-  
 mate of happiness is fairly formed. Hence it has been  
 truly said, that no man can be pronounced either great  
 or happy, until his last hour come. To that last hour,  
 what will bring such satisfaction, or add so much digni-  
 ty as the reflection, on having surmounted with firm-  
 ness all the discouragements of the world, and having  
 persevered to the end in one uniform course of fidelity  
 to honor ? Were marked before, the magnanimous be-  
 liever of the Apostle Paul, when he had persecution and  
 trials full in view. Hear now the sentiments of the  
 great man, when the time of his last suffering ap-  
 proached ; and remark the majesty, and the ease, with  
 which he looked on death. *I am now ready to be offer-  
 ed, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have  
 fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have  
 kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a  
 crown of righteousness.\** How many years of life does  
 a dying moment over-balance ? Who would not  
 die, in this manner, to go off the stage, with such a  
 shout of triumph in his mouth, rather than prolong his  
 existence through a wretched old age, stained with sin  
 and shame.  
 Animated by these considerations, let us nourish that  
 noble of mind, which is so essential to a man, and a

\* 2. Timothy, iv. 6, 7.

Christian. Let no discouragement, nor danger, deter  
 from doing what is right. Through *honor and dishonour*  
*through good report and bad report*, let us preserve  
 fidelity to our God and our Saviour. *Though an host*  
*be encamp'd against us*, let us not fear to discharge our  
 duty; God assists us in the virtuous conflict; and will crown  
 the conqueror with eternal rewards. *Be thou faithful*  
*unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* *To*  
*that overcometh, saith our blessed Lord, I will grant*  
*to sit with me on my throne; even as I also overcame,*  
*and am set down with my Father on his throne.*

## SERMON VIII.

### ON ENVY.

I CORINTHIANS xiii. 4.

*Charity envieth not.*

ENVY is a sensation of uneasiness and disquiet,  
 arising from the advantages which others are supposed to  
 possess above us, accompanied with malignity towards  
 those who possess them. This is universally admitted  
 to be one of the blackest passions in the human heart.  
 In this world, we depend much on one another; and  
 therefore formed by God to be mutually useful and  
 assisting. The instincts of kindness and compassion  
 which belong to our frame, show how much it was the  
 intention of our Creator, that we should be united in  
 friendship. If any infringe this great law of nature,  
 by acts of causeless hostility, resentment may justly arise.  
 It is one's duty to be defended for defending his rights,  
 and to show displeasure against a malicious enemy.

receive ill-will at one who has attacked none of our  
 interests, nor done us any injury, solely because he is more  
 prosperous than we are, is a disposition altogether unna-  
 tural; it suits not the human constitution, and partakes  
 more of the rancour of an evil spirit. Hence, the cha-  
 racter of an envious man is universally odious. All dis-  
 seminate it; and they who feel themselves under the influ-  
 ence of this passion, carefully conceal it.  
 But it is proper to consider, that among all our passi-  
 ons, both good and bad, there are many different gradations.  
 Sometimes they swim on the surface of the mind,  
 without producing any internal agitation. They pro-  
 ceed no farther than the beginnings of passion. Allayed  
 by the constitution, or tempered by the mixture of oth-  
 er dispositions, they exert no considerable influence on  
 the temper. Though the character in which envy forms  
 the ruling passion, and reigns in all its force, be one too  
 common, I hope, to be common; yet some shade, some  
 mixture, of this evil disposition, mixes with most cha-  
 racters in the world. It is, perhaps, one of the most  
 prevailing infirmities to which we are subject. There  
 are few but who, at one time or other, have found some-  
 what of this nature stirring within them; some lurking  
 in the recesses of their mind, when they looked up to oth-  
 ers who enjoyed a greater share than had fallen to their  
 lot, of some advantages which they wished, and thought  
 themselves intitled to possess. Though this should not  
 make their disposition bitter; though it should create the  
 uneasiness only, without the malignity of envy; yet still  
 it is a disturbed state of mind; and always borders upon  
 it, if it actually include not, some vicious affection.  
 In order, as far as possible, to remedy this evil, I shall  
 first consider what are the most general grounds of the  
 uneasiness which men are apt to bear to others; and shall ex-  
 amine what foundation they afford, for any degree of  
 this troublesome and dangerous passion.—The chief  
 grounds of envy may be reduced to three: Accompani-  
 ments of mind; advantages of birth, rank, and fortune;  
 and superior success in worldly pursuits.

I. Accomplishments, or endowments of the mind. The chief endowment for which man deserves to be valued, is virtue. This unquestionably, forms the most estimable distinction among mankind. Yet this which may appear surprizing, never forms any ground of envy. No man is envied for being more just, more generous, more patient, or forgiving, than others. This may, in part, be owing to virtue producing in every one who beholds it, that high degree of respect and love, which extinguishes envy. But probably, it is more owing to the good opinion which every one entertains of his own moral qualities. Some virtues, or, at least, the seeds of them, he finds within his breast. Others, he vainly attributes to himself. Those in which he is plainly deficient, he undervalues; as either not real virtues, or virtues of very inferior rank; and rests satisfied, that, in the whole, he is as worthy and respectable as his neighbour.

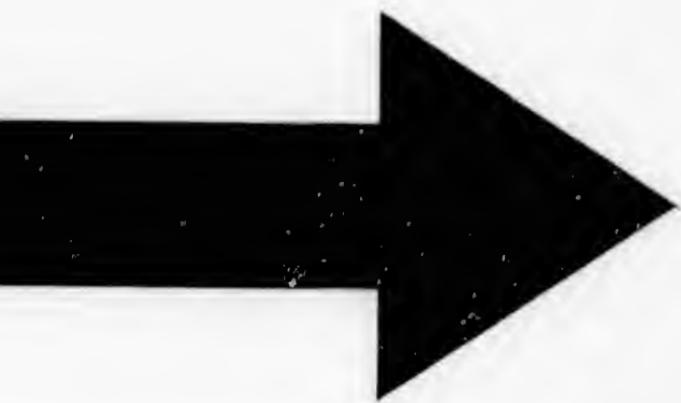
The case is different, with regard to those mental abilities and powers which are ascribed to others. As long as these are exerted in a sphere of action remote from ours, and not brought into competition with talents of the same kind, to which we have pretensions, they create no jealousy. They are viewed as distant objects in which we have not any concern. It is not until they touch our own line, and appear to rival us in what we wish to excel, that they awaken envy. Even then, envy is, properly speaking, not grounded on the talents of others. For here, too, our self-complacency brings relief; from the persuasion, that were we thoroughly known, and full justice done to us, our abilities would be found not inferior to those of our rivals. What properly occasions envy, is the fruit of the accomplishments of others; the pre-eminence which the opinion of the world bestows, or which we dread it will bestow, on their talents above ours. Hence, distinguished superiority in genius, learning, eloquence, or any other of those various arts that attract the notice of the world, often become painful grounds of envy; not indeed

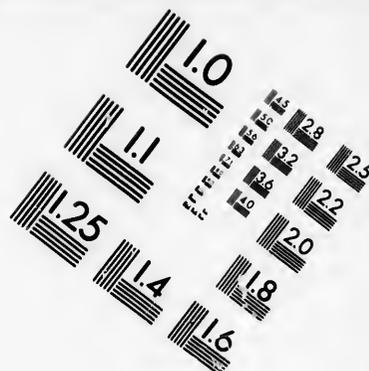
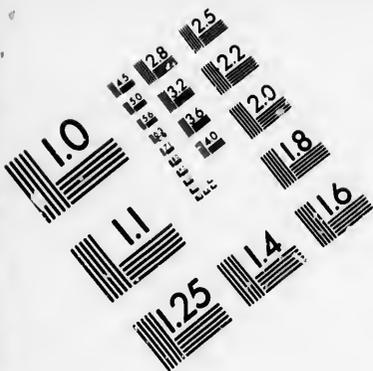
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indifferently, but to those who follow the same line of pursuit. Mere rivalry, inspired by emulation, would carry no reproach; were not that rivalry joined with obliquity, and a malignant spirit; did it not lead to secret detraction, and unfair methods of diminishing the reputation of others. Too frequently has such a spirit tarnished the character of those who sought to shine in the elegant arts; and who, otherwise, had a just title to fame.—Let such as are addicted to this infirmity, consider, how much they degrade themselves. Superior merit, of any kind, always rests on itself. Conscious of what it deserves, it disdains low competitions and jealousies. They who are stung with envy, especially when they allow its malignity to appear, confess a sense of their own inferiority; and, in effect, pay homage to that merit from which they endeavour to detract.

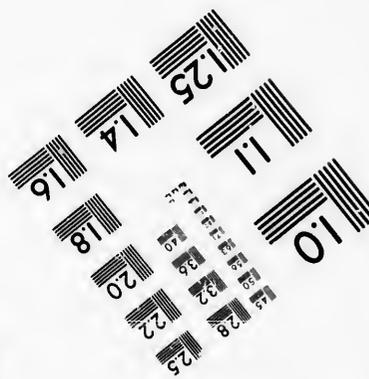
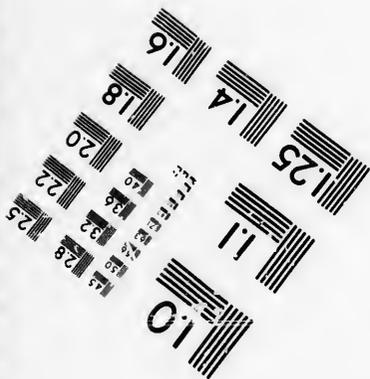
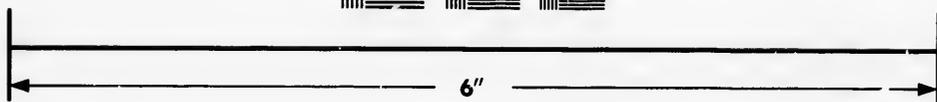
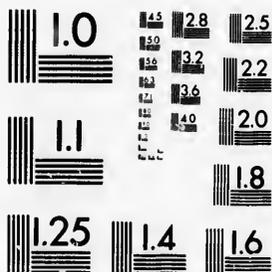
But in order to eradicate the passion, and to cure the inquiet which it creates; let such persons farther consider, how inconsiderable the advantage is which their rivals have gained, by any superiority over them. They whom you envy, are themselves inferior to others who follow the same pursuits. For how few, how very few, have reached the summit of excellence, in the art or study which they cultivate? Even that degree of excellence which they have attained, how seldom is it allowed to them by the world, till after they die? Public applause is the most fluctuating, and uncertain, of all rewards. Admired, as they may be, by a circle of their friends they have to look up to others, who stand above them in public opinion; and undergo the same mortifications which you suffer in looking up to them. Consider what labour it has cost them to arrive at that degree of eminence they have gained; and after all their labour, how imperfect their recompence is at last. With what narrow bounds is their fame confined? With what a number of humiliations is it mixed? To how many are they absolutely unknown? Among those who know them, how many censure and decry them?—Attending fairly to these considerations, the envious might







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come in the end to discern, that the same acquired by any accomplishment of the mind, by all that skill can contrive, or genius can execute, amounts to no more than a small elevation; raises the possessor to such an inconsiderable height above the crowd, that others may without disquiet, sit down contented with their own mediocrity.

II. Advantages of fortune, superiority in birth, rank and riches, even qualifications of body and form, become grounds of envy. Among external advantages those which relate to the body ought certainly, in the comparative estimation of ourselves and others, to hold the lowest place; as in the acquisition of them we can claim no merit, but must ascribe them entirely to the gift of nature. Yet envy has often showed itself here in full malignity; though a small measure of reflection might have discovered, that there was little or no ground for this passion to arise. It would have proved a blessing to multitudes, to have wanted those advantages by which they are envied. How frequently, for instance, has Beauty betrayed the possessors of it into many a snare, and brought upon them many a disaster? Beheld with spiteful eyes by those who are their rivals, they in the mean time, glow with no less envy against others by whom they are surpassed; while, in the midst of their competitions, jealousies, and concealed enmities, the fading flower is easily blasted; shortlived at the best, and trifling, at any rate, in comparison with the higher and more lasting beauties of the mind.

But of all the grounds of envy among men, superiority in rank and fortune is the most general. Hence, the malignity which the poor commonly bear to the rich, as ingrossing to themselves all the comforts of life. Hence, the evil eye with which persons of inferior condition scrutinise those who are above them in rank; and if they approach to that rank, their envy is generally strongest against such as are just one step higher than themselves.—Alas! my friends, all this envious disposition, which agitates the world, arises from a de-

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e acquired by that skill can be no more than to such an end as others may wish their own in birth, rank and form, but natural advantages certainly, in the others, to hold them we can entirely to the end of itself he is of reflection or no ground proved a blessing advantages for instance into many after? Behold your rivals, they against others in the midst of aaled enmities ed at the best with the highest men, superior. Hence, the efforts of inferior in rank; is generally higher in envious desire from a desire figure which imposes on the public view. False colors are hung out: the real state of men is not what it seems to be. The order of society requires a distinction of ranks to take place; but in point of happiness, all men come much nearer to equality than is commonly imagined; and the circumstances, which form any material difference of happiness among them, are not of that nature which renders them grounds of envy. The poor man possesses not, it is true, some of the conveniences and pleasures of the rich; but, in return, he is free of many embarrassments to which they are subject. By the simplicity and uniformity of his life, he is delivered from that variety of cares, which perplex those who have great affairs to manage, intricate plans to pursue, many enemies, perhaps, to encounter in the pursuit. In the tranquillity of his small habitation, and private family, he enjoys a peace which is often unknown at courts. The gratifications of nature which are always the most satisfactory, are possessed by him to their full extent; and if he be a stranger to the refined pleasures of the wealthy, he is unacquainted also with the desire of them, and by consequence, feels no want. His plain meal satisfies his appetite, with a relish, probably, higher than that of the rich man, who sits down to his luxurious banquet. His sleep is more sound; his health more firm; he knows not what spleen, langor or listlessness are. His accustomed employments or labors are not more oppressive to him, than the labor of attendance on courts and the great, the labors of dress, the fatigue of amusements, the very weight of idleness, frequently are to the rich. In the mean time, all the beauty of the face of nature, all the enjoyments of domestic society, all the gaiety and cheerfulness of an easy mind, are as open to him as to those of the highest rank. The splendor of retinue, the sound of titles, the appearances of high respect, are indeed soothing, for a short time, to the great. But become familiar, they are soon forgotten. Custom effaces their impression. They sink into the rank of those ordinary things, which daily recur.

without raising any sensation of joy.—Cease, therefore from looking up with discontent and envy to those whose birth or fortune have placed above you. Adjust the balance of happiness fairly. When you think of the enjoyments you want, think also of the troubles from which you are free. Allow their just value to the comforts you possess; and you will find reason to rest satisfied, with a very moderate, though not an opulent and splendid, condition of fortune. Often, did you know the whole, you would be inclined to pity the state of those whom you now envy.

III. Superior success in the course of worldly pursuits, is a frequent ground of envy. Among all ranks of men, competitions arise. Wherever any favorite object is pursued in common, jealousies seldom fail to take place among those who are equally desirous of attaining it; as in that ancient instance of envy recorded of Joseph's brethren, who *hated their brother, because their father loved him more than all the rest.*\* “I could not sily bear,” says one “that some others should be more reputable or famous, should be richer or greater, than I. It is but just, that this man should enjoy the distinction to which his splendid abilities have raised him. It is natural for that man to command the respect to which he is intitled by his birth or his rank. But when I, and another, have started in the race of life, upon equal terms and in the same rank; that he should without any pretension to uncommon merit, should have suddenly so far out stripped me; should have engrossed all that public favor to which I am no less entitled than he; this is what I cannot bear; my blood boils, my spirit swells with indignation, at the undeserved treatment I have suffered from the world. Complaints of this nature are often made, by them who seek to justify the envy which they bear to their more prosperous neighbours. But if such persons wish not to be thought unjust, let me desire them to inquire

\* Gen. xxxvii. 4.

whether they have been altogether fair in the comparison they have made of their own merit with that of their rivals; and whether they have not themselves to blame, more than the world, for being left behind in the career of fortune. The world is not always blind or unjust, in conferring its favors. Instances indeed, sometimes occur, of deserving persons prevented, by a succession of cross incidents, from rising into public acceptance. But, in the ordinary course of things, merit, sooner or later, receives a reward; while the greater part of men's misfortunes and disappointments can, generally, be traced to some misconduct of their own. *Wisdom bringeth to honor; The hand of the diligent maketh rich;* and, it has been said, not altogether without reason, that, of his own fortune in life, every man is the chief artificer. If Joseph was preferred by the father to all his brethren, his subsequent conduct showed how well he merited the preference.

Supposing, however, the world to have been unjust, to an uncommon degree, with regard to you, this will not vindicate malignity and envy towards a more prosperous competitor. You may accuse the world; but what reason have you to bear ill-will to him, who has only improved the favor which the world showed him? If, by means that are unfair, he has risen; and, to advance himself, has acted injuriously by you, resentment is justifiable; but if you cannot accuse him of any such improper conduct, his success alone gives no sanction to your envy. You, perhaps, preferred the enjoyment of your ease, to the stir of a busy, or to the cares of a thoughtful life. Retired from the world, and following your favorite inclinations, you were not always attentive to seize the opportunities which offered, for doing justice to your character, and improving your situation. Might you then to complain, if the more active and laborious have acquired what you were negligent to gain; or, if you have obtained less preferment, you are possessed more indulgence and ease. Consider, moreover, that the rival to whom you look up with re-

pining eyes, though more fortunate in the world, ma-  
 perhaps, on the whole, not be more happy than you.  
 He has all the vicissitudes of the world before him, H  
 may have much to encounter, much to suffer, fro  
 which you are protected by the greater obscurity of yo  
 station. Every situation in life, has both a bright a  
 a dark side. Let not your attention dwell only  
 what is bright on the side of those you envy, and da  
 on your own. But bringing into view both sides of yo  
 respective conditions, estimate fairly the sum of felicit  
 Thus I have suggested several considerations, for  
 vining the unreasonableness of that disquietude whic  
 envy raises in our breasts; considerations which tend  
 le- it to mitigate and allay the workings of this mal  
 nant passion, and which, in a sober mind, ought tota  
 to extinguish it. The scope of the whole has been,  
 promote, in every one, contentment with his own sta  
 Many arguments of a different nature may be employ  
 against envy; some taken from its sinful and crimin  
 nature; some, from the mischiefs to which it gives r  
 in the world; others, from the misery which it proc  
 ces to him who nourishes this viper in his bosom. B  
 undoubtedly, the most efficacious arguments, are su  
 as show, that the circumstances of others, compar  
 with our own, afford no ground for envy. The mis  
 ken ideas which are entertai- ned, of the high importa  
 of certain worldly advantages and distinctions, form  
 principal cause of our repining at our own lot, and  
 vying that of others. To things light in themselves  
 our imagination has added undue weight. Did we  
 low reflection and wisdom to correct the prejud  
 which he have imbibed, and to disperse those ph  
 toms of our own creating, the gloom which over  
 us would gradually vanish. Together with return  
 contentment, the sky would clear up, and every obj  
 brighten around us. It is in the fullen and dark sh  
 of discontent, that noxious passions, like venomous  
 mals, breed, and prey upon the heart.

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The world, manly is a passion of so odious a nature, that not only is concealed as much as possible from the world, but every man is glad to dissemble the appearances of it, though it is his own heart. Hence, it is apt to grow upon him, and is not perceived. Let him who is desirous to keep his heart pure and free from its influence, examine himself closely on those dispositions which he bears towards his neighbors. Does he ever view, with secret satisfaction, the merit of others rising into notice and distinction? Does he hear their praises with unwillingness? Does he feel an inclination to depreciate, what he does not openly blame? When obliged to commend, does his cold and awkward approbation, insinuate his suspicion of some unknown defects in the applauded character? From such symptoms as these, he may infer that the disease of envy is forming; that the poison is beginning to spread its infection over his heart.

The causes that nourish envy are principally two; the first is pride, and the second is indolence. The connection of pride and indolence with envy, is obvious and direct. The high value which the proud set on their own merit, the unreasonable claims which they form on the world, and the injustice which they suppose to be done to them by any inferiority given to others, are perpetual sources, first of discontent, and next of envy. When indolence is added to pride, the disease of the mind becomes more obstinate and incurable. Pride leads men to claim more than they deserve. Indolence prevents them from obtaining what they might justly claim. Disappointments follow; and spleen, malignity, and envy, rage in their hearts. The proud and indolent, are always envious. Wrapt up in their own importance, they sit still, and do not improve, because others are more prosperous than they; while, with all their high opinion of themselves, they have done nothing either to deserve, or to acquire, the same prosperity. As therefore, we value our virtue, or our talents, let us guard against these two evil dispositions of the mind. Let us be modest in our own esteem, and, by

diligence and industry, study to acquire the esteem of others. So shall we shut up the avenues that lead to many a bad passion; and shall learn, *in whatsoever situation we are therewith to be content.*

Finally, in order to subdue envy, let us bring off into view those religious considerations which regard particularly as Christians. Let us remember how worthy we all are in the sight of God; and how many the blessings which each of us enjoy, are beyond what we deserve. Let us nourish reverence and submission to that Divine government, which has appointed to every one such a condition in the world as is fittest for him to possess. Let us recollect how opposite the Christian spirit is to envy; and what sacred obligations it lays upon us, to walk in love and charity towards one another. Indeed, when we reflect on the many miseries which abound in human life; on the scanty proportion of happiness which any man is here allowed to enjoy; on the small difference which the diversity of fortune makes on that scanty proportion: it is surprising, that envy should ever have been a prevalent passion among men, much more that it should have prevailed among Christians. Where so much is suffered in common, little room is left for envy. There is more occasion for pity and sympathy, and inclination to assist each other. To our own good endeavours for rectifying our dispositions, let us not forget to add serious prayers to the Author of our being, that he who made the heart of man, and knows all its infirmities, would thoroughly purify our hearts from a passion so base, and so criminal, as envy. *Create in me, O God, a clean heart; and renew a right spirit within me. Search me, and know my heart. Prick out mine iniquities, and know my thoughts. See if there be any ungodly way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.\**

\* Psalms, li. 10; cxxxix 23, 24.

# SERMON IX.

## ON IDLENESS.

MATTHEW XX. 6.

—*Why stand ye here all the day idle ?*

IT is an observation which naturally occurs, and has often been made, that all the representations of the Christian life in scripture are taken from active scenes; as in carrying on a warfare, running a race, striving to enter in at a strait gate, and, as in this context, labouring in a vineyard. Hence the conclusion plainly follows, that various active duties are required of the Christian; and that sloth and indolence are inconsistent with the hope of heaven.

But it has been sometimes supposed, that industry, as well as idleness, is a matter of duty, regards our spiritual concerns as well as our temporal employments only; and that one might be very diligent as a Christian, who was very idle as a man. Hence, among some denominations of Christians, an opinion has prevailed, that the perfection of religion was to be found in those monastic retreats, where every active function of civil life was totally excluded, and the whole time of men filled up with exercises of devotion. They who hold such opinions proceed on the supposition, that religion has little or no concern with the ordinary affairs of the world; that its duties stand apart by themselves; and mingle not in the intercourse which we have with one another. The perfect Christian was supposed to live a sort of angelic life, sequestered from the business or pleasures of this contemptible state. The religion, on the contrary, represents the religion of Christ as intended for the benefit of human society. It assumes us engaged in the business of active life; and directs its exhortations accordingly, to all ranks and sta-

tions ; to the magistrate and the subject, to the master and the servant, to the rich and the poor, to them that buy and them that sell, them *that use* and them *that use* the world. Some duties, indeed, require privacy and retreat. But the most important must be performed in the midst of the world, where we are commanded to *shine as lights*, and by our *good works to glorify our Father which is in heaven*. This world, as the apostle represents it, is God's vineyard, where each of us has a task assigned him to perform. In every station, and every period of life, labor is required. At the third, sixth, or the eleventh hour, we are commanded to work, if we would not incur, from the great Lord of the vineyard, this reproof, *Why stand ye here all the day idle*. We may, I confess, be busy about many things, and yet be found negligent of the *One thing needful*. We may be very active, and, withal, very ill employed. I though a person may be industrious without being religious, I must at the same time admonish you, that no man can be idle without being sinful. This I shall endeavour to show in the sequel of the discourse ; where in I purpose to reprove a vice which is too common among all ranks of men. Superiors admonish their inferiors, and parents tell their children, that idleness is the mother of every sin ; while, in their own practice, they often set the example of what they reprobate severely in others. I shall study to show, that the idle man is every view, both foolish, and criminal ; that he does not live to God ; nor lives to the world ; nor lives to himself.

I. He lives not to God. The great and wise Creator certainly does nothing in vain. A small measure of reflection might convince every one, that for some purpose he was sent into the world. The nature of man bears no mark of insignificance, or neglect. He is placed at the head of all things here below. He is furnished with a great preparation of faculties and powers. He is enlightened by reason with many important discoveries, and even taught by revelation to consider himself as

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by the death of Christ, from misery; and intended  
 life, by gradual advances, to a still higher rank in the  
 verse of God. In such a situation, thus distinguish-  
 thus favored and assisted by his Creator, can he hope  
 be forgiven, if he aim at no improvement, if he pur-  
 no useful design, live for no other purpose but to in-  
 ge in sloth, to consume the fruits of the earth, and to  
 od his days in a dream of vanity? Existence is a fa-  
 trust; and he who thus misemploys, and squanders  
 way, is treacherous to his Author.—Look around  
 and you will behold the whole universe full of ac-  
 powers. Action is, to speak so, the genius of na-  
 By motion and exertion, the system of being is

erved in vigor. By its different parts always acting  
 subordination one to another, the perfection of the  
 is carried on. The heavenly bodies perpetually  
 lve. Day and night incessantly repeat their appoint-  
 course. Continual operations are going on in the  
 n, and in the waters. Nothing stands still. All is  
 , and stirring, throughout the universe.—In the  
 of this animated and busy scene, is man alone to  
 ain idle in his place? Belongs it to him, to be the  
 inactive and slothful being in the creation, when he  
 so much allotted him to do; when in so many vari-  
 ways he might improve his own nature, might ad-  
 ce the glory of the God who made him; and con-  
 te his part to the general good?

ardly is there any feeling of the human heart more  
 ral, or more universal, than that of our being ac-  
 table to God. It is, what the most profligate can  
 er totally erase. Almost all nations have agreed in  
 belief, that there is to come some period, when the  
 ighty will act as the judge of his creatures. Pre-  
 ments of this, work in every breast. Conscience  
 already erected a tribunal, on which it anticipates  
 sentence which at that period shall be passed. Be-  
 this tribunal let us sometimes place ourselves in re-  
 thought, and consider what account we are pre-  
 give of our conduct to Him who made us.

"I placed you," the great Judge may then be supposed to say, "in a station where you had many occasions for action, and many opportunities of improvement. You were taught, and you knew, your duties. Throughout a course of years I continued your improvement. I surrounded you with friends, to whom you might be useful. I gave you health, ease, leisure, and various advantages of situation—Where are the fruits of those talents which you possessed? What have you done with them to yourselves? what good to others? How have you filled up your place, answered your destination, in the world? Produce some evidence, of your not having existed altogether in vain."—Let such as are now mere blanks in the world, and a burden to the earth, think what answers they will give to those awful questions.

II. The idle live not to the world, and their fellow-creatures around them, any more than they do to God. Had any man a title to stand alone, and to be independent of his fellows, he might then consider himself at liberty to indulge in solitary ease and sloth, without being responsible to others for the manner in which he chose to live. But, on the face of the earth, there is not such a person, from the King on his throne, to the beggar in his cottage. We are all connected with one another by various relations; which create a chain of mutual dependence, reaching from the highest, to the lowest station in society. The order and happiness of the world cannot be maintained, without a perpetual circulation of active duties and offices, which all are called upon to perform in their turn. Superiors are not independent of their inferiors, than these inferiors are of them. Each have demands and claims upon the other; and he, who in any situation of life, refuses to act his part, and to contribute his share to the general stock of felicity, deserves to be proscribed from society as an unworthy member. *If any man will not work, says the Apostle Paul, neither shall he eat.\** If

\* 2 Thessa. iii. 10.

nothing to advance the purposes of society, he has no title to enjoy the advantages of it. It is sometimes supposed, that industry and diligence are duties required of the poor alone, and that riches confer the privilege of being idle. This is so far from being justified by reason, how often soever it may obtain in fact, that the higher one is raised in the world, his obligation to be useful is proportionably increased. The claims upon him, from various quarters, multiply. The sphere of his active duties widens on every hand. Even supposing him exempted from exerting himself in behalf of his inferiors, supposing the relation between superiors and inferiors abolished, the relation among equals must still subsist. If there be no man, however high in rank, who stands not frequently in need of the good offices of his friends, does he think that he owes nothing to them in return? Can he fold his arms in selfish indolence, and expect to be served by others if he will not exert himself, in doing service to any?—Were there no other call to industry, but the relation in which everyone stands to his own family, the remembrance of this alone, should make the man of idleness blush. Pretends he to love those with whom he is connected by the dearest ties, and yet will he not bestir himself for their guidance, their support, or their advancement in the world? How immoral, and cruel, is the part he acts who flummerys in sensual ease, while the wants and demands of a helpless family cry aloud, but cry in vain, for his vigorous exertions? Is this a husband, is this a father, that deserves to be honored with those sacred names? How many voices will be lifted up against him, at the last day? Do such persons remember the awful words of scripture, and tremble. It is written in the First Epistle to Timothy, the fifth chapter, and eighth verse, *If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

III. The idle man lives not to himself, with advantage than he lives to the world. It

supposition entirely opposite, that persons of this character proceed. They imagine that, how deficient for they may be in point of duty, they at least consult their own satisfaction. They leave to others the drudgery of life; and betake themselves, as they think, to the quarter of enjoyment and ease. Now, in contradiction to this, I assert, and hope to prove, that the idle man, first, shuts the door against all improvement; next, that he opens it wide to every destructive folly; and lastly, that he excludes himself from the true enjoyment of pleasure.

First, He shuts the door against improvement of every kind, whether of mind, body, or fortune. The faculty of our nature, the condition under which we were placed from our birth, is, that nothing good or great is to be acquired, without toil and industry. A price is appointed by Providence to be paid for every thing; and the price of improvement, is labor. Industry, may, indeed, be sometimes disappointed. *The race may not be given to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.* But, at the same time, it is certain that, in the ordinary course of things, without strength, the battle cannot be gained; without swiftness, the race cannot be run with success. *In all labor, says the wise man, there is profit; but the soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing.\** If we consult either the improvement of the mind, or the health of the body, it is well known that exercise is a great instrument of promoting both. Sloth enfeebles equally the bodily, and the mental powers. As in the animal system it engenders disease, so on the faculties of the soul it brings a fatal rust, which corrodes and weakens them; which, in a short time, reduces the brightest genius to the same level with the meanest understanding. The great differences which take place among men are not owing to a distinction that nature has made in the original powers, so much as to the superior diligence as any, which some have improved these powers by. says the

\* Prov. xiv. 23. xiii. 3.

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thers. To no purpose do we possess the seeds of many  
 great abilities, if they are suffered to lie dormant within  
 It is not the latent possession, but the active exer-  
 on of them, which gives them merit. Thousands,  
 whom indolence has sunk into contemptible obscurity,  
 might have come forward to the highest distinction, if  
 idleness had not frustrated the effect of all their powers.  
 Instead of going on to improvement, all things go to  
 decline, with the idle man. His character falls into con-  
 tempt. His fortune is consumed. Disorder, confusion,  
 and embarrassment, mark his whole situation. Observe  
 what lively colors the state of his affairs is described  
 by Solomon. *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 cov-  
 ered the face thereof; and the stone wall thereof was bro-  
 ken down. Then I saw and considered it well. I looked  
 on it, and received instruction.\** In the midst, too, of  
 these distresses which idleness brings on its votaries, they  
 must submit to innumerable mortifications, which never  
 fail to attend their shameful conduct. They must reck-  
 on, on seeing themselves contemned by the virtuous and  
 despised, and slighted by the thriving part of mankind.  
 They must expect to be left behind by every competitor  
 of rank or fortune. They will be obliged to humble  
 themselves before persons, now far their superiors in the  
 world, whom once, they would have disdained to ac-  
 knowledge as their equals.—Is it in this manner, that  
 a man lives to himself? Are these the advantages, which  
 are expected to be found in the lap of ease? The  
 man may at first have appeared soft: But it will soon  
 be found to cover thorns innumerable. *How long wilt  
 thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of  
 sleep? Yet a little sleep; yet a little slumber, a little  
 drowsing of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come  
 like a thief, and thy want as an armed man.†*

\* Prov. xxiv. 30, 31, 52.

† Prov. xxiv. 33, 54.

But this is only a small part of the evils which persons of this description bring on themselves: For,

In the second place, while in this manner they shut the door against every improvement, they open it wide to the most destructive vices and follies. The human mind cannot remain always unemployed. Its passions must have some exercise. If we supply them not with proper employment, they are sure to run loose into riot and disorder. While we are unoccupied by what is good, evil is continually at hand; and hence it is said in Scripture, that as soon as Satan *found the house empty*, he took possession, and filled it *with evil spirits*.\* Every man who recollects his conduct, may be satisfied, that his hours of idleness have always proved the hours most dangerous to virtue. It was then, that criminal desires arose! guilty pursuits were suggested; and designs were formed, which, in their issue, have disquieted and embittered his whole life. If seasons of idleness be dangerous, what must a continued habit of it prove? Habitual indolence, by a silent and secret progress, undermines every virtue in the soul. More violent passions run their course, and terminate. They are like rapid torrents, which foam, and swell, and bear down every thing before them. But after having overflowed the banks, their impetuosity subsides. They return, by degrees, into their natural channel; and the damage which they have done, can be repaired. Sloth is like the slowly flowing, putrid stream, which stagnates in the marsh, breeds venomous animals, and poisonous plants; and infects with pestilential vapors the whole country round it. Having once tainted the soul, it leaves no part of it sound; and at the same time, gives not those alarms to the conscience, which the eruptions of bolder and fiercer passions often occasion. The disease which it brings on is creeping and insidious; and is, on that account, most certainly mortal.

\* Matth. xii. 44.

which persons, and, of course, to heighten our demands for gratifications; while it unhappily withdraws from us the proper means of gratifying these demands. If the desires of the industrious man be set upon opulence or rank, upon conveniencies, or the splendor of life, he can accomplish his desires, by methods which are fair and allowable. The idle man has the same desire with the industrious, but not the same resources for compassing his end by honorable means. He must therefore turn himself to seek by fraud, or by violence, what he cannot submit to acquire by industry. Hence, the origin of those multiplied crimes to which idleness is daily giving birth in the world; and which contribute so much to violate the order, and to disturb the peace, of society.— In general, the children of idleness may be ranked under two denominations or classes of men; both of whom may, too justly, be termed, The children of the devil. The first, incapable of any effort, they are such as sink into absolute meanness of character, and contentedly wallow with the drunkard and debauchee, among the herd of the sensual; until poverty overtake them, or disease cut them off: Or, they are such as, retaining some remains of vigour, are impelled, by their passions, to venture on a desperate attempt for retrieving their ruined fortunes. In this case, they employ the art of the fraudulent gamester to ensnare the unwary. They issue forth with the highwayman to plunder on the road; or with the thief and the robber, they infest the city by night. From this class, our prisons are peopled; and by them the scaffold is furnished with those melancholy admonitions, which are so often delivered from it to the crowd. Such are frequently the tragical, but well known, consequences of the vice against which I now warn you.

In the third, and last place, how dangerous soever idleness may be to virtue, are there not pleasures, it may be said, which attend it? Is there not ground to plead, that it brings a release from the oppressive cares of the world; and soothes the mind with a gentle satisfaction,

which is not to be found amidst the toils of a busy and active life?—This is an advantage which, least of all others, we admit it to possess. In behalf of incessant labor, no man contends. Occasional release from toil and indulgence of ease, is what nature demands, and virtue allows. But what we assert is, that nothing is so great an enemy to the lively and spirited enjoyment of life, as a relaxed and indolent habit of mind. He who knows not what it is to labor, knows not what it is to enjoy rest. The felicity of human life, depends on the regular prosecution of some laudable purpose or object, which keeps awake and enlivens all our powers. Our happiness consists in the pursuit, much more than in the attainment, of any temporal good. Rest is agreeable, but it is only from preceding labors, that rest acquires its true relish. When the mind is suffered to remain in continued inaction, all its powers decay. It soon languishes and sickens; and the pleasures which it proposed to obtain from rest, end in tediousness and insipidity. To this, let that miserable set of men bear witness, who after spending great part of their life in active industry have retired to what they fancied was to be a pleasing enjoyment of themselves, in wealthy inactivity, and profound repose. Where they expected to find an elysium, they have found nothing but a dreary and comfortless waste. Their days have dragged on, in uniform languor; with the melancholy remembrance often returning of the chearful hours they passed, when they were engaged in the honest business, and labors of the world.

We appeal to every one who has the least knowledge or observation of life, whether the busy, or the idle have the most agreeable enjoyment of themselves? Compare them in their families. Compare them in the societies with which they mingle; and remark, which of them discover most cheerfulness and gaiety; which possess the most regular flow of spirits; whose temper is most equal; whose good humor, most unclouded. While the active and diligent both enliven, and enjoy society, the idle are not only a burden to themselves,

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 d. He who ceases a fretful restlessness of mind; gives rise to cravings  
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 owers. Our ing person, of the folly, the guilt, and the misery, of an  
 re than in the e state. Let these admonitions stir us up, to exert  
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 t unclouded- to be forgotten, that we must *first seek the kingdom*  
 n, and enjo- *God, and his righteousness; and give diligence to make*  
 themselves, *calling and election sure.* Otherwise, how active

never we may seem to be, our whole activity will be only a laborious idleness: We shall appear in the end to have been busy to no purpose, or to a purpose worse than none. Then only we fulfil the proper character of Christians, when we join that pious zeal which becomes us as the servants of God, with that industry which is required of us, as good members of society; when, according to the exhortation of the Apostle, we are *not slothful in business*, and, at the same time, *servants of the Spirit, serving the Lord*.\*

## SERMON X.

### ON THE SENSE OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE.

PSALM LXXIII. 23.

— *I am continually with thee* —

WE live in a world which is full of the divine presence and power. We behold every where around us the traces of that supreme goodness, which enlivens and supports the universe. *Day uttereth speech of it to day and night sheweth knowledge of it to night*. Yet, surrounded as we are with the perfections of God, meeting him wherever we go, and called upon by a thousand objects, to confess his presence, it is both the misfortune and the crime of a great part of mankind, that they are strangers to Him in whose world they dwell. Occupied with nothing but their pursuits of interest and pleasure, they pass through this world, as though God were not there. The virtuous and reflecting are particularly distinguished from the giddy and dissolute, by that habit

\* Rom. xii. 11.

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... of the divine presence which characterises the  
...ner. To them, nothing appears void of God. They  
...contemplate his perfections in the works of nature; and  
...trace his Providence in the incidents of life. When  
...ured from the world, he often employs their medita-  
...ns. When engaged in action, he always influences  
...in conduct. Wherever a pious man is, or whatever  
...does, in the style of the text, he is *continually with*

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The happy effect of this sentiment on the heart, is  
...ly displayed in the context. We see it allaying all  
...the disquiet which the Psalmist, in the preceding verses,  
...cribes himself to have suffered on account of the  
...prosperity of the wicked. The first reflection which  
...stored tranquillity to his mind, was the remembrance of  
...the presence of God. *Nevertheless, I am continually*  
*with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand.* He  
...came sensible, that whatever distresses the righteous  
...might suffer for a time, they could not fail of being  
...compensated in the end, by that Almighty Protector,  
...whose propitious presence ever continued to surround  
...them. Whereupon follow those memorable expressions  
...his trust and joy in God. *Thou shalt guide me with*  
*counsel; and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom*  
*do I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth*  
*desire besides thee.*

There are principally two effects, which the sense of  
...divine presence is fitted to produce upon men.—One  
...to restrain them from vice; the other, to encourage  
...their virtue. Its operation, as a check upon the sinner,  
...is obvious. The perpetual presence of so powerful and  
...dearable a witness, is one of the most awful considera-  
...tions which can be addressed to the dissolute. It re-  
...moves all the security which secrecy can be supposed to  
...afford to crimes. It aggravates the guilt of them, from  
...being committed in the face of the Almighty; and has  
...power to strike terror into the heart of the greatest crim-  
...inal, in the midst of his misdeeds.—While this princi-  
...ple of religion thus checks and testifies the sinner, it

produces also another effect, that of strengthening and comforting the good man, in the practice of his duty. It is the influence of the divine presence on good men, which, in consequence of the Psalmist's sentiment, I purpose to consider. To their character, it belongs to *be continually with God*. I shall endeavor to show the high benefit and comfort which they derive from such a habit of mind; and shall, for this end, first consider the internal moral state; and next, view them as they are affected by several of the external accidents and situations of life.

Let us begin with considering them in their internal state. The belief of the divine presence acts upon the heart here, first, as an incitement to virtue. The presence of one whom we highly esteem and revere, of a sovereign, for instance, a father, or a friend, whose approbation we are solicitous to gain, is always found to exalt the powers of men, to refine, and improve their behavior. Hence, it has been given as a rule by ancient moralists, that, in order to excel in virtue, we should propound to ourselves some person of eminent and distinguished worth; and should accustom ourselves to act, as if we were standing by, and beholding us. To the esteem and approbation of their fellow creatures, none are insensible. There are few who, in the conspicuous parts of their life, when they know the eyes of the public to be fixed on them, act not their part with propriety and decorum. But what is the observation of the public, what is the presence of the greatest or wisest man on earth, to that presence of the Divinity which constantly surrounds us. The man who realises to his mind this august presence feels a constant incentive for acquitting himself with dignity. He views himself as placed on an illustrious theatre. To have the Almighty for the spectator and witness of his conduct, is more to him than if the whole world were assembled to observe him. Men judge often falsely, always imperfectly, of what passes before them. They are imposed on by specious appearances, and the artful carry away the praise which is due to

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erving. Even supposing them to judge fairly, we may want the opportunity of doing justice to our character, by any proper display of it in the sight of the world. Our situation may bury in obscurity, those talents and virtues which were intitled to command the highest esteem. But he, in whose presence the good man acts, is both an impartial, and an unerring judge of worth. No fallacious appearances impose on him. No secret virtue is hidden from him. He is attentive equal to the meanest and the greatest; and his approbation confers eternal rewards. The man, therefore, who *says the Lord always before him*, is prompted to excel in virtue by motives, which are peculiar to himself, and which engage, on the side of duty, both honor and interest. *I have kept thy precepts, and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee.\**

Supposing, however, his virtuous endeavours to be unfruitful, many imperfections will attend them. A faultless tenor of unblemished life, is beyond the reach of man. Passions will sometimes overcome him; and ambition or interest, in an unguarded hour, will turn him aside into evil. Hence, he will be ashamed of himself, and disquieted by a sense of guilt and folly. In this state, to which we are often reduced by the weakness of human nature, the belief of God's continual presence brings relief to the heart. It acted before as an animating principle. It now acts as a principle of comfort, in the midst of many imperfections, a virtuous man appeals to his divine witness, for the sincerity of his intentions. He can appeal to him who *knows his frame*, that the general train of his conduct, it is his study to keep the law of God.

Mere law, among men, is rigid and inflexible. As no human law-giver can look into the hearts of his subjects, he cannot, even though we were ever present with them, estimate their character exactly. He can make no allowance for particular situations. He must prescribe

\* Psalms cxix. 168.

the same terms to all whom he rules ; and treat all according to their outward actions. But every mind, diversity of character, temper, and situation, is known to God. It is not only from what his servants do, but from what they seek to do, that he forms his judgment of them. He attends to all those circumstances which may render the trial of their virtue, at any time, peculiarly hard. He hears the whisper of devotion as it rises in the soul. He beholds the tear of contrition which falls in secret. He sees the good intention struggling in its birth ; and pursues it, in its progress, through those various obstacles which may prevent it from ripening into action. Good men, therefore, in their most humble and dejected state, draw some consolation from his knowledge of their heart. Though they may sometimes be erring from the right path, they can look up to him who is ever with them, and say, as an apostle, who had grievously offended, once said to his great Master ; *Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee.*\*

Appealing thus to their omniscient witness, they are naturally soothed and encouraged by the hope of his clemency. At the same time, it is the peculiar advantage of this sentiment of the divine presence, that it prevents such hope from flattering them too much, or leading into undue presumption. For while it encourages, it tends also to humble, a pious man. If it encourages him, by the reflection on all his good dispositions being known and attended to by God, it humbles him, by the remembrance, that *his secret sins also are ever in the sight of the divine countenance.* So that, by dwelling under the sense of God being continually with us, we keep alive the proper temper of a Christian in the face of humanity, without dejection ; fear, mingled with hope. We are cheered, without being lifted up. We feel ourselves obnoxious to the all-observing eye of justice, and are comforted with the thoughts of that mercy which is through Jesus Christ, the Discreeter of all hearts.

\* John, xii. 17.

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to the sincere and penitent. Such are the blessed effects which this principle of religion produces upon the inward mortal state of a good man. Let us now, in the second place, consider his external circumstances; and examine the influence which the same principle has upon his happiness, in several different situations of life.

Let us first view him in what the world calls prosperity; when his circumstances are easy or affluent, and his life flows in a smooth untroubled stream. Here, it might be thought, that a sense of the divine presence would operate upon him only, or chiefly, for promoting temperance, and restraining the disorders incident to a prosperous state. Valuable effects, indeed, these are; and most conducive to the true enjoyment of all that is desirable in life. But though it, doubtless, does exert a salutary influence, yet it stops not there. It not only preserves the virtue of a good man amidst the temptations of pleasure, but it gives to his prosperity a security, and a peculiar relish, which to others is unknown. He who is without a sense of God upon his mind bends in human affairs nothing but a perpetual fluctuation, and vicissitude of events. He is surrounded with unknown causes, which may be working his destruction in secret. He cannot avoid perceiving, that there hangs over him the irresistible arm of that Providence, whose pleasure he has done nothing to stay or avert. But he who, in the day of prosperity, dwells with God, is preserved from those disquieting alarms. He dwells as in a friend and protector, from whom he conceives blessings to proceed. He can appeal to him for the thankfulness with which he receives them; and for his labours to employ them well. He trusts, that the God whom he serves will not forsake him; that the goodness which he has already experienced, will continue to bless him; and though he believes himself not exempted from the changes of the world, yet, in the midst of these, he has ground to hope, that sources of comfort and happiness shall always be left open to him.

Moreover, the pleasures of life, while they last, are unspeakably heightened by the presence of that Benefactor who bestows them. The pleasing emotion of gratitude to the giver mingles with the enjoyment of the gift. While to the mere worldly man, the whole frame of nature is only a vast irregular fabric; and the course of human affairs no more than a confused succession of fortuitous events; all nature is beautified, and every agreeable incident is enlivened, to him who beholds God in all things. Hence arise a variety of pleasing sensations, to fill up those solitary hours, in which external prosperity supplies him with no entertainment. In the smiling scenes of nature, he contemplates the benignity of its author. In its sublime objects, he admires its Majesty. In its awful and terrible ones, he adores its power. He dwells in this world as in a magnificent temple, which is full of the glory of its founder; and every where views nature offering up its incense to him from a thousand altars. Such ideas exalt and ennoble the human mind; and reflect an additional lustre on the brightness of prosperity.

From the prosperous, let us next turn to the afflicted condition of a good man. For, as prosperity may, affliction certainly will, at one time or other, be his lot. It enters in to the appointed trial of his virtue; and, one degree or other, is the doom of all. Here we shall find various situations occur, in which no relief is equal to what a virtuous and holy man derives from a sense of the perpetual presence of God.

Is he, for instance thrown in an obscure condition in the world, without friends to assist him, or any to regard and consider his state? He enjoys the satisfaction of thinking, that though he may be neglected by men, he is not forgotten by God. Inconsiderable as he is himself, he knows, that he will not be overlooked by his Maker, amidst the infinite variety of beings, or the vast immensity of his works. The poor man can, as much encouragement as the rich or great, lift up his eyes to heaven, and say, *Nevertheless, O Lord, I am*

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sinually with thee : Thou holdest me by my right hand. The gracious presence of that Supreme Being is affect- ed by no diversity of rank or fortune. It imparts itself alike to all the virtuous and upright ; like its glorious image, the sun in the firmament, which sheds its rays equally upon the humble cottage, and upon the palace of Kings. In the presence of the great Lord, of heaven and earth, all the distinctions which vanity has contriv- ed to make among men, totally disappear. All ranks are on one level. *The rich and the poor* here indeed *meet together*, without any other distinction than what arises from the heart and the soul. The sense of this, lifts the poor man above contempt ; supports his spirits when apt to be dejected ; and bestows dignity on the part which he acts. How inconsiderable soever that part may appear in the estimation of an injudicious world, it is exalted, when virtuously performed, by the approbation of his divine witness. He can bear with indifference the scorn of the proud, as long as he knows, that there is one higher than the highest to regard him. He can enjoy himself with pleasures in his mean habita- tion, because he believes that God dwells with him there. The Divine presence cheers to him the most lonely re- treat. It accompanies his steps to the most distant regi- ons of the earth. If he should be driven into exile from all his friends, and obliged to dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there God's hand would hold him, and his right hand would guide him. Though left without companion or friend, he never thinks himself desolate, as long as he can say, *I am still with God.*

But though raised above obscurity or poverty, yet, in any situation of fortune, calumny and reproach may be the lot of the servants of God. His good intentions may be misconstrued ; his character unjustly traduced ; and, to the open reviling of enemies, the more bitter unkindness of friends may sometimes be joined. In this situation, when wounded in spirit, and, perhaps, unable to make his innocence appear, to whom shall he have recourse for defence, to whom make his last appeal, but

to that God who is ever present with him, and who knoweth his heart? How frequently, amidst the injustice and oppression of the world, has distressed innocence had no other relief but this? "God is my witness." "God is my avenger. He hath seen it; and he will repay." A good conscience, it is true, is, of itself, a powerful support. But God is Lord of the conscience, and it is only when connected with a sense of divine presence and approbation, that a good conscience becomes a steady principle of fortitude in the mind, under all discouragements. Hence, a virtuous man possesses a high degree of independence, both on the praise, and on the censure of the world. It is enough to him, when undergoing the same reproaches which Job suffered from his mistaken friends, he can say with him, *Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.* He affects not to divulge his good deeds to the world. He is without concern whether the world be acquainted with them, or not. He knoweth, that his Father *which is in heaven seeth in secret*; and that his prayers and his alms come up in grateful memorial before him. *With me, it is a small thing to the judgment of you, or of man's judgment; he that judgeth me is the Lord, he shall bring forth my righteousness, at last, as the light, and my judgment as the noon day.* In this consciousness of integrity, he looks down with indifference, as from a superior station, upon the harsh censures of a giddy and ignorant world. The sense of being continually in the presence of God diffuses over his soul a holy calm, which unjust reproach cannot disturb. In the presence of that august and venerable witness, all the noise and clamors of men like the murmurings of a distant storm, die away.

Lastly, Supposing the character of a good man to be tainted by reproach, supposing also his external situation to be opulent or distinguished, many, notwithstanding, and secret, are the difficulties to which he may be exposed. Secret griefs may be preying upon him;

\* Job. xvi. 19.

† 1 Cor. iii. 4.

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heart, left to feed in silence on its own bitterness. He may labor under sore disease, and discern his earthly frame gradually mouldering into dust. He may be deprived of those friends and relatives who had been the chief comforts of his state; or may be obliged to separate himself for taking farewell of them for ever. In the midst of these various afflicting scenes of human life, no consolation can be more powerful than what arises from the presence of a divine protector and guardian, to whom our case, with all its sorrows, is perfectly known. *To him, says the Psalmist, I poured out my complaint. I bowed before him my trouble. I looked on my right hand and viewed; but behold there was no man who cared for my soul. I said unto thee, O Lord, thou art my refuge. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou overurst my path.\**

We all know, that to communicate our grief to a faithful friend, often gives ease and relief to the burdened heart. Such communication we are encouraged to make, and such relief we may expect to find, in pouring out our heart before that God in whom compassions flow. We may have no earthly friend to whom we can with full confidence disclose all our sorrows; or we may want words in which to express them. But God is the Father of all hearts; and the hearer of all prayers. To the secret anguish of the soul, he is no inactive witness. Every groan which is heaved from the laboring bosom, though heard by no human ear, reaches his throne. *As he knows our trials, so he remembers us in dust; and thence light arises to the upright in darkness.* For the hope naturally springs, that this beneficent being will pity them, as a father pitieth his children; and in the midst of those distresses which the present circumstances of man render unavoidable, will send them help from his sanctuary. Surrounded with this omnipotent presence of the Almighty, good men never view themselves as lost in this vale of tears, to bear, solitary

\* Psalms cxlii. 2, 3, 4.

and alone, the whole weight of human woe. In the dark, as well as in their brighter hours, God is with them. Even in that valley of the shadow of death, where no friend, no comforter, can go along to aid them, he is with them still. In the last extremity of nature, *the rod and staff of the Shepherd of Israel support them.*

Thus I have shown, though in an imperfect manner, what benefits holy men derive from a habitual sense of the divine presence. It animates and strengthens the virtue. It enlivens and brightens their prosperity. Under various forms of adversity, it affords them consolation and relief. Such considerations, undoubtedly form a strong argument in favor of a devout spirit, and a virtuous life. But they are considerations which may probably, be regarded by some, as ideal and visionary, requiring aid from a heated, or enthusiastic fancy, in order to give them force. I readily admit, that amidst the hurry and turbulence of the world, it may be difficult to bring these religious sentiments as fully into view, as is necessary for their making a just impression on the soul. This requires the effort of an intelligent and feeling mind; and therefore cannot be expected to be commonly found. To the unreflecting crowd, nothing appears real, but what is exposed to sense. What is invisible, is the same to them, as if it had no existence. But by the grossness of their own conceptions, they have no title to measure those of others. While they affect to treat all considerations taken from the sense of the divine presence, as visionary and enthusiastic, it can, on the contrary, be clearly shown, that they are founded on the most certain and unquestionable principles of reason. They essentially belong not to revealed only, but to natural, religion. Their reality can be denied by none, but those who deny that God exists, or that he governs the world. For, if he exist, he must undoubtedly pervade and inspect the world which he governs. He must know what is going on throughout his own universe; and especially must know what passes within the hearts which he has made, and of which he is to judge. To be

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where present; is the attribute of his nature, which, all others, is the most necessary to his administration of the universe. This, accordingly, is an attribute which all religions have ascribed to him. All nations have believed in it. All societies appeal to it, in the solemnities of an oath, by which they determine controversies. This attribute being once admitted to belong to the Deity, the consequences which I have deduced from it, plainly and naturally follow. And every good man has ground to say, *O Lord I am continually with thee.*



SERMON XL

ON PATIENCE.

LUKE XII. 10.

*In your patience possess ye your souls.*

THE possession of our souls is a very emphatical expression. It describes that state in which a man has both the full command, and the undisturbed enjoyment of himself; in opposition to his undergoing some inward agitation which discomposes his powers. Upon the least reflection, it must appear, how essential such a state of mind is to happiness. He only who thus possesses his soul, is capable of possessing any other thing with advantage; and in order to attain and preserve this self-possession, the most important requisite is, the habitual exercise of patience. I know that patience is apt to be ranked by many as the more humble and obscure virtue; belonging chiefly to those who groan on a sick-bed, or who languish in a prison. If their situation be happily, of a different kind, they imagine that there is no occasion for

The discipline of patience being preached to them. I hope to make it appear, that, in every circumstance of life, no virtue is more important, both to duty and happiness; or more requisite for forming a manly and worthy character. It is not confined to a situation of continued adversity. It principally, indeed, regards disagreeable circumstances which are apt to occur. In our present state, the occurrence of these is so frequent, that, in every condition of life, patience is incessantly called forth. Prosperity cannot be enjoyed, more than adversity supported, without it. It must enter into the temper, and form the habit of the soul, we would pass through the world with tranquillity and honor. What I purpose is, to point out some of the chief occasions on which patience is required; and recommend and enforce the exercise of it, in order *our possessing our souls.*

I. Patience under provocation. The wide circle of human society is diversified by an endless variety of characters, dispositions, and passions. Uniformity is in respect, the genius of the world. Every man is marked by some peculiarity which distinguishes him from another; and no where can two individuals be found who are exactly, and in all respects, alike. Where so much diversity obtains, it cannot but happen, that in the intercourse which men are obliged to maintain, their tempers shall often be ill adjusted to that intercourse; shall contend and interfere with each other. Hence, in every station, the highest as well as the lowest, and in every condition of life, public, private, and domestic, occasions of irritation frequently arise. We are provoked sometimes, by the folly and levity of those with whom we are connected; sometimes, by their indifference or neglect; sometimes, by the incivility of a friend, the haughtiness of a superior, or the insolent behavior of one in lower station. Happily a day passes, without somewhat or other occurrence, which serves to rattle the man of impatient spirit. In the course such a man lives in a continual storm. He knows not what it is to enjoy a train of good humor.

to them. His neighbors, friends, spouse, and children, all, though the unrestrained violence of his temper, become sources of disturbance and vexation to him. In vain is his diligence, in vain are health and prosperity. The least provocation is sufficient to discompose his mind, and poison his pleasures. His very amusements are mixed with turbulence and passion.

I would beseech this man to consider, of what small moment the provocations which he receives, or at least imagines himself to receive, are really in themselves; and of what great moment he makes them, by suffering them to deprive him of the possession of himself. I would beseech him, to consider, how many hours of happiness he throws away, which a little more patience would allow him to enjoy; and how much he puts in the power of the most insignificant persons to render him miserable. "But who can expect," we hear him complain, "that he is to possess the insensibility of a stone? How is it possible for human nature to endure so many repeated provocations? or to bear calmly with such unreasonable behavior?"—My brother! you can bear with no instances of unreasonable behavior, withdraw yourself from the world. You are no longer fit to live in it. Leave the intercourse of men, retreat to the mountain, and the desert; or shut yourself up in a cell. For here, in the midst of society, disturbances must come. You might as well expect, when you hold a calm atmosphere, and a clear sky, that no clouds should ever to rise, and no winds to blow, as that your life was long to proceed, without receiving provocations on human frailty. The careless and the imprudent, the giddy and the sickle, the ungrateful and the interested, every where meet us. They are the briars and the thorns, with which the paths of human life are beset. Only who can hold his course among them with patience and equanimity, he who is prepared to bear what he must expect to happen, is worthy of the name of a

Did you only imagine yourself composed for a moment, you would have seen the insignificance of these provocations which you magnify so highly. Within a few years more have rolled over your head, the storm will have, of itself subsided; the cause of your present impatience and disturbance will be utterly forgotten. Can you not, then, anticipate this hour of calmness to yourself; and begin to enjoy the peace which it certainly brings? If others have behaved improperly, leave them to their own folly, without becoming the victim of their caprice, and punishing yourself on their account.—Patience, in this exercise of it, cannot be much studied by all who wish their life to flow in a smooth stream. It is the reason of a man, in opposition to the passion of a child. It is the enjoyment of peace in opposition to uproar and confusion. *He that has rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken and without walls.\**—The next, important exercise of patience is,

**II. Patience under disappointments.** These will happen to the best and wisest man. Sometimes, his wisest and best concerted plans. They may be frustrated, not through an imprudence of those who have devised the plan, not even through the malice or ill designs of others; but merely in consequence of some of those cross incidents of life which could not be foreseen. On such occasions, persons of a warm and sanguine temper are presently in a ferment. They had formed their hopes, as they think, upon the justest grounds. They had waited long for success; and borne with many delays. But when their designs are brought to so unexpected an issue; when, without any fault of their own, they find their hopes finally blasted, all patience for them; they no longer possess their souls; the most passionate exclamations break forth. “To whom, O God, could such a disappointment have happened?—since the greatest in the world, was such a com-

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of disastrous incidents ever before? Why are  
 we doomed to be so unfortunate beyond all others?  
 Alas! how unskillfully have you calculated the  
 issue of human events? How rashly and presumptu-  
 ously had you trusted to success? To whom was it ever  
 your duty to guard against all the vicissitudes, which this  
 changing *fashion of the world* is incessantly bringing a-  
 gainst you? If one friend, to whom you looked up, has died,  
 another has lost his influence and power; if the op-  
 inion of the public is changed, and its favor has been  
 withdrawn; if some mistakes have occurred to lessen the  
 good-will of a patron on whom you depended; if,  
 through the concurrence of these, or such like circum-  
 stances, a more fortunate rival has prevailed against you;  
 what is there in all this, that differs from the ordinary  
 lot of man? Are we not, each in his turn, doomed to  
 experience the uncertainty of worldly pursuits? Why,  
 then, do we aggravate our misfortunes by the unreasonable vio-  
 lence of an impatient spirit? If our designs have failed  
 through rashness or misconduct, let us blame ourselves.  
 If they have failed through circumstances which we  
 could not prevent, let us submit to the fate of man; and  
 wait, with patience, till a more favorable opportunity  
 occur of regaining success.

Meanwhile, let us turn to the other side of the pro-  
 spect; and calmly consider how dubious it was, whether  
 the success which he longed for, would have proved a  
 blessing. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?*  
 Perhaps, the accomplishment of our designs might have  
 been pregnant with misery. Perhaps, from our present  
 disappointment, future prosperity may rise. Of such  
 unforeseen issues, we all know there have been many  
 examples. Who can tell, whether our case may not  
 prove one to the number?—At any rate, let us recollect,  
 that there is a Supreme Ruler, who disposes of the af-  
 fairs of men; under whom, all second causes work only  
 as subordinate agents. Looking up to that irresistible  
 power which is stretched over our heads, let us be calm;  
 let us submit and adore. Either to despair or to rage;

under disappointments, is sinful. By the former, we injure ourselves. By the latter, we insult Providence and provoke its displeasure to continue. *To possess souls in patience* is, at once, our wisdom as men, and our duty as Christians. The benefits of this virtue are so often reaped in this world, that good policy alone would recommend it to every thinking man. Disappointments derange, and overcome, vulgar minds. The patient and the wise, by a proper improvement frequently make them contribute to their high advantage. — We next recommend,

III. *Patience under restraints.* Numerous are the restraints imposed on us, by the nature of the human condition. To the restraints of authority and law, we must submit. The restraints of education and discipline lie on the young. Considerations of health restrain the indulgence of pleasure. Attentions to fortune restrain expence. Regard to friends, whom we are bound to please; respect to established customs, and to the opinions of society, impose restraints on our general behavior. There is no man, in any rank of life, who is always at liberty to act according as he would incline. In some quarter or other, he is limited by circumstances that either actually confine, or that ought at least to confine and restrain him.

These restraints, the impatient are apt to scorn. They will needs burst the barriers which reason had erected, or their situation had formed; and without regard to consequences, give free scope to their present wishes. Hence, many dangerous excesses flow; much confusion and misery are produced in human life. Had men more patience to submit to their condition, and to wait till they might, in a short time, obtain the power of gratifying them with safety. If the young, for instance, would undergo, with patience, the labors of education, they would rise, at a proper period, to honors, riches, or power. If the infant would, with patience, bear the regular regimen which their constitution demands, they might receive

the comforts of health. If persons of straitened fortune  
 and patience to conform themselves to their circumstan-  
 ces, and to abridge their pleasures, they might by de-  
 grees, improve and advance their state. Whereas, by  
 impetuosity of temper, and precipitancy of indulgence,  
 they forfeit all the advantages which patience would  
 have procured; and incur the opposite evils to their full  
 extent.

In the present state of human affairs, no lesson is more  
 necessary to be learned by all, to be inculcated on the  
 young, and to be practised by the old, than that of pati-  
 ent submission to necessity. For under the law of neces-  
 sity, we are all inevitably placed. No man is, or can be,  
 his own master. We are obliged, in a thousand  
 cases, to submit and obey. The discipline of patience  
 preserves our minds easy, by conforming them to our  
 state. By the impetuosity of an impatient and unsub-  
 mitting temper, we fight against an unconquerable pow-  
 er, and aggravate the evils we must endure.—Another  
 important exercise of the virtue concerning which we  
 discourse, is,

IV. patience under injuries and wrongs. To these,  
 amidst the present confusion of the world, all are expos-  
 ed. No station is so high, no power so great, no charac-  
 ter so unblemished, as to exempt men from being attack-  
 ed by rancours, malice, or envy. To behave under such  
 attacks with patience and moderation, is, it must be  
 confessed, the most trying exercises of virtue.—  
 In order to prevent mistakes on this subject, it is  
 necessary to observe, that a tame submission to wrongs is  
 not required by religion. We are, by no means to im-  
 agine, that religion tends to extinguish the sense of hon-  
 our, or to suppress the exertion of a manly spirit. It is  
 under a false apprehension of this kind, that Christian pa-  
 tience is sometimes stigmatised in discourse, as no other  
 than a different name for cowardice. On the contrary,  
 every man of virtue ought to feel what is due to his  
 character, and to support properly his own rights. Re-  
 sistance of wrong, is an useful principle in human na-  
 ture.

sure ; and for the wisest purposes ; was implanted in our frame. It is the necessary guard of private right ; and the great restraint on the insolence of the violent, who if no resistance were made, would trample on the gentle and peaceable.

Resentment however, if not kept within due bounds is in hazard of rising into fierce and cruel revenge. It is the office of patience to temper resentment by reason. In this view, it is most properly described in the text, by a man's *possessing his soul* ; acting the part which self-defence, which justice or honor, require him to act, without being transported out of himself by the vehemence of anger ; or insisting on such degrees of reparation as bear no proportion to the wrong that he has suffered. What proportion, for instance, is there between the life of a man, and an affront received by some rash expression in conversation, which the wise would have slighted ; and which, in the course of a few weeks, would have been forgotten by every one ? How fantastic, then, how unjustifiable, are those supposed laws of modern honor which for such an affront, require no less reparation than the death of a fellow-creature ; and which, to obtain this reparation, require a man to endanger his own life. Laws, which as they have no foundation in reason, never received the least sanction from any of the wise or polished nations of antiquity ; but were devised in the darkest ages of the world, and are derived to us from the ferocious barbarity of Gothic manners.

Nothing is so inconsistent with self-possession, as violent anger. It overpowers reason ; confounds our ideas ; distorts the appearance, and blacken the color of every object. By the storm it raises within, and by the mischiefs which it occasions without, it generally brings on the passionate and revengeful man, greater misfortune than he can bring on his enemy. Patience allays the destructive tempest, by making room for the return of calm and sober thought. It suspends the blow which sudden resentment was ready to inflict. It disposes to attend to the alienating circumstances, which may

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discovered in the midst of the wrongs we suppose ourselves to have suffered. Hence, it naturally inclines us to the moderate and gentle side; and while it allows all proper measures to be taken, both for safety, and for just redress, it makes way for returning peace. Without some degree of patience exercised under injuries, human life would be rendered a state of perpetual hostility; offences and retaliations would succeed to one another in endless train; and the world would become a field of blood.—It now remains to recommend,

V. *Patience under adversity and affliction.* This is the most common sense in which this virtue is understood; as it respects disease, poverty, old age, loss of friends, and the other calamities which are incident to human life. *Though a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.\** The various duties to which patience, under this view, gives rise, afford a larger subject to discourse than I am at present to pursue. In general, there are two chief exercises of patience under adversity; one respecting God, and another respecting men.

Patience, with respect to God, must, in the days of trouble, suppress the risings of a murmuring and rebellious spirit. It must appear in that calm resignation to the will of Heaven, which is expressed in those pious sentiments of ancient good men: *I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it. It is the Lord, who do what seemeth good in his eyes. Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also?* This is loyalty to the great Governour of the universe. This is that reverence which so well becomes creatures who know they are dependent, and who must confess themselves to be sinful. Such a spirit is fitted to attract the favor of Heaven; and to bring severe visitation sooner to a close. Whereas the stubborn and impatient, who submit not themselves to the

\* Eccl. xi. 8.

decrees of the Most High, require to be humbled and subdued by a continuance of chastisement.

Patience in adversity, with respect to men, must appear by the composure and tranquility of our behavior. The loud complaint, the querulous temper, and fretful spirit, disgrace every character. They show a mind that is unmanned by misfortunes. We weaken thereby the sympathy of others; and estrange them from the office of kindness and comfort. The exertions of pity will be feeble, when it is mingled with contempt. At the same time, by thus weakly yielding to adversity, we allow it weight to bear us down with double pressure. Patience, by preserving composure within, resists the impressions which trouble makes from without. By leaving the mind open to every consolation, it naturally tends to alleviate our burden.—To maintain a steady and unbroken mind, amidst all the shocks of the world, forms the highest honor of a man. Patience, on such occasions, rises to magnanimity. It shows a great and noble mind, which is able to rest on itself, on God, and a good conscience; which can enjoy itself amidst all evils; and would rather endure the greatest hardships, than submit to what was dishonorable, in order to obtain relief. This gives proof of a strength that is derived from Heaven. It is a beam of the Immortal Light, shining on the heart. Such patience, is the most complete triumph of religion and virtue; and accordingly it has ever characterized those whose names have been transmitted with honor to posterity. It has enobled the hero, the saint, and the martyr. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*

Thus I have traced Patience through several of its most important operations, in different circumstances of life; under provocations; under disappointments; under restraints; under injuries; and under afflictions. We now see, that it is a virtue of universal use.

humbled man, in any condition, can pass his days with tolerable comfort, who has not learned to practise it. His prosperity will be continually disturbed; and his adversity will be clouded with double darkness. He will be uneasy and troublesome to all with whom he is connected; and will be more troublesome to himself than to any other.—Let me particularly advise those who wish to cultivate so necessary a virtue, to begin their cultivation of it, on occasions when small offences and provocations arise. It is a great, but common error to imagine, that we are at liberty to give loose reins to temper, among the trivial occurrences of life. No excuse irritation and impatience, can be worse, than what is taken from the person being inconsiderable, or the incident being slight, which threw us off our guard. With inconsiderable persons we are surrounded. Of slight incidents, the bulk of human life is composed. In the midst of these, the ruling temper of the mind is formed. It is only by moderation and self-command then acquired, that we can inure ourselves to patience, when the great conjunctions of life shall put it to a severer trial. If neglected when we shall afterwards solicit its return in vain. *If thou hast run with foot men, and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?\**

In order to assist us in the acquisition of this grace, let us often contemplate that great model of it, which is displayed in the whole life of our Saviour Jesus Christ, whose temper was ever tried by more frequent provocations, more repeated disappointments, more flagrant injuries, or more severe distress? Yet, amidst them all, behold him patiently enduring the contradictions of sinners; to their rudeness, opposing a mild and untrifling, though firm, spirit; and, in the cause of mankind, patiently bearing with every indignity. Well might he say, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.†*

\* Jer. xii. 5.

† Math. xi. 29.

Having such a high example before our eyes, let us be ashamed of those sallies of impatience which we so often suffer to break forth, in the midst of prosperity. By more manly tranquillity and self-command, let us discover to the world, that, as men, and as Christians, we have learned in patience to possess our souls.

## SERMON XII.

### ON MODERATION.

PHILIPPIANS IV. 5.

*Let your moderation be known unto all men.*—

THE present state of man is neither doomed to constant misery, nor designed for complete happiness. It is in general, a mixed state, of comfort and sorrow, of prosperity and adversity; neither brightened by uninterrupted sunshine, nor overcast with perpetual shade; but subject to alternate successions of the one and the other. While such a state forbids despair, it also checks presumption. It is equally adverse to despondency of mind and to high elevation of spirits. The temper which best suits it, is expressed in the text by *moderation*; which as the habitual tenor of the soul, the apostle exhorts us to discover in our whole conduct; *let it be known unto all men*. This virtue consists in the equal balance of the soul. It imports such proper government of our passions and pleasures, as shall prevent us from running into extremes of any kind; and shall produce a calm and temperate frame of mind. It chiefly respects our conduct in the state, which comes under the description of adversity or prosperity. Patience, of which I treated in the preceding discourse, directs the proper regulation of

... let us be led, under the disagreable incidents of life. Moderation determines the bounds within which it should rest. By this, when circumstances are agreeable or promising, that I now purpose is, to point out some of the chief instances in which Moderation ought to take place, and shew the importance of preserving it.

I. Moderation in our wishes. The active mind of man seldom or never rests satisfied with its present condition, how prosperous soever. Originally formed for a wider range of objects, for a higher sphere of enjoyments, it finds itself, in every situation of fortune, straited and confined. Sensible of deficiency in its state, it is ever sending forth the fond desire, the aspiring wish, for something beyond what is enjoyed at present. Hence, that restlessness which prevails so generally among mankind. Hence, that disgust of pleasures which they have tried; that passion for novelty; that ambition arising to some degree of eminence or felicity, of which they have formed to themselves an indistinct idea. All these may be considered as indications of a certain natural original greatness in the human soul, swelling beyond the limits of its present condition; and pointing at higher objects of which it was made. Happy, if this latent remains of our primitive state served to direct our wishes towards their proper destination, and to lead us into the path of true bliss!

But in this dark and bewildered state, the aspiring tendency of our nature unfortunately takes an opposite direction, and feeds a very misplaced ambition. The stateliest appearances which here present themselves to our view; the distinctions which fortune confers; the advantages of rank and pleasures which we imagine the world to be capable of bestowing, fill up the ultimate wish of most men and tempt them to exert their active labors; which warm the breast of the young, animate the industry of the middle-aged, and often keep alive the passions of the old, in the very close of life. Assuredly, there is nothing so foolish in our wishing to be freed from whatever is

disagreeable, and to obtain a fuller enjoyment of the comforts of life. But when these wishes are not tempered by reason, they are in danger of precipitating into much extravagance and folly. Desires and wishes are the first springs of action. When they become exorbitant, the whole character is likely to be tainted; we suffer our fancy to create to itself worlds, of ideal happiness; if we feed our imagination with plans of valence and splendor far beyond our rank; if we fix our wishes certain stages of high advancement; or obtain degrees of uncommon reputation or distinction, the sole stations of felicity; the assured consequence will be, that we shall become unhappy in our present state, unfit for acting the part, and discharging the duties that belong to it; we shall discompose the peace and order of our minds, and foment many hurtful passions. Here then, let Moderation begin its reign; by bringing wishes in reasonable bounds the wishes that we form. As soon as they become extravagant, let us check them by proper reflections on the fallacious nature of those objects which the world hangs out to allure desire.

You have strayed, my friends, from the road which conducts to felicity; you have dishonored the natural dignity of your souls, in allowing your wishes to terminate on nothing higher than worldly ideas of greatness and happiness. Your imagination roves in a land of shadows. Unreal forms deceive you. It is no more than a phantom, an illusion of happiness, which attracts your fond admiration; nay, an illusion of happiness which often conceals much real misery. Do you imagine, that all are happy, who have attained to those summits of distinction, towards which your wishes aspire? Alas! he frequently has experience inewed, that where roses were supposed to bloom, nothing but briars and thorns grew. Reputation, beauty, riches, grandeur, nay royalty itself would, many a time, have been gladly exchanged by the possessors, for that more quiet and humble station, which you are now dissatisfied. With all that is splendid and shining in the world, it is decreed that

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 stations of fortune, the great calamities of life chiefly  
 are not tempered. There the storm spends its violence, and there the  
 precipitating winds and withers break; while safe and unhurt, the inhabitant  
 of the vale remains below.—Retreat, then, from those  
 and pernicious excursions of extravagant desire.  
 Satisfy yourselves with what is rational and attainable.  
 Gain your minds to moderate views of human life, and  
 human happiness. Remember, and admire, the wisdom  
 of Agur's wish. *Remove far from me vanity and lies.  
 Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food  
 convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say,  
 Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take  
 the name of my God in vain.*—Let me recommend,  
 I. Moderation in our pursuits. Wishes and desires  
 must be within. If immoderate and improper, though they  
 are not in the heart, yet society may not be affected by them.  
 An obscure and harmless individual may indulge his  
 whims, without disturbing the public peace. But when  
 active pursuits in which we engage, rise beyond mo-  
 deration, they fill the world with great disorders; often  
 with flagrant crimes. This admonition chiefly respects  
 ambitious men of the world. I say not, that all am-  
 bition is to be condemned; or that high pursuits ought,  
 on every occasion, to be checked. Some men are form-  
 ed by nature, for rising into conspicuous stations of life.  
 Following the impulse of their minds, and properly ex-  
 ercising the talents with which God has blessed them,  
 there is room for ambition to act in a laudable sphere,  
 and to become the instrument of much public good.  
 In this may safely be pronounced, that the bulk of men  
 are ready to over-rate their own abilities, and to imagine  
 themselves equal to higher things than they were ever  
 designed for by nature. Be sober, therefore, in fixing  
 your aims, and planning your destined pursuits. Be  
 careful of being led aside from the plain path of sound and  
 moderate conduct, by those false lights which self-gatte-

ry is always ready to hang out. By aiming at a  
too high, you may fall short of what it was within your  
power to have reached. Instead of attaining to em-  
inence, you may expose yourselves to derision; nay, you  
bring upon your heads manifold disasters. *I say to every  
man that is among you, not to think of himself  
highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.\**

Whatever your aims be, there is one exercise of  
moderation which must be enjoined to those of the great  
abilities as well as to others; that is never to transgress  
the bounds of moral duty. Amidst the warmth of suc-  
cess, accustom yourselves to submit the restraints, which  
religion and virtue, which propriety and decency, which  
regard and reputation and character, impose. Think  
that there are no barriers which ought to stop your pro-  
gresses. It is from a violent and impetuous spirit that  
the evils spring, which are so often found to accompany  
ambition. Hence, in private life, the laws of truth and  
honor are violated. Hence, in public contests, the peace  
and welfare of nations have been so often sacrificed to  
the ambitious projects of the great. The man of mod-  
eration, as he is temperate in his wishes, so in his suc-  
cesses he is regulated by virtue. A good conscience  
makes him more valuable than any success. He is not so  
intent on the accomplishment of any design, as to take  
dishonorable step in order to compass it. He can bear  
patience. He can brook disappointments. He can bear  
to unmountable obstacles; and, by gentle and gradual  
progress, is more likely to succeed in the end, than  
others are, by violence and impetuosity. In his highest suc-  
cesses, he wishes not to have the appearance of a meteor,  
which fires the atmosphere; or, of a comet, which  
astonishes the public, by its blazing, eccentric course,  
rather to resemble those steady luminaries of heaven,  
which advance in their orbits, with a silent and regular  
motion. He approves himself thereby to the virtuous  
the wise, and discerning; and, by a temperate and

\* Rom. xii. 3.

ing at a m...ptionable conduct, escapes those dangers which per...  
as within y... of an oppolite description are perpetually ready to  
ing to em...ur.

ll. Be moderate in your expectations. When your  
is flourishing, and the course of events proceeds ac-  
ding to your wish, suffer not your minds to be vainly  
ed up. Flatter not yourselves with high prospects of  
ercise of... increasing favors of the world, and the continuing  
of the gre... cause of men. Say not within your hearts, *My moun-*  
to transg... *stands strong, and shall never be moved. I shall nev-*  
armth of... *the adversity. To-mor ow shall be as this day, and*  
straints, w... abundantly.—You are betraying yourselves; you  
cency, w... laying a sure foundation of disappointment and mis-  
e. Think... when you allow your fancy to soar to such lofty pin-  
top your... es of confident hope. By building your house in this  
spirit tha... region, you are preparing for yourselves a great and  
to accom... d fall. *Your trust is the spider's web. You may*  
s of truth... *on your house; but it shall not stand. You may hold*  
ests, the p... *fast; but it shall not endure.* For, to man on earth it  
sacrifice... never granted, to gratify all his hopes; or to p...  
man of m... in one tract of uninterrupted prosperity. Unpleas-  
o in his... iciffitudes never fail to succed those that were grate-  
onscience... *The fashion of the world, how gay or smiling soev-*  
s not so... *erish, and often passeth suddenly, away.*  
n, as to t... want of moderation of our hopes, we not only in-  
He can... dejection when disappointment comes, but we ac-  
He can... ate disappointment; we bring forward, with great-  
le and gr... eed, disagreeable changes in our state. For the  
nd, than... al consequence of presumptuous expectation, is  
his high... efs in conduct. He who indulges confident secu-  
ance of a... of course neglects due precautions against the dan-  
comet, v... that threaten him; and his fall will be foreseen,  
ic cour... predicted. He not only exposes himself unguarded  
es of he... ngers, but he multiplies them against himself. By  
nt and r... mption and vanity, he either provokes enmity, or  
the vic... contempt.

erats a... arogant mind, and the proud hope, are equally  
y to religion, and to prudence. The world can-  
ear such a spirit; and Providence seldom fails to

check it. The Almighty beholds with displeasure the who, intoxicated with prosperity, forget their dependence on that Supreme Power which raised them. His awful government of the world, has been in nothing more conspicuous than in bringing low the lofty looks of man, and scattering the proud in the imagination of their minds.—Is not this the great Babylon, which I have built by the might of my power, and for the honor of my Majesty? Thus exclaimed the presumptuous monarch, in the pride of his heart. But, lo! when the word was yet in his mouth, the visitation from heaven came, and the voice was heard, O, Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: thy kingdom is departed from thee.—He that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and that humbleth himself shall be exalted.† A temperate spirit, and moderate expectations, are the best safeguard of the mind in this uncertain and changing state. They enable us to pass through life with most composure. When we rise in the world, they contribute to our elevation; and if we must fall, they render our fall lighter.

IV. Moderation in our pleasures is an important exercise of the virtue which we are now considering. It is an invariable law of our present condition, that every pleasure which is pursued to excess, converts itself into poison. What was intended for the cordial and refreshment of human life, through want of moderation, turns to its bane. In all the pleasures of sense, it is apparent, that only when indulged within certain limits they confer satisfaction. No sooner do we pass the bounds which temperance has drawn, than pernicious effects come forward, and show themselves. Could I lay open to your view the monuments of death, they would make a lecture in favor of moderation, much more powerful than any that the most eloquent preacher can give. You would behold the graves peopled with the victims of intemperance. You would behold those chambers

‡ Daniel iv. 30, 31.

† Luke xiv. 11.

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darkness hung round, on every side, with the trophies of luxury, drunkenness, and sensuality. So numerous would you find those martyrs of iniquity, that it may safely be asserted, where war or pestilence have slain their thousands, intemperate pleasures has slain its ten thousands.

While the want of moderation in pleasure brings men to an untimely grave, at the same time, until they arrive there, it pursues and afflicts them with evils innumerable. To what cause, so much as to this, are young, faded youth, and premature old age; an enervated body, and an enfeebled mind; together with all that long train of diseases, which the indulgence of appetite and sense have introduced into the world? Health, cheerfulness, and vigor, are known to be the offspring of temperance. The man of moderation brings to all the natural and innocent pleasures of life, that sound, uninterrupted relish, which gives him a much fuller enjoyment of them, than the palled and vitiated appetite of the voluptuary allows him to know. He culls the flower of every allowable gratification, without dwelling upon it until the flavor be lost. He tastes the sweets of every pleasure, without pursuing it till the bitter dregs rise. Whereas the man of opposite character dips so deep, that he never fails to stir an impure and noxious sediment, which lies at the bottom of the cup—In the pleasures, which are regulated by moderation, there is always that dignity which goes along with innocence. No man needs to be ashamed of them. They are consistent with honor; with the favor of God, and of man. The sensualist, who disdains all restraint in his pleasures, is odious in the public eye. His vices become a burden both to himself and to society. Let me

port you, once more,  
 To moderation in all your passions. This exercise of the virtue is the more requisite, because there is a passion in human nature but what has, of itself, a

tendency to run into excess. For all passion implies a violent emotion of mind. Of course, it is apt to derange the regular course of our ideas; and to produce confusion within. Nothing, at the same time, is more seducing than passion. During the time when it grows and swells, it constantly justifies, to our apprehension, the tumult which it creates, by means of a thousand false arguments which it forms, and brings to our aid.—Of some passions, such as anger and resentment, the excess is so obviously dangerous, as loudly to call for moderation. He who gives himself up to the impetuosity of such passions, without restraint, is universally condemned by the world; and hardly accounted a man of sound mind. But, what is less apt to be attended to, some even of those passions which are reckoned innocent; or whose tendency to disorder and evil is not apparent, stand nevertheless, in need of moderation and restraint, as well as others. For, such is the frailty of our nature, that every passion which has for its object any worldly good, is in hazard of attaching us too strongly, and of transporting us beyond the bounds of reason. If allowed to acquire the full and unrestrained dominion of the heart, it is sufficient, in various situations, to render us miserable; and almost in every situation, by its ingrossing power, to render us negligent of duties which, as men or Christians, we are bound to perform.

Of the insidious growth of passion, therefore, we have great reason to beware. We ought always to be on our hand considerations, which may assist us in tempering its warmth, and in regaining possession of our senses. Let us be persuaded, that moments of passion are always moments of delusion; that nothing truly is, which it then seems to be; that all the opinions which we form, are erroneous; and all the judgments which we pass, are extravagant. Let moderation accustom us to wait until the fumes of passion be spent; and to resist which it has raised begin to be dissipated.

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shall then be able to see where truth and right lie; and reason shall, by degrees, resume the ascendant. On no occasion let us imagine, that strength of mind is shown by violence of passion. This is not the strength of men but the impetuosity of children. It is the strength of one who is in the delirium of a fever, or under the disease of madness. The strength of such a person is indeed increased. But it is unnatural strength; which being under no proper guidance, is directed towards objects that occasion his destruction. True strength of mind is shown in governing and resisting passion, not in giving it scope, in restraining the wild beast within; and acting on the most trying occasions, according to the dictates of conscience, and temperate reason.

Thus I have pointed out, in several instances, how moderation ought to be displayed; moderation in our wishes; moderation in our pursuits; moderation in our hopes; moderation in our pleasures; moderation in our passions. It is a principle which should habitually influence our conduct, and form the reigning temperature of the soul.

The great motive to this virtue is suggested by the words immediately following the text; *the Lord is at hand*. The Judge is coming, who is to close this temporary scene of things, and to introduce a higher state of existence. The day is at hand, which will place the great concerns of men in a point of view very different from that in which they are at present beheld; will strip the world of its false glory; will detect the vanity of earthly pursuits; and disclose objects which have the proper title to interest a rational mind. Objects acquire power to engage our passions, only in proportion as they are conceived to be great. But great, or little, are no more than terms of comparison. Those things which appear great to one who knows nothing greater, will sink into a diminutive size, when he becomes acquainted with objects of a higher nature. Were it oftener in our

thoughts, that *the Lord is at hand*, none of those things which now discompose and agitate worldly men, would appear of sufficient magnitude to raise commotion in our breasts. Enlarged views of the future destination of man, and of the place which he may hope to possess in an eternal world, naturally give birth to moderation of mind. They tend to cool all misplaced ardour about the advantages of this state; and to produce that calm and temperate frame of spirit, which becomes men and Christians. They give no ground for entire disregard of earthly concerns. While we are men, we must feel and act as such. But they afford a good reason why they who believe *the Lord to be at hand*, should let their moderation appear, and *be known unto all men*.

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### SERMON XIII.

On the Joy, and the BITTERNESS of the HEART.

PROVERBS XIV. 10.

*The bear knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.*

IT is well known, that men have always been much inclined to place their happiness in the advantages of fortune, and the distinction of rank. Hence these have been pursued by the multitude with such avidity, that every principle of honor, probity, and virtue, have been sacrificed to the attainment of them. At the same time, many circumstances might have convinced men, that supposing them to be successful in the pursuit, by no means followed, that happiness was to be the reward. For if happiness, be, in truth, essentially connect-

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ed with splendid fortune, or exalted rank, how comes it to pass, that many in the inferior stations of life, visibly spend their days with more comfort, than they who occupy the higher departments of the world? Why does the begger sing, while the King is sad? A small measure of reflection on our nature might satisfy us, that there are other principles of happiness or misery, too often overlooked by the world, which immediately affect the heart, and operate there with greater force and power, than any circumstances of rank or fortune. This is the observation of the wise man in the text; and what I now propose to illustrate. I shall take a view of the chief sources of that *bitterness which the heart knoweth*, and of that *joy with which a stranger doth not intermeddle*; and then shall point out the proper improvements to be made of the subject.

If we inquire carefully into the sources of the joy or bitterness of the heart, we shall find, that they are chiefly two; that they arise either from a man's own mind and temper; or, from the connection in which he stands with some of his fellow-creatures. In other words, the circumstances which most essentially affect every man's happiness are, his personal character, and his social feelings.

I. Every man's own mind and temper is, necessarily, to himself a source of much inward joy or bitterness. For every man, if we may be allowed the expression, is more connected with himself, than with any external object. He is constantly a companion to himself in his own thoughts; and what he meets with there, must, of all things, contribute most to his happiness or his discontent. Whatever his condition in the world be, whether high or low, if he find no cause to upbraid himself for his behavior: if he be satisfied that his conduct proceeds upon a rational plan; if, amidst the failings incident to humanity, his conscience be, in the main free from reproach, and his mind undisturbed by any dismal presages of futurity; the foundation is laid for

a placid and agreeable tenor of life. If to this you add a calm and cheerful temper, not easily fretted or disturbed, not subject to envy, nor prone to violent passion, much of that joy will be produced, which it is said in the text, *a stranger intermeddeth not with*. For this is an intrinsic joy, independent of all foreign causes. *The upright man*, as it is written, *is satisfied from himself*. Undisturbed by the vexations of folly, or the remorse of guilt, his nights will be peaceful, and his days serene. His mind is a kingdom to itself. A good conscience, and good temper, prepare, even in the midst of poverty, *a continual feast*.

But how sadly will the scene be reversed, if the first thoughts which occur to a man concerning himself, shall be of a gloomy and threatening kind; if his temper, instead of calmness and self-enjoyment, shall yield him nothing but disquiet and painful agitation? In any situation of fortune, is it possible for him to be happy, whose mind is in this troubled state? *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit, who can bear?* Vigour of mind, may enable a man to sustain many shocks of adversity. In his spirit, as long as it is sound, he can find a resource, when other auxiliaries fail. But if that which should sustain him be enfeebled and broken; if that to which he has resource for the cure of other sorrows, become itself the wounded part; to what quarter can he turn for relief?

The wounds which the spirit suffers are owing chiefly to three causes; to folly, to passion, or to guilt. They frequently originate from folly; that is, from vain, and improper pursuits, which, though not directly criminal, are unsuitable to a man's age, character, or condition, in the world. In consequence of these, he beholds himself degraded and exposed; and suffers the pains of many mortifying reflection and many a humbling comparison of himself with others. The distress occasioned by a sense of folly, is aggravated by any violent passion being allowed the possession of the heart. Even though it be of

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of those which are reckoned innocent, yet, if it have  
 entirely seized and overpowered a man, it destroys his  
 tranquillity, and brings his mind into a perturbed state.  
 If it be a passion of the black and vicious kind, it is  
 sufficient to blast the most flourishing condition, and to  
 destroy all his joys. If to those wounds inflicted by folly,  
 by passion, you add the wound of guilt, the remorse  
 and fear produced by criminal deeds, you fill up the mea-  
 sure of pain, and bitterness of heart. Often have the  
 errors of conscience occasioned inward paroxysms, or  
 violent agitations of mind. A dark and threatening  
 cloud seems, to the conscious sinner, to be hanging over  
 his head. He who believes himself despised, or hated,  
 by men, and who dreads, at the same time, an avenging  
 God, can derive little pleasure from the external com-  
 forts of life. The bitterness of his heart infuses itself  
 into every draught which pleasure offers to his lips.  
 The external misfortune of life, disappointments, pov-  
 erty, and sickness, are nothing in comparison of those  
 inward distresses of mind, occasioned by folly, by pas-  
 sion, and by guilt. They may indeed prevail in differ-  
 ent degrees, according as one or other of those princi-  
 ples is predominant. But they are seldom parted far  
 under from one another; and when, as it often hap-  
 pens, all the three are complicated, they complete the  
 misery of man. The disorders of the mind, having  
 been arisen to their height, becomes of all things the  
 most dreadful. The shame of folly, the violence of  
 passion, and the remorse of guilt, acting in conjunc-  
 tion, have too frequently driven men to the last and ab-  
 surd refuge, of seeking relief in death, from a life  
 so embittered to be any longer endured. I proceed to  
 consider.

II. Other troubles, and other joys of the heart, aris-  
 ing from sources different from those that I have now de-  
 scribed; founded in the relation or connections which we  
 have with others, and springing from the feelings which  
 we have on these occasions. Such causes of sorrow or joy are of an ex-

ternal nature. Religion does not teach, that all sources of inward pleasure or pain are derived from tempers and moral behavior. These are indeed principal springs of bitterness or joy. In one way or other, they affect all the pleasures and pains of life; they include not, within themselves, the whole of the matter. Our Creator did not intend, that the happiness of each individual should have no dependence on those who surround him. Having connected us in society by various ties, it is his decree, that these ties should prove, both during their subsistence, and in their dissolution, causes of pleasure or pain, immediately, and often deeply affecting the human heart. My doctrine, therefore, is not, that *the bitterness which the heart knoweth as its own, and the joy with which a stranger intermeddleth* is dependent on every thing external. What I assert is, that this *bitterness*, and this *joy*, depend much more on other causes, than on riches or poverty, on high or low stations in the world; that, equally in the conditions of elevated fortune, and of private life, the most material circumstances of trouble or felicity, next to the state of our own mind and temper, are the sensations and affections which arise from the connections we have with others.

In order to make this appear, let us suppose a man in any rank or condition of life, happy in his family, beloved by his friends; soothed by the cordial intercourse of kind affections, which he partakes with them; enjoying the comforts of doing them good offices, and receiving in return their sincerest gratitude; experiencing no jealousy nor envy, no disquiet or alienation of affection among those with whom he is connected; how many and how copious sources of inward joy open to such a man! how smooth is the tenor of a life that proceeds in such a course! What a smiling aspect does the love of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, of friends and relations, give to every surrounding object, and every returning day! With what a lustre does it

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 en the small habitation where such placid intercourse  
 wells; where such scenes of heartfelt satisfaction suc-  
 ed uninterruptedly to one another!  
 But let us suppose this joyful intercourse to be broken  
 in an untimely hour, by the cruel hand of the last  
 ; let us imagine the family, once so happy among  
 themselves, to behold the parent, the child, or the spouse,  
 whom their hearts were attached by the tenderest  
 , stretched on the cold bed of death; then, what bit-  
 ness does the heart know! This, in the strictest  
 ase, is its *own bitterness*; from which it is not in the  
 wer of any external circumstance whatever to afford  
 relief. Amidst those piercing griefs of the heart, all  
 ks of life are levelled; all distinctions of fortune are  
 gotten. Unavailing are the trophies of splendid woe,  
 h which riches deck the fatal couch, to give the least  
 nfort to the mourner. The prince, and the peasant,  
 n equally feel their own bitterness. Dwelling on the  
 ancholy remembrance of joys that are past and gone,  
 one forgets his poverty; the other despises the gild-  
 trappings of his state. Both, in that sad hour, are  
 y sensible, that on the favors of fortune it depends  
 to make man happy in this world.  
 ut it is not only the death of friends, which, in the  
 st of a seemingly prosperous state, is able to bring  
 ress home to the heart. From various failures in  
 r conduct when living, arises much of the inward  
 asiness we suffer. It will, in general, be found,  
 the behavior of those among whom we live in near  
 ection, is, next to personal character and temper,  
 chief source, either of the pleasures, or of the dis-  
 tudes, of every man's life. As, when their beha-  
 is cordial and satisfactory, it is of all external things  
 most soothing to the mind; so, on the other hand,  
 levity, their inattention, or occasional harshness,  
 though it proceed to no decided breach of friends-  
 yet ruffles and frets the temper. Social life, har-  
 d with those petty vexations, resembles a road which

a man is doomed daily to travel ; but finds it rugged and stony, and painful to be trod.

The case becomes much worse, if the base and criminal conduct of persons whom we have once loved dissolve all the bonds of amity, and show that our confidence has been abused. Then are opened, some of the deepest springs of bitterness in the human heart. Behold the heart of the parent, torn by the unworthy behavior and cruel ingratitude of the child, whom he has trained up with the fondest hopes ; on whom he has lavished his whole affection ; and for whose sake he has labored and toiled, through the course of a long life. Behold the endearments of the conjugal state, changed into black suspicion, and mistrust ; the affection of a spouse, or the virtuous husband, left to mourn, with a broken heart, the infidelity of the once beloved partner of their life. Behold the unsuspecting friend betrayed in the hour of danger, by the friend in whom he trusted ; or, in the midst of severe misfortune, meeting nothing but cold indifference, perhaps scorn and contempt, where he had expected to find the kindest sympathy. Are these, let me ask, uncommon scenes in the world ? Are such distresses peculiar to any rank or station ? Do they chiefly befall persons in humble station and have the great any prerogative which affords them exemption ? When the heart is sorely wounded by ingratitude or faithlessness of those on whom it had leaned with the whole weight of affection, where shall it turn for relief ? Will it find comfort in the recollection of honors and titles, or in the contemplation of surrounding treasures ? Talk not of the honors of a court. Talk not of the wealth of the east. These, in the hour of heart-bitterness, are spurned, as contemptible and perhaps cursed, as indirect causes of the present distress. The dart has made its way to the heart. There, it is fixed. The very seat of feeling is assailed ; and in proportion to the sensibility of the sufferer's heart, and the tenderness of his affections, such, unfortunately,

his degradation, God, much distress, it as flood, pageant, port. It is the wind. Thus you quarters, th his own, all pleasure th al fortune e state of excited by his joy, uch great one, that far as hu icted with et us now e practical First, L and high si he eager p times that and lower r trachery, ociety. H be atrocio ve of pow often been l had these co of ensuring o bitterness: lence to rize might gh expenc ent. But tace, that

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his degree of anguish. A good conscience, and hope in God, may indeed bring him consolation. But under such distresses of the heart, as I have described, fortune, if it as flourishing as you will, is no more than an empty pageant. It is a feeble reed, which affords no support. It is a house of straw, which is scattered before the wind.

Thus you see this doctrine meeting us from many quarters, that the heart knows a bitterness and a joy of its own, altogether distinct from the uneasiness or the pleasure that is produced by the circumstances of external fortune; arising either from personal character, and the state of a man's own mind; or from the affections excited by the relations in which he stands to others. This joy, and this bitterness, are, each of them, of so much greater consequence than any distinctions of fortune, that blessed with the former, one may be happy, as far as human happiness goes, in a cottage; and afflicted with the latter, he must be miserable in a palace. Let us now proceed to an important part of the subject, the practical improvement to which this doctrine leads. First, Let it serve to moderate our passion for riches, and high situations in the world. It is well known, that the eager pursuit of these is the chief incentive to the crimes that fill the world. Hence, among the middle and lower ranks of men, all the fraud, falsehood, and treachery, with which competition for gain infests society. Hence, in the higher stations of the world, all the atrocious crimes flowing from ambition, and the love of power, by which the peace of mankind has so often been broken, and the earth stained with blood. Had these coveted advantages and power, when obtained, ensured joy to the heart, and rendering it a stranger to bitterness, some apology might be offered for the violence to which they have given occasion. The prize might be supposed worthy of being acquired at a high expence, when so much depended on the attainment. But I have shown, I hope with satisfactory evidence, that the contrary is the truth. I say not, that the



with state and splendor, and upon whom you think the favors of Heaven so improperly lavished, may be a wretch, pining away in secret, with a thousand griefs unknown to the world. That poor man, who appears neglected and overlooked, may, in his humble station, be partaking of all the moral, and all the social joys, that exhilarate the heart; may be living cheerful, contented, and happy. Cease, then, to murmur against dispensations of Providence, which are, to us, so imperfectly known. Envy not the prosperity of sinners, judge not of the real condition of men, from what floats merely on the surface of their state. Let us rather, Thirdly, Turn our attention to those internal sources of happiness or misery, on which it hath been shown that so much depends. As far as the bitterness or joy of the heart arises from the first of those great springs which I assigned to it, our own conduct and temper, so far our happiness is placed, in some measure, in our own hands. What is amiss or disordered within, in consequence of folly, of passion, or guilt, may be rectified by due care, under the assistance of divine grace. He who thereby attains to a tranquil and composed state of heart, free from ill-humor and disgust, from violent passions, and from vexing remorse, is laying a foundation for enjoyment of himself, much surer and broader, than if he were amassing thousands to increase his estate. With regard to the other spring of joy or bitterness of heart, arising from our connections with others, here indeed, we are more dependent on things not within our power. These connections are not always of our own forming; and even when they have been formed by choice, the wisest are liable to be disappointed in their expectations. Yet here too it will be found, that the proper regulation of the heart is of the utmost importance, both for improving the joys which our situation affords, and for mitigating the griefs which our connections may render unavoidable. As far as the choice of friends or relations may depend on ourselves, let them

virtue and worth ever direct that choice, if we look for any lasting felicity from it. In all the habits and attachments of social life, after they are formed, let it be our study, to fulfil properly our own part. Let nothing be wanting on our side, to nourish that mutual harmony and affectionate friendship which, in every situation of life, as has been shown, is of so great consequence to our peace and satisfaction. It is not, indeed, in our power to preserve always alive those friends, in whom our hearts delight. It is often not in our power to prevent the ingratitude and unworthy behavior of other friends, from whom we once expected comfort. But under those afflictive incidents of life, much may be done by proper employment of the thoughts, and direction of the affections, for obtaining relief. To a purified and well regulated heart, reason and religion can bring many aids for healing its wounds, and restoring its peace; aids which, to the negligent and vicious, are wholly unknown. The greater experience we have of the vicissitudes of human life, with more weight will that precept of the wise man always come home to our remembrance. *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issue of life\**—Hence arises,

In the fourth and last place, another instruction, that is of the utmost importance to us all;—frequently to look up to Him who made the human heart; and to implore his assistance in the regulation and government of it. Known to him, are all the sources of bitterness and joy by which it is affected. On him it depends, to let them forth, or shut them up; to increase, or to diminish them, at pleasure. In a study so infinitely important to happiness, as that of the preservation of inward peace, we cannot be too earnest in beseeching aid from the great Father of Spirits, to enable us to keep our hearts free from distress and trouble. Besides the assistance which we may hope to derive from divine gra-

\* Prob. iv. 3.

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the employments of devotion themselves, form one of the most powerful means of composing, and tranquillising the heart. On various occasions, when the sources of heart-bitterness have been most overflowing, devotion has been found the only refuge of the sufferer. Devotion opens a sanctuary, to which they, whose hearts have been most deeply wounded, can always fly: within that quiet and sacred retreat, they have often found a healing balsam prepared. When grieved by men, they have derived, from the ascent of the mind towards God and celestial objects, much to sooth them at present, and much to hope for in future. Let us, therefore, neglect no mean with which religion can furnish us, for promoting the joys, and assuaging the bitterness of the heart. Amidst the frailties of our nature, the inconstancy of men, and frequent changes of human life, we shall find every assistance that can be procured, little enough, for enabling us to pass our few days with tolerable comfort and peace.

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## SERMON XIV.

ON CHARACTERS OF IMPERFECT GOODNESS.

MARK X. 12.

*Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him.*

THE characters of men which the world presents to us are infinitely diversified. In some, either the good or the bad qualities are so predominant, as strongly to mark the character, to discriminate one person as virtuous, another as a vicious man. In others, these qualities are so mixed together, as to leave the character doubtful. The light and the shade are so much blended, the colors of

virtue and vice run in such a manner into one another, that we can hardly distinguish where the one ends and the other begins; and we remain in suspense, whether to blame or to praise. While we admire those who are thoroughly good, and detest the grossly wicked, it is proper also to bestow attention on these imperfect characters, where there may be much to praise, and somewhat to blame: and where regard to the commendable part shall not hinder us from remarking what is defective or faulty. Such attention will be found the more useful, as characters of this mixed sort are, more frequently than any other, exhibited to us in the commerce of society.

It was one of this sort, which gave occasion to the incident recorded in the text. The incident seems to have been considered as remarkable, since it is recounted by three of the evangelical writers; and by them all, with nearly the same circumstances. The person to whom the history relates was a ruler; one of higher rank and station than those who usually resorted to Jesus. He was a rich man: he was a young man. His whole behavior was prepossessing and engaging. He appears to have conceived a high opinion of our Lord. He addressed him with the utmost respect; and the question which he put to him was proper and important. He knelt to him; and said, *Good Master, What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* His conduct in the world had been regular and decent. He could protest, that he had hitherto kept himself free from any gross vice; and in his dealings with others, had observed the precept of God. Our Lord, beholding him, is said to have loved him; whence we have reason to conclude, that he was not hypocritical in his professions; and that his countenance carried the expression of good dispositions, as his speech, and manners, were altogether complacent and gentle. Yet this person, amiable as he was, when his virtue was put to the test, disappointed the hopes which he had given reason to form. Attached, in all probability

to the indulgence of mankind for the sake of fulfilling his duty, he became on every encounter so great. Impressed on his mind. He alone; and he was sorrowful. Persons of this sort of us may have among those who are disturbed by that they are willing they are more than superiors in a defensive and are fond of displeasing any. He had promised toward and affixed nature, that as we see secret and majesty of power enabling them to be put to a test is unfavorable integrity. There is ground they are deficient in them and all praise of virtue cannot pronounce their character depended on

to the indulgence of ease and pleasure, he wanted fortitude of mind to part with the advantages of the world, for the sake of religion. When our Lord required him to fulfil his good intentions, by relinquishing his fortune, becoming one of his followers, and preparing himself to encounter sufferings, the sacrifice appeared to him too great. Impressions of virtue, however still remained on his mind. He was sensible of what he ought to have done; and regretted his want of courage to do it. He *was sorrowful: He was grieved: Yet he went away.*

Persons of a character somewhat resembling this, all of us may have met with; especially, among the young; among those who have been liberally educated, and polished by good society. They abhor open vice, and crimes that disturb the world. They have a respect for religion. They are willing to receive instruction for their conduct. They are modest and unassuming; respectful to their superiors in age or station; gentle in their address; inoffensive and courteous in their whole behavior. They are fond of obliging every one; unwilling to hurt or displease any. Such persons we cannot but love. We gladly promise well of them: and are disposed to forward and assist them. Yet such is the weakness of our nature, that at the bottom of this character there may be, as we see exemplified in the instance before us, some secret and material defects. That vigor of mind, that firmness of principle, may be wanting which is requisite for enabling them to act with propriety, when their virtue is put to a decisive trial. The softness of their nature is unfavorable to a steady perseverance in the course of integrity. They possess the amiable qualities; but there is ground to suspect, that in the estimable ones they are deficient. While, therefore, we by no means set them among the bad, we dare not give them the full praise of virtue. When they set out in the world, we cannot pronounce with confidence, what confirmed features their character will assume; nor how far they can be depended upon, in future life. Allow me now to

point out the dangers which such persons are most likely to incur ; and to show what is requisite for them farther to study, in order to their fulfilling the part of good men and true Christians.

I. Persons of this description are not qualified for discharging aright many duties, to which their situation in life may call them. In certain circumstances, they behave with abundance of propriety. When all is calm and smooth around them ; when nothing occurs to agitate the mind, or to disturb the tenor of placid life, none of their defects come forward. They are beloved ; and they are useful. They promote the comfort of human society ; and, by gentleness, and courtesy of manners, serve to cement men together in agreeable union. But to sail on the tranquil surface of an unruffled lake, and to steer a safe course through a troubled and stormy ocean, require different talents : alas ! human life oftener resembles the stormy ocean, than the unruffled lake. We shall not have been long embarked, without finding the resemblance to hold too closely.

Amidst the bustle of the world, amidst the open contentions, and secret enmities, which prevail in every society, mildness, and gentleness alone, are not sufficient to carry us, with honor, through the duties of our different stations ; as heads of families, citizens, subjects, magistrates, or as engaged in the pursuits of our several callings. Disturbances and trials arise, which demand vigorous exertions of all the moral powers ; of patience, vigilance, and self-denial ; of constancy and fortitude, to support us under danger and reproach, of temperance, to restrain us from being carried away by pleasure ; of a firm and determined principle, to make us despise the bribes of sin. These manly dispositions of mind are indispensably necessary to prepare one, for surmounting the discouragements of virtue ; and for struggling honorably through the hardships of life. Unless he be thus armed and fortified, whatever good intentions have been in his heart, they are likely to be frustrated in act.

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most likely, nothing that is great, can be undertaken. Nothing that  
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 is calm and peace, to severe trials of firmness and constancy. The  
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 ener refer- II. Persons of the character I have described are ill-  
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have not force to stand by the decisions of their own minds with regard to right and wrong. Like the animal which is said to assume the color of every object which it is applied, they lose all proper character of their own; and are formed by the character of those with whom they chance to associate. The mild are apt to sink into habits of indolence and sloth. The cheerful and gay, when warmed by pleasure and mirth, lose that sobriety and self-denial, which is essential to the support of virtue. Even modesty and submission, qualities so valuable in themselves, and so highly ornamental to youth, sometimes degenerate into a vicious timidity, a timidity which restrains men from doing their duty with firmness; which cannot stand the frown of the great, the reproaches of the multitude, or even the ridicule and sneer of the scorner.

Nothing can be more amiable, than a constant desire to please; and an unwillingness to offend or hurt. Yet in characters which this is a predominant feature, defects are often found. Fond always to oblige, and afraid to utter any disagreeable truth, such persons are sometimes led to dissemble. Their love of truth is sacrificed to their love of pleasing. Their speech, and their manners, assume a studied courtesy. You cannot always depend on their smile; nor, when they promise, be sure of the performance. They mean and intend well. But the good intention is temporary. Like water they yield easily to every impression; and the transient friendship contracted with one person, is effaced by the next. Undistinguished desire to oblige, often prevails in the present state of human things, a dangerous habit. They who cannot, on many occasions, give a firm and steady denial, or who cannot break off a connection which has been hastily and improperly formed, stand on the brink of many mischiefs. They will be seduced to the corrupting, ensnared by the artful, betrayed by those in whom they had placed their trust. Unsuspecting of themselves, they were flattered with the belief of having

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 Unsuspecte heaven. It is firm religious principles, acting upon  
 belief of hav nly and enlightened mind, that gives dignity to the

character, and composure to the heart, under all troubles of the world. This enables the brave and courageous man, with success to buffet the storm. While who had once sparkled in society with all the charms of gay vivacity, and had been the delight of every circle in which he was engaged, remains dispirited, overwhelmed, and annihilated in the evil day.

Such are the failings incident to persons of moderate and imperfect goodness: such the defects of a character formed merely of the amiable, without the estimable qualities of man.

It appears from this, that we must not place too much trust in the fair appearances, which a character may first exhibit. In judging of others, let us always take the best, and employ the spirit of charity and candour. But in judging of ourselves, we ought to be more severe. Let us remember him whom our Lord beheld, and let us and who yet fell short of the kingdom of heaven. Let us not forget, that something more than gentleness and modesty, than complacency of temper and affability of manners, is requisite to form a worthy man, and a Christian. To a high place in our esteem, these qualities are justly entitled. They enter essentially into every good man's character. They form some of its most favorable distinctions. But they constitute a part only, not the whole. Let us not, therefore, rest on them entirely, when we conceive an idea of what manner of persons we ought to be.

Let piety form the basis of firm and established virtue. If this be wanting, the character cannot be solid and entire. Moral virtue will always be endangered, often be overthrown, when it is separated from its best support. Confidence in God, strengthened by faith in the great Redeemer of mankind, not only, amidst the severer trials of virtue, gives constancy to the mind, but by nourishing the hopes of immortality, adds weight and elevation to the affections. They whose conduct is not animated by religious principle, are deprived of

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powerful incentive to worthy and honorable deeds. Such discipline, next, be studied, as may form the active and manly virtues. To natural good affections, we can never entirely trust our conduct. As has been shown, they may sometimes be warped, what is wrong; and often will prove insufficient, carrying us rightly through all the duties of life. Afflictions are highly valuable; but they must be supported by fixed principles, cultivated in the understanding, and rooted in the heart. Habits must be acquired of temperance and self-denial, that we may be able to resist pleasure, and endure pain, when either of them interfere with our duty; that we may be prepared to make a sacrifice of any worldly interest, when the will of God and conscience demand it. Let us always remember, that without fortitude of mind, there is no good; there can be no perseverance in virtue. Let us have a fixed and inviolable regard for truth reign in our behavior. Let us be distinguished for fidelity to every promise we have made; and for constancy in every worthy friendship we have formed. Let no weakness, complaisance, undue regard to the opinions of men, make us betray the rights of conscience. What we have once, upon due consideration, adopted as rules of conduct, to these let us adhere unshaken. However the world may change around us, let it find us the same in prosperity and adversity; faithful to God and to his commands; faithful to the convictions of our own heart. Whatever our lot in the world may be, is not ours to fore-determine. But it is ours to resolve, that whatever it shall be, it shall find us persevering in our line of duty and honor.

Such discipline, such attentions as these, we are to apply against those failings which are sometimes found in the most engaging characters. Joining in promotion the amiable and the estimable qualities, by the one we shall attract the good; and by the other, command respect from the bad. We shall both secure our

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own integrity, and shall exhibit to others a proper view of what virtue is, in its native grace and majesty. In one part of our character, we shall resemble the flower that smiles in spring; in another, the firmly rooted tree, that braves the winter storm. For, remember we must, that there is a season of winter, as well as of spring and summer, in human life; and it concerns us to be equally prepared for both.

A higher and more perfect example of such a character as I now recommend, cannot be found, than what is presented to us in the life of Jesus Christ. In him, we behold all that is gentle, united with all that is respectable. It is a remarkable expression, which the Apostle Paul employs concerning him; *I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ\**. Well might these qualities be singled out, as those for which he was known and distinguished. We see him in his whole behavior affable, courteous, and easy of access. He conversed familiarly with all who presented themselves; and despised not themeanest. With all the infirmities of his disciples he calmly bore; and his rebukes were mild, when their provocations were great. He wept over the calamities of his country, which persecuted him, and apologized and prayed for them who put him to death. Yet the same Jesus we behold, awful in the strictness of his virtue; inflexible in the cause of truth; uncomplying with prevailing manners, when he found them corrupt; setting his face boldly against the hypocritical leaders of the people; over-awed by none of their threatenings; in the most indignant terms, reproving their vices and stigmatizing their characters. We behold him gentle, without being tame; firm, without being stern; courageous without being violent. *Let this mind be in us which was also in Jesus Christ*; and we shall attain to honor, both with God and with man.

\* 2 Cor. x. i.

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## SERMON XV.

On the SACRAMENT of the LORD'S SUPPER, and PREPARATION for DEATH.

Preached at the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

MATTHEW xxvi. 29.

*But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.*

WITH these words of our blessed Lord, the Evangelist concludes his account of the institution of the sacrament of the Supper. It is an institution which, solemn and venerable in itself, is rendered still more so, by the circumstances which accompanied it. Our Lord had now, for about three years, continued to appear in his public character, in the land of Judea. He had, all along, been watched with a jealous eye, by his enemies; and the time was come, when they were to prevail against him. A few friends he had, from the beginning selected, who, in every vicissitude of his state, remained faithfully attached to him. With these friends he was now meeting for the last time, on the very evening in which he was betrayed and seized. He perfectly knew all that was to befall him. He knew that this was the last meal in which he was to join with those who had been the companions of all his labors, the confidants of all his griefs; among whom he had passed all his quiet and private moments of his life. In less than a few hours, he was to be torn from this beloved society, by a band of ruffians; and by to-morrow, he was to be publicly arraigned, as a malefactor. With

a heart melting with tenderness, he said to the twelve Apostles, as he sat down with them at table *With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer\**. And then, having gratified himself for the last time in their society, and having instituted the commemoration of his death which was to continue in the Christian church until the end of ages, he took a solemn and affectionate farewell of his friends, in the words of the text, *I say unto you, that I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my father's kingdom.*

As these words were uttered by our Lord, in the prospect of his sufferings: when preparing himself for his death, and looking forward to a future meeting with his friends in heaven; let us, under this view, consider the sacrament which he then instituted, as a preparation for all the sufferings of life, and especially, a preparation for death. It is fit and proper, that such solemn prospects should enter into the service which we are to-day to perform. We have no reason to imagine, that they will render it a gloomy service. A good and wise man is often disposed to look forward to the termination of life. The number of our days is determined by God, and certainly it will not tend to shorten their number, that we employ ourselves in preparing for death. On the contrary, while our days last, it will tend to make us pass them more comfortably, and more wisely. Let us now, then, as if for the last time we were to partake of this sacrament, consider how it may serve to prepare us for the dying hour.

I. It is a high exercise of all those dispositions and affections, in which a good man would wish to die. He would surely wish to leave this world, in the spirit of devotion towards God, and of fellowship and charity towards all his brethren on earth. Now, these are the very elements, which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper

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pires into the heart of every pious communicant. It includes the highest acts of devotion of which human nature is capable. It imports, a lively sense of the infinite mercies of Heaven; of the gratitude we owe to that God, who, by the death of his Son, hath restored the forfeited happiness and hopes of the human race. It imports, the consecration of the soul to God; the entire resignation of ourselves, and all our concerns, into his hands; as to the God whom we serve and love; the guardian in whom we confide. *To thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy. I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear, I will worship towards thy holy temple\*.*

These devout affections towards God are, on this occasion, necessarily accompanied with benevolent dispositions towards men. Our communion is not only with God, but with one another. In this solemn service, the distinction of ranks is abolished. We assemble in common before our great Lord, professing ourselves to be all members of his family, and children of the same Father. No feud, nor strife, nor enmity, is permitted to approach the sacred table. All within that hallowed space, breathes peace, and concord, and love. *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother; and then come and offer thy gift†.* What can be more becoming men and Christians, than such sentiments of piety to the great Father of the universe; gratitude to the merciful redeemer of mankind, and charity and forgiveness towards all our brethren? Is not this the temper in which a good man would wish to live? more especially, is not this the frame of mind which will give both dignity and peace to his last moments? How discomposed and embittered will these important moments

\* Psalm xliiii. 4. v. 9. † Matthew v. 23. 24.

prove, if, with a mind soured by the remembrance of unforgiven injuries, with a breast rankled with enmity with a heart alienated from God, and insensible to devotion, one be forced away from life ?

Contemplate the manner in which our blessed Lord died ; which the service of this day brings particularly into your view. You behold him, amidst the extremity of pain, calm and collected within himself ; possessing his spirit with all the serenity which sublime devotion, and exalted benevolence inspire. You hear him, first, lamenting the fate of his unhappy country ; next, when he was fastened to the cross, addressing words of consolation to his afflicted parent ; and lastly, sending up prayers, mixed with compassionate apologies for those who were shedding his blood. After all those exercises of charity, you behold him in an act of devout adoration and trust, sighing his breath ; *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*—Can any death be pronounced unhappy, how distressing soever its circumstances may be, which is thus supported and dignified ? What could we wish for more in our last moments, than with this peaceful frame of mind, this calm of all the affections, this exaltation of heart towards God, this diffusion of benevolence towards men, to bid adieu to the world ?

If, in such a spirit as this, we would all wish to die, let us think, that now is the time to prepare for it, by seasonably cultivating this spirit while we live ; by imbibing, in particular, from the holy sacrament, those dispositions and affections which we would wish to possess at our latest period. It is altogether vain to imagine, that when the hour of death approaches, we shall be able to form ourselves into the frame of mind which is then most proper and decent. Amidst the struggles of nature, and under the load of sickness or pain, it is not time for unaccustomed exertions to be made, or for new reformations to be begun. *Sufficient*—and more than sufficient—*for that day, is the evils thereof.* It will be too late to assume then the hero, or the saint, if we have been totally

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unacquainted with the character before. The sentiments we would display, and the language we would utter, will be alien and strange to us. They will be forced, and foreign to the heart. It is only in consequence of habits acquired in former and better days, that a temper of piety and charity can grow up into such strength, as to confer peace and magnanimity on the concluding hours of life. Peculiarly favorably to the acquisition of such a temper, are the devotions of this day. In this view, let us perform them; and study to be at the table of the Lord, what we would wish to be when the summons of death shall come.

II. This sacrament becomes a preparation for death, by laying a foundation for peace with God. What is important at the close of life, is not only the temper in which we leave the world, but the situation in which we stand with respect to that great Judge, before whom we are about to appear. This view of our situation is apt to escape us, during the ordinary course of life. Occupied with the affairs and concerns of this world; flattered by those illusive colors of innocence and virtue; in which self-love dresses up our character, apprehensions of guilt create little uneasiness to the multitude of men. But, on the approach of death, their ideas change. As the inquisition of the Supreme Judge draws nigh, remembered transgressions crowd upon the mind: guilt becomes strongly realised to the imagination; and alarms, before unknown, begin to arise. Hence that anxiety, in the prospect of a future invisible world, which is so often seen to attend the bed of death. Hence those various methods, which superstition has devised for quieting this anxiety; the trembling mind eagerly grasping every feeble plank on which it can lay hold; and flying for protection to the most unavailing aid. The stoutest spirits have been then known to bend; the proudest hearts, to be humbled. They who are now most thoughtless about their spiritual concerns, may, perhaps, be in this state before they die.

The dispensation of grace, discovered in the gospel, affords the only remedy against those terrors, by the promise of pardon, extended to the penitent, through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the very essence of this sacrament, to exhibit this promised grace to mankind; *My body which was broken for you; my blood shed for many, for the remission of sins.* Here, shines from above, the ray of hope. Divine justice, we are assured, is not inexorable: Divine mercy is accessible, to all who believe and repent. The participation of this sacrament, therefore, naturally imparts comfort to the worthy communicant; as it supposes, on his part, a cordial compliance with those terms, on which pardon is offered by the gospel to mankind.

I mean not to say, that the participation of this sacrament, how pious and proper soever our dispositions at the time may be, is, of itself, sufficient to ensure us of comfort at death. It were unwarrantable to flatter Christians, with hopes of this extent. No single act of the most fervent devotion can afford assured hopes of peace with Heaven, until these hopes be confirmed by the succeeding tenor of a good life. But what may safely be asserted is, that communicating in a proper manner, makes way for such hopes. It is an introduction to that state of reconciliation with God, which will give you peace in death. It is the beginning of a good course which, if duly pursued, will make your latter end blessed. It is the entrance of *the path of the just; the morning of that light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* For this holy sacrament is a professed renunciation of the vices and corruptions of the world. It is a professed dereliction of former evil habits, a solemn return, on our part, to God and virtue, under the firm trust, that God will, through Jesus Christ, show mercy to the frailties of the penitent. If you continue to support the character which you this day assume, the invincible world will no longer present to you a scene of terrors. You will be comforted with the view of goodness

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compassion, as predominant in the administration of the universe. After having finished a virtuous course, you will be able to look up to that God whom you have worshipped, and to say, *I know in whom I have trusted. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me.*

III. This sacrament prepares us for a happy death, by strengthening the connection between Christians, and Christ their Saviour. This is a connection which, in various ways, redounds to their benefit; and will be found particularly consolatory at the hour of death. The awful Majesty of Heaven is in danger of overwhelming the mind in the feeble moments of departing life. The reverence it inspires is mingled with sensations of dread, which might be too strong for us then to bear. When we look up to it, through a Mediator and Intercessor, that Majesty assumes a milder aspect, and appears to invite our approach. Whatever, therefore, forms a connection with this great Mediator, this powerful friend and patron of the human race, must be most desirable to every one, especially to the dying man. Now, this sacrament unites us closely with him. It is the oath of our allegiance. It is the act of enlisting ourselves under the banners of this divine Leader. Of course, it strengthens our faith in him, as our guide through life, and our guardian and protector in death. It gives us a title to look up to him, under the confidence of that reciprocal engagement, which fidelity on the one hand is always understood to imply, of protection on the other.

His participation of our nature conveys a degree of encouragement, which we could derive from no being altogether celestial, how gracious or benign soever. In our utmost extremity, we can have recourse to his sympathizing aid, who had experience both of the distresses of life, and of the terrors of death. We behold, in the text, with what firm tranquillity he looked forward to his approaching sufferings. Sincere attachment to our

great Master, may be expected to infuse into us some degree of the same happy composure of mind. It is owing to our losing out of view this perfect model; to our following the crowd, and adopting the common spirit of the world, that we become mean-spirited and base; servilely attached to life, and afraid to die. Did we, according to our engagements at the Lord's table, keep our eye fixed on our divine Leader, and attempt to follow his steps, a portion of his spirit would descend upon us at the hour of death. It would be as the mantle of Elijah, falling on a chosen disciple; and would enable us, as it did Elijah of old, to smite, and divide the waters. We believe our Saviour now to rule in the world of spirits. The grave, therefore, bars not his followers from access to him. In the grave, for our sake, he once lay down; that he might dispel the gloom which appears to us to cover that formidable mansion. In a short time he arose from it, in order to assure us, that the dark and narrow house was not to confine his followers for ever. By his death, he conquered death; and him that had the power of it; and his voice to us is, *Because I live, ye shall live also.* Hence, as long as we preserve that attachment to him which we this day profess, we are furnished with a variety of considerations proper for supporting us in the prospects of our dissolution. This leads me to observe,

IV. That the sacrament of which we are to partake prepares us for death, by confirming and enlivening our hope of immortality. In this sacrament, my friends, you act for both worlds. As inhabitants of the earth, you are on this day to look forward, with care, to your future behavior in it. For you are not, by any means, disengaging yourselves totally from this life, and its concerns. On the contrary, you are forming, and even strengthening, those connections, which virtue requires you to maintain with your friends, and fellow-creatures around you. At the same time, you are not to consider yourselves as citizens of this earth only; but also as citizens

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Heaven. You are to recognise, on this occasion, your transition to a higher and better country, with which you are connected by the most sacred ties ; and from which you derive those comforts and hopes, that will both vivify your life, and render your death happy. The sacrament of the supper is, in this view, an ascent of the mind above terrestrial things. At the Lord's table, we associate ourselves, in some degree, with spirits of a more exalted order. We declare, that we are tending towards their society ; and have fixed our final rest within the veil. This view of the institution, so comfortable to the last period of life, is plainly given us in the words of the text. For it is worthy of particular observation, that, as soon as our Lord had instituted this sacrament, he straightway leads the thoughts of his disciples to a state of future existence. Employing that metaphorical style, which the occasion naturally suggests, he tells them, that though he was not henceforth to drink of the fruit of the vine on earth, yet a day was coming, when he was again to drink it *with them* ; to drink it, *in my Father's Kingdom*. Two distinct ideas are, in these words, presented to us. One is, the abode into which our Saviour was to remove ; *his Father's kingdom*. The other, the society which he was there to enjoy ; *with my Father's kingdom*. These correspond to the two views, under which death is most formidable to men ; the first of which he intended to banish, by the institution of this sacrament : first, that death is a transition to a new and unknown world ; and next, that it is a final separation from all the friends whom we have loved on earth.

First, if death terminates our existence here, the abode into which it translates the faithful followers of Christ, is the Kingdom of his Father. The institution of this sacrament, dispels all the gloomy ideas of annihilation, of non-existence, of total darkness, which our imagination is apt to associate with the grave. We are here assured, that, to good men, death is not the close of being, but

a change of state; a removal from a distant and obscure province of the universe, into the city of God, the chief seat of their Father's kingdom. They have every reason to believe, that the objects which are to meet them there, how new and unknown soever, shall all be precious and friendly. For into the kingdom of his Father their Lord has declared, that he is entered as their forerunner. *I go to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.* What reasonings, that speculations, we have power to impart so much peace to the dying man as a promise so direct and explicit, coming from him who is truth itself, and cannot lie? *If it were not so, I would have told you*\*. The prospect becomes still more cheering and relieving when we conclude,

The other circumstance mentioned in the text; the society to be enjoyed in that future state of being. *When ye shall drink of the fruit of the vine in my Father's kingdom.* In how amiable a light does our Saviour here appear, looking forward to a future re-union with his beloved friends, whom he was now leaving, as to a circumstance which should increase both his own felicity and theirs, when they met again in a happier world. Thus, in the most affectionate manner, cheering the drooping and dejected spirits; and by a similar prospect, providing for the comfort of his followers in future generations, when they should be about to leave this world.

The expressions in the text plainly suggest a joyful intercourse among friends, who had been separated by death, and therefore seem to give much confirmation to what has always been a favorite hope of good men, that friends shall know and recognise each other, and renew their former connections, in a future state of

\* John xiv. 4.

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 to compensate the vanity of life, and to mitigate the  
 pangs of death? For it is not to be denied, that one  
 of the most bitter circumstances attending death, is the  
 eternal separation from beloved friends. This is apt equal-  
 to wring the hearts of the dying, and the surviving;  
 and it is an anguish of that sort, which descends most  
 deeply into the virtuous and worthy breast. When, sur-  
 rounded with an affectionate family, and weeping friends,  
 a good man is taking his last adieu of all whom he held  
 most dear on earth; with a feeble voice, he is giving  
 them his blessing, before he leaves them for ever, when,  
 for the last time, he beholds the countenance, he touches  
 their hand, he hears the voice, of the person nearest his  
 heart; who could bear this bitterness of grief, if no sup-  
 port were to be ministered by religious hope? If there  
 were no voice to whisper to our spirits, that hereafter we,  
 and those whom we love, shall meet again in a more  
 blissful land? What higher view can possibly be given,  
 of the benefit redounding from this divine institution,  
 than its affording us consolation in such situations of ex-  
 treme distress, by realising to our souls the belief of an  
 immortal state, in which all the virtuous and worthy  
 shall be re-united in the presence of their common  
 Lord?

Thus I have set before you many considerations, arising  
 from the sacrament of our Lord's supper, which render  
 it a proper preparation, not only for a good life, but  
 for a comfortable and happy death. The great im-  
 provement to be made of the subject is, to bring to the  
 ear of God such dispositions of heart, as may give us  
 ground to hope for this blessed effect. Let us approach  
 the sacrament with the same seriousness of frame, as  
 if it were the last time we were ever to partake of it;  
 as if we were making provision for a journey to that  
 land whence none return; as if we were never to drink;  
 in this manner, *of the fruit of the vine until that day*

when we drink it, with those whom we have loved, *our Father's kingdom* God only knows to whom it may be truly spoken ! God knows who of this assembly shall never have opportunity to approach again to the sacred table, and to meet with their brethren, on some other occasion, in the courts of the Lord's house ! Whether ever our doom is to be, whether we are appointed to life or for death, such is the frame of mind which nature best becomes, and will most improve us, in partaking of the holy sacrament.

Let me caution you, before I conclude, against judging of the propriety of your disposition in this solemn act of worship, solely by the warmth of your affection, and the fervor of your devotion. This state of heart, however desirable soever it may be, cannot be at all times possessed. It depends, in some measure, on natural sensibility. All are not equally endowed with warm and tender feelings. Even they who are susceptible of the highest degree of pious and virtuous sensibility, cannot, on every occasion, command that happy temperance of mind. We are not, therefore, to judge unfavorably of ourselves, if this be not always the privilege of our devotions. It is chiefly a sedate and composed frame of spirit, that we must study to cultivate ; arising from grave and sober thoughts ; from serious and patient recollection of past errors ; from good purposes for the future ; and from a deep sense of the approaching events of death and immortality. Penetrated with such dispositions, you have ground to come to the presence of God with humble trust and joy ; under the belief that you are approaching, through the great Redeemer, that merciful Creator, to whom *in the high and holy place of eternity*, the devout aspirations of his servants on earth, are ever acceptable and pleasing.

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## SERMON XVI.

On the USE and ABUSE of the WORLD.

I CORINTHIANS vii. 31.

*—They that use this world, as not abusing it.—*

THE world is always represented in Scripture as the great scene of trial to a Christian. It sets before him a variety of duties, which are incumbent on him to perform; and, at the same time, surrounds him with many dangers, against which he has to guard. The part which is proper for him to act, may be comprised in these two expressive words of the text: *using the world, and not abusing it*; the significancy and extent of which, I propose now to explain. The subject is of the higher importance, as in the world we must live; and according to the way we use, or abuse it, it will prove either our friend, or our greatest foe.

It is natural to begin with observing, that the Christian is here supposed to *use the world*; by which we must certainly understand the Apostle to mean, maintaining intercourse and connection with the world; living in it, as one of the members of human society; assuming that rank which belongs to his station. No one can be said to *use the world* who lives not thus. Hence it follows, that seclusion from the world is no part of Christian duty; and it appears strange, that even among those who approve not of monastic confinement, seclusion from the intercourse of society should have been sometimes considered, as belonging to the character of a religious man. They have been supposed to be the best servants of God, who, consecrating their time to the exercises of devotion, shun the least in the ordinary commerce of the world; and especially who abstain most rigidly from all that has the appearance of amusement. But how pious and sincere

soever the intentions of such persons may be, they certainly take not the properest method, either for improving themselves, or for advancing religion among others. For this is not using the world, but relinquishing it. Instead of making the light of a good example shine with useful splendor throughout the circle of society, they confine it within a narrow compass. According to the metaphor employed by our Saviour, after *the candle is lighted, they put it under a bushel*. Instead of recommending religion to the world, they exhibit it under the forbidding aspect of unnecessary austerity. Instead of employing their influence, to regulate and temper the pleasures of the world, by a moderate participation of those that are innocent, they deliver up all the entertainments of society, into the hands of the loose and giddy.

The various dangers which the world presents to one who is desirous of maintaining his piety and integrity, have given rise to this scrupulous caution concerning the use of the world; and so far, the principle is commendable. But we must remember, that the virtue of a Christian is to be shown, in surmounting dangers which he is called to encounter. Into the post of danger we were ordered by Providence, when we were brought into this world. We were placed as soldiers, on the field of battle. It is there, that our fidelity to our great Commander must appear. The most signal virtues which adorn and improve the human character, are displayed in active life. There, the strength of the mind is brought forth, and put to the test. There, all the amiable dispositions of the heart find their proper exercise; humanity is cultivated; patience, fortitude, and self-denial, come forward in all their forms; and the light of good men's works so shine before others, as to lead them to *glorify their Father which is in Heaven*.

It may be assumed, therefore, as a principle justified by the text, and by the whole strain of Scripture, *to use, and in a certain degree to enjoy, the world, is*

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 them a wider command of the enjoyments of the  
 rld, of those enjoyments they may freely partake,  
 h in the bounds of temperance, moderation, and de-  
 ey. The highest situations of rank and opulence,  
 ight to be distinguished by dignity of character; by  
 ensive beneficence, usefulness, and public spirit; by  
 gnificence, without ostentation; and generous hot-  
 ality, without profusion.

We shall have a clearer view of the proper use of the  
 rld, when we contrast it with that abuse of the world,  
 hich we too often observe. Those abuses manifest  
 emselves in various forms; but in general may be  
 ed under three great heads.

They are abuses of the world, who intemperately  
 e themselves up to its pleasures, and lead a life of  
 nousness, riot, and dissipation. Amidst the wealth  
 d luxury of the present age, it will be admitted, tha  
 sons of this description are not unfrequent, who, be-  
 opulent in fortune, and perhaps in high rank, think  
 emselves intitled to pass their days in a careless man-  
 , without any other object in view, than the gratifi-  
 on of their senses and passions. It shall be granted,  
 at they are not obliged to that exact economy and at-  
 tion in their manner of living, which the state of  
 ne may require of others. Gaiety shall be permit-  
 to them; change of scene, and variety of amuse-  
 ts. But let them not forget, that as men and mem-  
 of society, not to say professors of the Christian  
 , they are bound to stop short in their career of pleas-  
 as soon as it becomes disgraceful to themselves, and

hurtful to the world. By the train of life which they lead, they defeat every purpose for which Providence bestowed on them the blessings of prosperity. They fix every talent which they possess, into useless insignificance. They corrupt the public manners by example and diffuse among others the spirit of extravagance and folly. They behave in a manner altogether unsuitable to the condition of the world in which we live; which we are exposed to so much change, surrounded with much distress, and daily behold so many affecting scenes as ought to awaken serious reflection, and chasten dissolute mirth.

With indignant eyes, the sober and thinking part of mankind, view the luxury and riot of those abusers of the world. To them are owing the discontents of the poor, their dissatisfaction to their superiors, their proneness to disturb the peace of the world. When the poor behold wealth properly used, they look up with respect to those who possess it. They rest contented in their station; and bless the just and the generous, from whose munificence they receive employment and reward. But when they behold those men of pleasure, dissipating, in vice and folly, the fortune which their forefathers had honorably earned; when they behold them oppressing all their dependents, merely that they may revel in luxurious extravagance, then their hearts swell within them; with murmurs of sullen grief, they eye their own mean habitation, and needy family; and become prepared for robbery, tumult, sedition and every evil work.

The conduct of such abusers of the world, is not only pernicious to the welfare of society, and to the interest of virtue; it is equally ruinous to themselves. I shall not insist on the loss of reputation, the waste of fortune, broken health, and debilitated frame, which are the well known consequences of a life of intemperate pleasure. I shall not recount all the better and more substantial joys which they forfeit. Amidst the turbulence, riot, and the fumes of intoxication, unknown to them

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the rational entertainments of regular life; the enjoyment of the face of nature; the pleasures of knowledge, and an improved mind; the pleasures of private friendship, and domestic society, the conscious satisfaction which accompanies honorable labors, and the justly acquired esteem of those who surround them. All these they have thrown away; and in their room leave substituted, what they think more high and vivid pleasures. But of what nature are those pleasures? *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful: and the end of that mirth is heaviness\**.

At the bottom of the hearts of all men, there lies a secret sense of propriety, virtue and honor. This sense may be so far blunted, as to lose its influence in guiding men to what is right, while yet it retains its power of making them feel that they are acting wrong. Hence remorse often gnaws the heart, which affects to appear light, and gay, before the world. Among the crowd of amusements, the voluptuary may endeavor to stifle his heaviness; but through all his defences it will penetrate. A conscious sense of his own insignificance, when he sees others distinguished for acting a manly and worthy part: reflection on the time he has wasted; and the contempt he has incurred; the galling remembrance of his earlier and better days, when he gave the fair promise of accomplishments, which now are blasted, have frequently been found to sadden the festive hour. The smile of merriment may be heard; but heaviness lies at the heart. While the tabret and the viol play, a melancholy voice sounds in his ears. The wasted estate, the neglected halls, and ruined mansion of his fathers, rise in view. The angry countenances of his friends, seem to stare him in the face. A hand appears to come forth from the wall, and to write his doom.

Retreat, then, from your dishonorable courses ye who licentiousness, extravagance and vice, are abusers of the world! You are degrading, you are ruining your-

\* Prov. xiv. 13.

selves. You are grossly misemploying the gifts of God and the giver will not fail to punish. Awake to the pursuits of men of virtue and honor. Break loose from that magic circle, within which you are at present held. Reject the poisoned cup which the enchantress Pleasure holds up to your lips. Draw aside the veil which she throws over your eyes. You will then see other objects than you now behold. You will see a dark abyss opening below your feet. You will see virtue and temperance marking out the road, which conducts to true felicity. You will be enabled to discern, that the world is enjoyed to advantage, by none but such as follow those divine guides; and who consider pleasure as the seasoning, but not as the business of life.

II. The world is abused, not only by an intemperate pursuit of its pleasures, but by a sordid attachment to its gains. This respects a set of men of very different description from the former; more decent in their carriage, and less flagrant in their vices; but corrupted by the world in no less a degree. For the world is often abused by the men of business, as much as by the men of pleasure. When worldly success becomes the sole object of their life; when the accumulation of fortune so engrosses them, as to harden their heart against every feeling of moral obligation; when it renders them insensible to the calls of affection, and to the impressions of piety and religion; they then come under the class of the covetous, whom, it is said, *the Lord abhorreth* \*.

The world, with its advantages, is a lawful object of pursuit to a Christian. He may seek, by fair industry to render his circumstances affluent. Without reproach he may aim at distinction and consideration in the world. He may bestow a considerable portion of his time and attention, on the successful management of his worldly interests. All this is within the limits of that allowable use of the world, to which religion gives its sanction.

\* Psalm x. 3.

gifts of God to a wise and good man, the world is only a second-  
 ary object. He remembers there is an eternity beyond  
 His care is, not merely to amass and possess, but to  
 use his possessions well, as one who is accountable to  
 God. He is not a slave, either to the hopes, or the fears  
 of the world. He would rather forfeit any present ad-  
 vantage, than obtain it at the expense of violating the  
 divine law, or neglecting his duty. This is using the  
 world like a good man. This is living in it, as a sub-  
 ject of God, and a member of the great community of  
 mankind. To such a man, riches are a blessing. He  
 may enjoy them with magnificence; but he will use them  
 with liberality. — They open a wide field to the exercise  
 of his virtue, and allow it to shine with diffusive lustre.  
 Very opposite to this, is the character of the worldly-  
 minded. To them, the mere attainment of earthly pos-  
 sessions, is an ultimate aim. They cannot be said to *use*  
 the world—for to possess, not to use or enjoy, is their ob-  
 ject. They are emphatically said in Scripture, to *load*  
 themselves with thick clay\*. Some sort of apology may  
 be framed for them who seek to extract from the world,  
 pleasure of one kind or other. But for those who know  
 no pleasure, farther than *adding house to house, and field*  
*to field*, and calling them their own, it is hardly possible  
 to frame any apology. Such persons are idolaters of  
 the worst kind; for they have made the world their God.  
 They daily worship and bow down before it; and hold  
 nothing to be mean or base, which can promote the en-  
 largement of their fortune. He is an abuser of the  
 world, let his possession of it be ever so ample, who  
 knows nothing higher than the gains of the world. He  
 is an abuser of the world, who sacrifices probity, virtue,  
 humanity, to its interests. He is an abuser of the  
 world, who cannot occasionally retreat from it, to consi-  
 der what character he bears in the sight of God; and to  
 see what issue his conduct will bring him at last. In a word,

\* Habakkuk ii. 6.

the world is then properly used, when it is generous and beneficently enjoyed : neither hoarded up by avarice, nor squandered by ostention.

III. The world is abused, by those who employ it to their advantage to the injury or oppression of their brethren. Under this class are included, the worst and most criminal abusers of the world ; who turn against their fellow creatures, those advantages with which it has pleased Heaven to distinguish them. It is a class which comprehends, the sovereign who tyrannizes over his people ; the great man who oppresses his dependents ; the master who is cruel to his servants ; every one, in fine, who renders his superiority of any kind, whether of wealth or power, unnecessarily grievous to those who are his inferiors : Whose superciliousness defects the modest whose insolence tramples on the poor ; whose rigor makes the widow and the orphan weep. Persons of this character, while thus abusing the advantages of the world may, for a while, enjoy their triumph. But let their hour not think, their triumph is always to last. Their turn shall come, to be humbled as low as those whom they now oppress. For there is a vigilant eye in the heavens attentive to observe their procedure. There is an impartial ear, which listens to every just complaint preferred against them. There is an irresistible arm stretched over their heads, whose weight they shall one day feel. The Sovereign of the universe characterises himself in the sacred writings, as peculiarly an adversary to the insolent and haughty. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now I will arise, saith the Lord, I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him\*.* *I will come near to you in judgment ; and I will be a swift witness against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, and the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right†. He that oppresseseth the poor, reproach his Maker‡. The Lord will plead their cause ; and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them||.*

\* Psalm xii. 5.

† Malachi iii. 5.

‡ Prov. xiv. 31.

|| Prov. xxii. 23.

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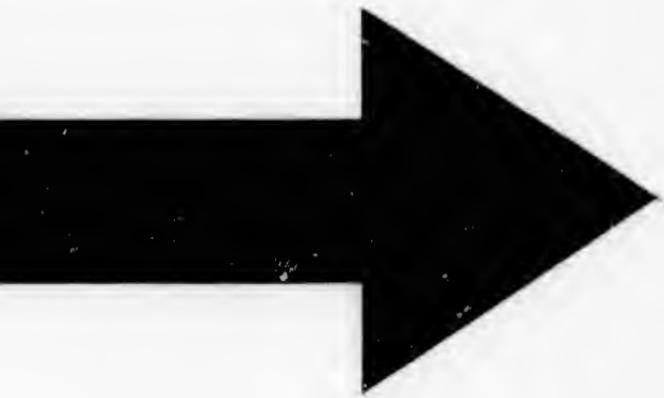
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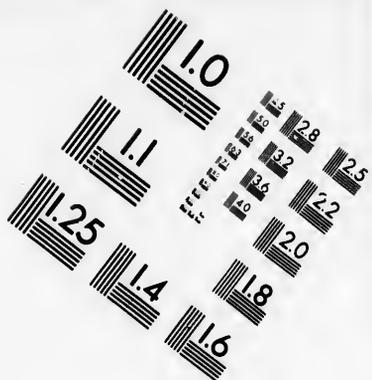
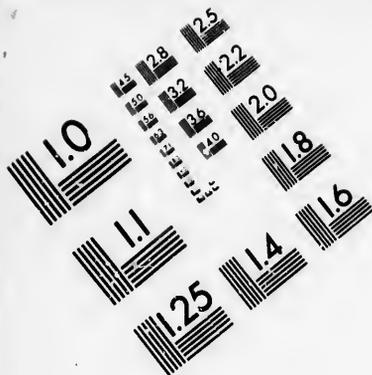
ed them.

After hearing these awful words, is it not strange, men, at once infatuated and cruel! that you cannot see the world, without abusing it, to the distress of your brethren? Even supposing no punishment to be threatened, no arm to be lifted up against you, is there nothing within you, that relents at the circumstances of those below you in the world? Is it not enough, that they suffer their own hard fate, without its being aggravated, by your severity and oppression? Why must the aged, the poor and friendless, tremble at your greatness? Cannot you be happy, unless you make them eat their scanty morsel in bitterness of heart?— You happy! profane word, what is such happiness as yours, compared with that of him who could say, *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. I was father to the poor. The blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.* How properly did such a man use the world, and with what just honor did he flourish in it! *Unto me men gave ear; they kept silence, and waited for my counsel. The princes refrained talking. The aged arose and stood up. My root was spread out by the waters; and the dew lay upon my branch.* Not only unknown to you are such pleasures of virtuous prosperity; but, even previous to prepared punishment, be assured, that remorse is approaching to wring your hearts. Of the world, which you now abuse, in a short time nothing shall remain, but the horror arising from remembered crimes. The wages you have detained, the wealth you have squeezed from the needy, shall lie heavy on your souls. The stately buildings which your pride has erected, by means of violence and oppression, shall seem haunted by injured ghosts. *The stone shall cry*

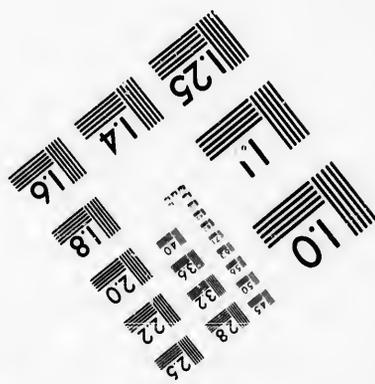
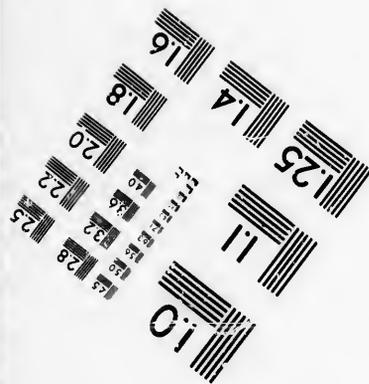
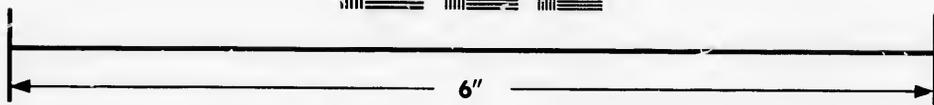
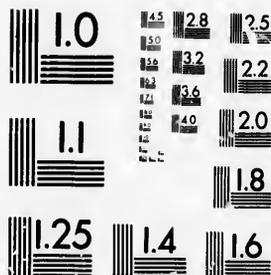
† Job xxix. 11—16.







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out of the wall; and the beam cut of the timber shall answer it\*. When you lie on the bed of death, the poor, whom you have oppressed, shall appear to you as gathered together; stretching forth their hands and lifting up their voices against you, at the tribunal of Heaven. *I have seen the wicked great in power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. But he passed away, and was not. I sought him, but he could not be found. They are brought down to desolation in a moment, and utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest thou shalt despise their image*†.

Thus I have shown what it is to *use*, and what to *abuse the world*. When, according to our different stations, we enjoy the advantages of the world with propriety, and decency; temperate in our pleasures; moderate in our pursuits of interest; mindful of our duty to God, and, at the same time, just, humane, and generous to our brethren; then, and then only, we *use the world* as become men, and Christians. Within these limits we may safely enjoy all the comforts which the world affords, and our stations allows. But if we pass beyond these boundaries, into the regions of disorderly and vicious pleasure, of debasing covetousness, or of oppressive insolence, the world will then serve only to corrupt our minds, and to accelerate our ruin. The licentious, the avaricious, and the insolent, form the three great classes of abusers of the world.

Let not those who are in wealthy and flourishing circumstances, complain of the restraints which religious doctrines attempts to impose on their enjoyments. For to what do these restraints amount? To no more than this, that, by their pleasures, they would neither injure themselves, nor injure others. We call not on the young to relinquish their gaiety; nor on the rich, to forego their opulence; nor on the great, to lay aside their state. We

\* Habak. ii. 17. † Psalm lxxvii, 35. lxxii. 19.

ly call on them, not to convert gaiety into licentiousness; not to employ opulence in mere extravagance; nor to abuse greatness for the oppression of their inferiors: While they enjoy the world, not to forget that they are subjects of God, and are soon to pass into another state. Let the motive by which the Apostle enforces the exhortation in the text, present itself to their thought; *Use the world as not abusing it; for the fashion of the world passeth away.* Its pomp and its pleasures, its riches, magnificence, and glory, are no more than transient show. Every thing that we here enjoy, changes, decays, and comes to an end. All floats on the surface of a river, which, with swift current, is running towards a boundless ocean. Beyond this present scene of things, above these sublunary regions, we are to look for what is permanent and stable. The world passes away; but God, and Heaven, and virtue, continue unchangeably the same. We are soon to enter into eternal habitations: and into these, our works shall follow us. The consequences shall ever remain of the part which we have acted as good, or bad men; as faithful subjects of God, or as servants of a vain world.

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## SERMON XVII.

ON EXTREMES IN RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CONDUCT.

PROVERBS IV. 37.

*Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left.*

*I WILL behave myself wisely,* said the Psalmist David, *in a perfect way\*.* Wisdom is no less necessary in religious, and moral, than in civil conduct. Unless there

\* Psalm cii. 2;

be a proper degree of light in the understanding, it will not be enough, that there are good dispositions in the heart. Without regular guidance, they will often depart from the right scope. They will be always wavering and unsteady; nay, on some occasions, they may betray us into evil. This is too much verified by that propensity to run into extremes, which so often appears in the behavior of men. How many have originally set out with good principles, and intentions, who through want of discretion in the application of their principles, have in the end injured themselves, and brought discredit to religion? There is a certain temperate mean, in the observance of which piety and virtue consist. On each side there lies a dangerous extreme. Bewildering paths are open; by deviating into which, men are apt to forfeit all the praise of their good intentions; and to finish with reproach, what they had begun with honor. This is the ground of the wise man's exhortation in the text.

*Thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.* In discoursing from these words, I purpose to point out some of the extremes into which men are apt to run in religion and morality, and to suggest directions for guarding against them.

With regard to religious principles in general, it may perhaps be expected, that I should warn you of the danger of being, on one hand, too rigid in adhering to them, and, on the other hand, too easy in relaxing it. But to make a distinction between these supposed extremes, I conceive to have no foundation. No man can be too strict in his adherence to a principle of duty. Here, there is no extreme. All relaxation of principle, is criminal. What conscience dictates, is to be ever obeyed. Its commands are universally sacred. Even though it should be mislead, yet, as long as we conceive it to utter the voice of God, in disobeying it we sin. The error, therefore, to be here avoided is, not too scrupulous or tenacious

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regard to conscience, but too little care to have consci-  
 ence properly enlightened, with respect to what is mat-  
 er of duty and of sin. Receive not without examina-  
 on, whatever human tradition has consecrated as sa-  
 red. Recur, on every occasion, to these great fountains  
 of light and knowledge, which are opened to you in the  
 pure word of God. Distinguish, with care, between the  
 superstitious fancies of men, and the everlasting com-  
 mandments of God. Exhaust not on trifles that zeal,  
 which ought to be reserved for the weightier matters of  
 the law. Overload not conscience, with what is frivo-  
 us and unnecessary. But when you have once drawn  
 the line, with intelligence and precision, between duty  
 and sin, that line you ought on no occasion to transgress.  
 Though there is no extreme in the reverence due to  
 conscience, there may undoubtedly be an extreme, in  
 laying too much stress, either on mere principle, or on  
 mere practice. Here we must take particular care, not  
 to turn to the right hand, nor to the left; but to hold  
 both with and a good conscience united, as the Scripture, with  
 great propriety exhort us\*. The error of resting wholly  
 on faith, or wholly on works is one of those seductions,  
 which most easily mislead men; under the semblance of  
 piety on the one hand, and of virtue on the other. This  
 is not an error peculiar to our times. It has obtained in  
 every age of the Christian church. It has run through  
 all the different modes of false religion. It forms the  
 chief distinction of all the various sects which have di-  
 vided, and which still continue to divide the church; ac-  
 cording as they have leaned most to the side of belief,  
 or to the side of morality.

Did we listen candidly to the voice of Scripture, it  
 would guard us against either extreme. The Apostle  
 Paul every where testifies, that by no works of our own  
 we can be justified; and that, *without faith it is impos-  
 sible to please God.* The Apostle James as clearly show

\* 1 Tim. i. 19.

that faith, if it be unproductive of good works, justifies no man. Between those sentiments, there is no opposition. Faith, without works, is nugatory and insignificant. It is a foundation, without any superstructure raised upon it. It is a fountain which sends forth no stream; a tree, which neither bears fruit, nor affords shade. Good works, again, without good principles, are a fair, but airy structure; without firmness or stability. They resemble the house built on the sand; the reed, which shakes with every wind. You must join the two in full union, if you would exhibit the character of a real Christian. He who sets faith in opposition to morals, or morals in opposition to faith, is equally an enemy to the interests of religion. He holds up to view an imperfect and disfigured form in the room of what ought to command respect from all beholders. By leaning to one extreme, he is in danger of falling into vice by the other, of running into impiety.

Whatever the belief of men be, they generally prize themselves in the possession of some good moral quality. The sense of duty is deeply rooted in the human heart. Without some pretence to virtue, there is no self-esteem, and no man wishes to appear in his own view, as entirely worthless. But as there is a constant strife between the lower and higher parts of our nature, between inclination and principle, this produces much contradiction and inconsistency in conduct. Hence arise most of the extremes into which men run in their moral behavior; relying their whole worth on that good quality, to which by constitution or temper, they are most inclined.

One of the first and most common of these extremes is, that of placing all virtue, either in justice on the one hand; or in generosity, on the other. The opposition between these, is most discernable among two different classes of men in society. They who have earned their fortune by a laborious and industrious life, are obstinate and tenacious of what they have painfully acquired. To justice, they consider themselves as obliged; but to generosity,

works, justice and it in acts of kindness, they consider as superfluous and extravagant. They will not take any advantage of others, which conscience tells them is iniquitous; but neither will they make any allowance for their necessities and wants. They contend, with rigorous exactness, for that is due to themselves. They are satisfied, if no man suffer unjustly by them. That no one is benefited by them gives them little concern.—Another set of men place their whole merit in generosity and mercy; while to justice and integrity they pay small regard. These persons generally of higher rank, and of easy fortune, to them, justice appears a sort of vulgar virtue, requisite chiefly in the petty-transactions, which those of inferior station carry on with one another. But humanity and liberality, they consider as more refined virtues, which dignify their character, and cover all their failings. They can relent at representations of distress; can bestow with ostentatious generosity; can even occasionally spare their wealth with a companion with whom they are fond; while, at the same time, they withhold from others what is due to them; are negligent of their family and their relations; and to the just demands of their creditors give no attention.

Both these classes of men run to a faulty extreme. They divide moral virtue between them. Each takes that part of it only, which suits his temper. Without justice, there is no virtue. But without humanity and mercy, no virtuous character is complete. The one man leans to the extreme of parsimony. The other, to that of profusion. The temper of the one is unfeeling. The sensibility of the other is thoughtless. The one you may in some degree respect; but you cannot love. The other may be loved; but cannot be respected: and it is difficult to say, which character is most defective. We undoubtedly begin with being just, before we attempt to be generous. At the same time, he who goes no farther than bare justice, stops at the beginning of virtue. We are commanded to *do justly*; but to *love mercy*.

The one virtue, regulates our actions. The other, improves our heart and affections. Each is equally necessary to the happiness of the world. Justice is the pillar that upholds the whole fabric of human society. Mercy as the genial ray, which cheers and warms the habitation of men. The perfection of our social character consists in properly tempering the two with one another; in holding that middle course, which admits of our being just, without being rigid; and allows us to be generous without being unjust.

We must next guard against either too great severity or too great facility of manners. These are extremes of which we every day behold instances in the world. He who leans to the side of severity, is harsh in his censures, and narrow in his opinions. He cannot condescend to others in things indifferent. He has no allowance to make for human frailty; or for the difference of age, rank, or temper, among mankind. With him, all gaiety is sinful levity; and every amusement is a crime. To this extreme, the admonition of Solomon may be understood to belong; *Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise. Why shouldst thou destroy thyself\**! When this severity of manners is hypocritical, and assumed as a cloak to secret indulgence, it is one of the worst prostitutions of religion. But I now consider it not as the effect of design, but of natural austerity of temper, and of contracted maxims of conduct. Its influence upon the person himself, is to render him gloomy and sour; upon others, to alienate them both from his society, and his counsels; upon religion, to set it forth as a morose and forbidding principle. The opposite extreme to this is, perhaps still more dangerous; that of too great facility, and accommodation to the ways of others. The man of this character, partly from indolent weakness, and partly from softness of temper, is disposed to a tame and universal assent. Averse either to contradict or to

\* Eccl. vii. 16.

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same, he goes along with the manners that prevail. He  
 views every character with indulgent eyes; and with  
 good dispositions in his breast, and a natural reluctance,  
 to profligacy and vice, he is inticed to the commission of  
 evils which he condemns, merely through want of forti-  
 tude to oppose others.

Nothing, it must be confess'd, in moral conduct, is  
 more difficult, than to avoid turning here, either to the  
 right hand or to the left. One of the greatest trials both  
 of wisdom and virtue is, to preserve a just medium, be-  
 tween that harshness of austerity, which disgusts and  
 alienates mankind; and that weakness of good-nature,  
 which opens the door to sinful excess. The one sepa-  
 rates us too much from the world. The other connects  
 us too closely with it; and seduces us to *follow the mul-  
 titude in doing evil*. One who is of the former charac-  
 ter, studies too little to be agreeable, in order to  
 render himself useful. He who is of the latter, by  
 studying too much to be agreeable forfeits his inno-  
 cence. If the one hurt religion, by cloathing it in the  
 garb of unnecessary strictness; the other, by unwarrant-  
 able compliance, strengthens the power of corruption in  
 the world. The one borders on the character of the  
 Pharisee; the other, on that of the Sadducee. True  
 religion enjoins us to stand at an equal distance from both  
 and to pursue the difficult, but honorable aim, of uniting  
 good-nature with fixed religious principle; affable man-  
 ners, with untainted virtue.

Farther; we run to one extreme, when we contemn  
 together the opinions of mankind; to another, when  
 we court their praise too eagerly. The former discovers  
 a high degree of pride and self-conceit. The latter be-  
 trays servility of spirit. We are formed by nature and  
 providence, to be connected with one another. No  
 man can stand entirely alone, and independent of all his  
 fellow creatures. A reasonable regard, therefore, for  
 their esteem and good opinion, is a commendable princi-  
 ple. It flows from humanity; and coincides with the

desire of being mutually useful. But, if that regard be carried too far, it becomes the source of much corruption. For in the present state of mankind, the praise of the world, often interferences with our acting that steady and conscientious part, which gains the approbation of God. Hence arises the difficulty of drawing a proper line, between the allowable regard for reputation, and the excessive desire of praise. On the one side, and on the other, dangers meet us; and either extreme will be pernicious to virtue.

He who extinguishes all regard to the sentiments of mankind, suppresses one incentive to honorable deeds. He may, he removes one of the strongest checks on vice. For where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach and shame; and when this sense is destroyed, the way is paved to open profligacy. On the other hand, he who is actuated solely by the love of human praise, incroaches on the higher respect which he owes to conscience, and to God. Hence, virtue is often counterfeited; and many splendid appearance has been exhibited to the world, which had no basis in real principle, or inward affection. Hence, religious truths have been disguised, or unfairly represented, in order to be suited to popular taste. Hence the scribes and Pharisees rejected our blessed Lord, *because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*—Turn, therefore, neither to the right hand, nor to the left. Affect not to despise what the world thinks of your conduct and character; and yet, let not the sentiments of the world entirely rule you. Let a desire of esteem be one motive of your conduct; but let it hold a subordinate place. Measure the regard that is due to the opinions of men, by the degree in which these coincide with the law of God.

Allow me next to suggest, the danger of running to the extreme of anxiety about worldly interests on the one hand, and of negligence on the other. It is hard to say which of these extremes is fraught with most vice, and most misery. Industry and diligence are unquestionable duties, strictly enforced on all Christians; and, he who

in making, suitable provision for his household and family, is pronounced to be worse than an infidel. But there are bounds, within which our concern for worldly success must be confined. For anxiety is the certain poison of human life. It debases the mind; and sharpens all the passions. It involves men in perpetual distractions and tormenting cares; and leads them aside from what ought to be the great scope of human action. Anxiety, in general, the effect of a covetous temper. Negligence is commonly, the offspring of licentiousness, and always, the parent of universal disorder. By anxiety, you render yourselves miserable. By negligence, you too often occasion the ruin of others. The anxious man is the votary of riches; the negligent man, the votary of pleasure. Each offers his mistaken worship, at the shrine of a false deity; and each shall reap only such rewards as an idol can bestow; the one sacrificing the enjoyment and improvement of the present, to vain cares about futurity; the other, so totally taken up in enjoying the present, as to store the future with certain miseries.— True virtue holds a temperate course between these extremes; neither careless of to-morrow, nor taking too much thought for it; diligent, but not anxious; prudent, but not covetous; attentive to provide comfortable accomodation on earth, but chiefly concerned to lay up treasures in heaven.

I shall only warn you further against the extreme, of engaging in a course of life too busy and hurried, or of devoting yourselves to one too retired and unemployed. We are formed for a mixture of action and retreat. Our connections with society, and the performance of the duties which we owe to one another, necessarily engage us in active life. What we owe to ourselves, requires occasional retirement. For he who lives always in the bustle of the world, cannot, it is to be feared, always preserve his virtue pure. Sentiments of piety will be deprived of that nourishment and support, which they would derive from meditation and devotion. His temper will be often ruffled and disturbed. His pas-

sions will be kept too much on the stretch. From the contagious manners which every where abound, he will not be able to avoid contracting some dangerous infection. On the other hand, he who flies to total retreat in order either to enjoy ease, or to escape from the temptations of the world, will often find disquiet meeting him in solitude, and the worst temptations arising from within himself. Unoccupied by active and honorable pursuits; unable to devote his whole time to improving thoughts, many an evil passion will start up, and occupy the vacant hour. Sullenness and gloom will be in danger of overwhelming him. Peevish displeasure and suspicions of mankind, are apt to persecute those who withdraw themselves altogether from the haunts of men. Steer therefore a middle course, between a life oppressed with business on the one hand; and burdened for the burden is no less, with idleness on the other. Provide for yourselves matter of fair and honest pursuit to afford a proper object to the active powers of the mind. Temper business with serious meditation; and enliven retreat by returns of action and industry.

Thus I have pointed out some of those extremes into which men are apt to run, by forsaking the line which religion and wisdom have drawn. Many more, I am sensible, might be suggested; for the field is wide, and hardly is there any appearance of piety, virtue, or good conduct, but what the folly of men is apt to push into undue excess, on one or the other side. What I have mentioned, will be sufficient, to show the necessity of prudent circumspection, in order to escape the dangers which beset us in this state of trial. Let us study to attain a regular, uniform, consistent character; where nothing that is excessive or disproportioned shall come forward to view; which shall not plume itself with a fair show on one side only, while in other quarters it remains unadorned, and blemished; but, where the different parts of worth and goodness shall appear united, and each shall exert its proper influence on conduct. The

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ing neither to the right hand, nor to the left, we shall, as far as our frailty permits approach to the perfection of the human character; and shall have reason to be ashamed when we have equal respect to all God's commandments.

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## SERMON XVIII.

### ON SCOFFING AT RELIGION.

2 PETER iii. 3.

*—There shall come in the last days Scoffers.—*

AS the Christian religion is adverse to the inclinations and passions of the corrupted part of mankind, it has in its fate, in every age, to encounter the opposition of various foes. Sometimes, it has undergone the storms of violence and persecution. Sometimes, it has been attacked by the arms of false reasoning, and sophistry. When these have failed of success, it has at other times been exposed to the scoffs of the petulant. Men of light and frivolous minds, who had no comprehension of the weight and importance of religion, have taken upon them to treat religion with contempt, as if it were of no consequence to the world. They have affected to represent the whole of that venerable fabric, which has so long commanded the respect of mankind; which, for ages, the learned have supported, and the wise have admired, as having no better foundation than the gloomy imaginations of fanatics and visionaries. Of this character were those *scoffers*, predicted by the Apostle to arise.

in the last days; a prediction which we have seen to be often fulfilled. As the false colors which such men throw on religion, are apt to impose on the weak and weary, let us now examine, whether religion affords any just grounds for the contempt or ridicule of the scoffer. They must be either the doctrines, or the precepts of religion, which he endeavors to hold forth to contempt.

The doctrines of the Christian religion are rational and pure. All that it has revealed concerning the perfections of God, his moral government and laws, the destination of man, and the rewards of punishments of the future state, is perfectly consonant to the most enlightened reason. In some articles which transcend the limits of our present faculties, as in what relates to the essence of the Godhead, the fallen state of mankind, and their redemption by Jesus Christ its doctrines may appear mysterious and dark. Against these, the scoffer has often directed his attacks; as if whatever could not be explained by us, ought upon that account to be exploded as absurd.

It is unnecessary to enter, at present, on any particular defence of these doctrines, as there is one observation which, if duly weighed, is sufficient to silence the cavils of the scoffer. Is he not compelled to admit, that the whole system of nature around him is full of mystery? What reason, then, had he to suppose, that the doctrine of revelation, proceeding from the same Author, would contain no mysterious obscurity? All that is requisite for the conduct of life, both in nature and in religion, divine wisdom has rendered obvious to all. As nature has afforded us sufficient information concerning what is necessary for our food, our accommodation, and our safety, so religion has plainly instructed us in our duty towards God, and our neighbor. But as soon as we attempt to rise towards objects that lie beyond our immediate sphere of action, our curiosity is checked; and darkness meets us on every side. What the essence is of those meteoric bodies which we see and handle; how a seed grows up

See this and the masterly Revealed

have seen to a tree; how man is formed in the womb; or how  
 which such me the mind acts upon the body, after it is formed; are  
 the weak and un mysteries of which we can give no more account, than of  
 ion affords an the most obscure and difficult parts of revelation. We  
 of the scoffer are obliged to admit the existence of the fact, though  
 ne precepts the explanation of it exceeds our faculties.

After the same manner, in natural religion, questions  
 ion are ration rise concerning the creation of the world from nothing,  
 on concerning the origin of evil under the government of a perfect be-  
 d laws, the ac ing, and the consistency of human liberty with divine  
 arishments of prescience, which are of a intricate a nature, and of a  
 ne most enlig difficult solution, as any questions in Christian theology.  
 anscend the We may plainly see, that we are not admitted into the  
 relates to the secrets of Providence, any more than into the mysteries  
 f mankind, an of the Godhead. In all his ways, the Almighty is a God  
 nes may appe that hideth himself. He maketh darkness his pavilion.  
 scoffer has o He holdeth back the face of his throne; and spreadeth  
 ould not be e a thick cloud upon it.—Instead of its being any objection  
 be exploded revelation, that some of its doctrines are mysterious,

would be much more strange and unaccountable, if no  
 any particul such doctrines were found in it. Had every thing in  
 ne observation the Christian system been perfectly level to our capacities,  
 nce the cavil his might rather have given ground to a suspicion, of its  
 dmit, that it ot proceeding from God; since it would have been  
 ll of mystery en so unlike to what we find, both in the system of the  
 the doctrine iverse, and in the system of natural religion. Where-  
 Author, we according as matters now stand, the gospel has the  
 that is requ me features, the same general character, with the other  
 nd in religio wo, which are acknowledged to be of divine origin;  
 l. As natu ain and comprehensible, in what relates to practice;  
 rning what ark and mysterious, in what relates to speculation and  
 nd our safety lief\*. The cavils of the scoffer, therefore, on this head  
 duty toward e so far from having any just foundation, that they  
 ve attempt ly discover his ignorance, and the narrowness of his  
 mediate spher ews:

\* See this argument fully pursued, and placed in a strong light  
 the masterly hand of Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy of Natural  
 and Revealed Religion.*

Let us next proceed to what relates to practice, or preceptive part of religion.—The duties which religion enjoins us to perform towards God, are those which have oftentimes furnished matter to the scoffs of the licentious. They attempt to represent these as so idle and superfluous, that they could owe their birth to nothing but enthusiasm.—For, is not the Deity so far exalted above us, as to receive neither advantage nor pleasure from our worship? What are our prayers, or our praise to that infinite mind, who, resting in the full enjoyment of his own beatitude, beholds all his creatures passing before him, only as the insects of a day? What but superstitious terrors, could have dictated those forms of homage, and those distinctions of sacred days, in which vulgar minds delight, but which the liberal and enlarged look upon with scorn?

Now, in return to such insults of the scoffer, it might be sufficient to observe, that the united sentiments of mankind in every age and nation, are against him. Thoughtless as the bulk of men are, and attached only to objects which they see around them; this principle has never been extinguished in their breasts, that to the great Parent of the human race, the universal, though invisible benefactor of the world, not only internal reverence, but external homage is due. Whether he need that homage or not, is not the question. It is what, on our part, we undoubtedly owe; and the heart is with reason, held to be base, which stifles the emotions of gratitude to a benefactor, how independent soever he may be of any return. True virtue, always prompts a public declaration of the greatful sentiments which it feels; and glories in expressing them. Accordingly, over, all the earth, crowds of worshippers have assembled to adore in various forms the ruler of the world. In these adorations, the philosopher, the savage, and the saint, have equally joined. None but the cold and unfeeling can look up to that beneficent Being, who is at the head of the universe, without some inclination to pray, or to praise. In

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Therefore, would the scoffer deride, what the loud voice of nature demands and justifies. He erects himself against the general and declared sense of the human race. But apart from this consideration, I must call on him to attend to one of a still more serious and awful nature. By his licentious ridicule of the duties of piety, and of the institutions of divine worship, he is weakening the power of conscience over men; he is undermining the great pillars of society; he is giving a mortal blow to public order, and public happiness. All these rest on nothing so much, as on the general belief of an all-seeing witness, and the general veneration of an Almighty Governor. On this belief, and this veneration, is founded the whole obligation of an oath; without which, government could not be administered, nor courts of justice act; controversies could not be determined, nor private property be preserved safe. Our only security against innumerable crimes, to which the restraints of human laws cannot reach, is the dread of an invisible avenger, and of those future punishments which he hath prepared for the guilty. Remove this dread from the minds of men; and you strengthen the hands of the wicked, and endanger the safety of human society.

But how could impressions so necessary to the public welfare be preserved, if there were no religious assemblies, no sacred institutions, no days set apart for divine worship, in order to be solemn remembrancers to men, of the existence and the dominion of God, and of the future account they have to give of their actions to him? To all ranks of men, the sentiments which public religion tends to awaken, are salutary and beneficial. But with respect to the inferior classes, it is well known, that the only principles which restrain them from evil, are required in the religious assemblies which they frequent. Destitute of the advantages of regular education; ignorant, in a great measure, of public laws; unacquainted with those refined ideas of honor and pro-

quity, to which others of more knowledge have been  
 ruined; were those sacred temples deserted, to which  
 they now resort, they would be in danger of degenerat-  
 ing into a ferocious race, from whom lawless violence  
 was perpetually to be dreaded.

He, therefore, who treats sacred things with any de-  
 gree of levity and scorn, is acting the part, perhaps  
 without his seeing or knowing it, of a public enemy to  
 society. He is precisely the *madman* described in the  
 book of Proverbs, \* *who catcheth firebrands, arrows, and*  
*death; and saith am I not in sport?* We shall hear  
 him, at times, complain loudly of the undutifulness of  
 children, of the dishonesty of servants, of the tumults  
 and insolence of the lower ranks; while he himself is,  
 in a great measure, responsible for the disorders of which  
 he complains. By the example which he sets, of con-  
 tempt for religion, he becomes accessory to the manifold  
 crimes, which that contempt occasions among others.  
 By his scoffing at sacred institutions, he is encouraging  
 the rabble to uproar and violence; he is emboldening the  
 false witnesses to take the name of God in vain; he is,  
 in effect, putting arms into the hands of the highwayman,  
 and letting loose the robber on the streets by night.

We come next to consider that great class of duties,  
 which respect our conduct towards our fellow-creatures.  
 The absolute necessity of these to general welfare is so  
 apparent, as to have secured them, in a great degree,  
 from the attacks of the scoffer. He who should attempt  
 to turn justice, truth, or honesty, into ridicule, would be  
 avoided by every one. To those who had any remains  
 of principle, he would be odious. To those who attend-  
 ed only to their interest, he would appear a dangerous  
 man. But though the social virtues are treated in gene-  
 ral as respectable and sacred, there are certain forms and  
 degrees of them, which have not been exempted from  
 the scorn of the unthinking. That extensive generosity,

\* Prov. xxvi. 12,

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and high public spirit, which prompt a man to sacrifice his own interest, in order to promote some great general good; and that strict and scrupulous integrity, which will not allow one, on any occasion, to depart from the truth; have often been treated with contempt by those who are called men of the world. They who will not stoop to flatter the great; who disdain to comply with prevailing manners, when they judge them to be evil; who refuse to take the smallest advantage of others, in order to procure the greatest benefit for themselves; are represented as persons of romantic character, and visionary notions, unacquainted with the world, and unfit to live in it.

Such persons are so far from being liable to any just ridicule, that they are intitled to a degree of respect, which approaches to veneration. For they are, in truth, the great supporters and guardians of public order. The authority of their character over-awes the giddy multitude. The weight of their example retards the progress of corruption; checks that relaxation of morals, which is always too apt to gain ground insensibly, and to make encroachments on every department of society. Accordingly, it is this high generosity of spirit, this inflexible virtue, this regard to principle, superior to all opinion, which has ever marked the characters of those who have eminently distinguished themselves in public life; who have patronised the cause of justice against powerful oppressors; who in critical times, have supported the falling rights and liberties of men; and have reflected honor on their nation and country. Such persons may have been scoffed at by some among whom they lived; but posterity has done them ample justice; and they are the persons, whose names are recorded to future ages, and who are thought and spoken of with admiration.

The mere temporizer, the man of accomodation principles, and inferior virtue, may support a plausible character for a while among his friends and followers; but

as soon as the hollowness of his principles is detected, he sinks into contempt. They who are prone to deride men of inflexible integrity, only betray the littleness of their minds. They show that they understand not the sublime of virtue; that they have no discernment of the true excellence of man. By affecting to throw any discouragements on purity and strictness of morals, they not only expose themselves to just contempt, but propagate sentiments very dangerous to society. For, if we lose in the regard due to virtue in any of its parts, we begin to sap the whole of it. No man, as it has been often said, becomes entirely profligate at once. He deviates, step by step, from conscience. If the loose casuistry of the scoffer were to prevail, open dishonesty, falsehood, and treachery, would speedily grow out of those complying principles, those relaxations of virtue, which he would represent to be necessary for every man who knows the world.

The last class of virtues I am to mention, are those which are of a personal nature, and which respect the government to be exercised over our pleasures and passions. Here, the scoffer has always considered himself as having an ample field. Often, and often, have such virtues as sobriety, temperance, modesty, and chastity, been made the subject of ridicule, as monkish habits, which exclude men from the company of the fashionable and the gay; habits, which are the effect of low education, or of mean spirits, or of mere feebleness of constitution; while scoffers, walking, as it is too truly said of them by the Apostle, after their lusts, boast of their own manners as liberal and free, as manly and spirited. They fancy themselves raised thereby much above the crowd; and hold all those in contempt, who confine themselves within the vulgar bounds of regular and orderly life.

Infatuated men! who see not that the virtues of which they make sport, not only derive their authority from the laws of God, but are moreover essentially re-

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quisite both to public and private happiness. By the indulgence of their licentious pleasures for a while, as long as youth and vigor remain, a few passing gratifications may be obtained. But what are the consequences? Suppose any individual to persevere unrestrained in this course, it is certainly to be followed by disrepute in his character, and disorder in his affairs; by a wasted and broken constitution; and a speedy and miserable old age. Suppose a society to be wholly formed of such persons as the scoffers applaud; suppose it to be filled with none but those whom they call the sons of pleasure; that is, with the intemperate, the riotous, and dissolute, among whom all regard to sobriety, decency, and private virtue, was abolished; what an odious scene would such a society exhibit? How unlike any civilised or well-ordered state, in which mankind have chosen to dwell? What turbulence and uproar, what contests and quarrels, would perpetually reign in it? What man of common understanding would not rather chuse to dwell in a desert, than to be associated for life with such companions? Shall, then, the scoffer presume to make light of those virtues, without which there could be neither peace nor comfort, nor good order, among mankind? Let him be desired to think, of his domestic situation and connections. Is he a father, a husband, or a brother? Has he any friend or relation, male or female, in whose happiness he is interested?—Let us put the question to him, whether he be willing that intemperance, unchastity, or dissipation of any kind, should mark their character? Would he recommend to them such excesses? Would he chuse, in their presence, openly, and without disguise, to scoff at the opposite virtues, as of no consequence to their welfare?—If even he most licentious shudders at the thought; if, in the midst of his loose pleasures, he be desirous that his own family should remain untainted; let this teach him the value of those private virtues, which, in the hours of dissipation, in the giddiness of his mind, he is ready to condemn. Banish sobriety, temperance, and purity,

and you tear up the foundations of all public order, and all domestic quiet. You render every house a divided and miserable abode, resounding with terms of shame, and mutual reproaches of infamy. You leave nothing respectable in the human character. You change the man into a brute.

The conclusion from all the reasonings which we have now pursued is, that religion and virtue, in all their forms, either of doctrine or of precept; of piety towards God, integrity towards men, or regularity in private conduct; are so far from affording any grounds of ridicule to the petulant, that they are entitled to our highest veneration; they are names, which should never be mentioned, but with the utmost honor. It is said in scripture, *Fools make a mock, at sin.*\* They had better make a mock at pestilence, at war, or famine. With one, who should chuse these public calamities, for the subject of his sport, you would not be inclined to associate. You would fly from him, as worse than a fool, as a man of distempered mind, from whom you might be in hazard of receiving a sudden blow. Yet certain it is, that to the great society of mankind, sin is a greater calamity, than either pestilence, or famine, or war. These operate, only as occasional causes of misery. But the sins and vices of men, are perpetual scourges of the world. Impiety and injustice, fraud and falsehood, intemperance and profligacy, are daily producing mischief and disorder; bringing ruin on individuals; tearing families and communities in pieces; giving rise to a thousand tragical scenes on this unhappy theatre. In proportion as manners are vicious, mankind are unhappy. The perfection of virtue which reigns in the world about the Moon had is the chief source of the perfect blessedness which prevails there.

When, therefore, we observe any tendency to treat religion or morals with disrespect and levity, let us have

\* Prov. xiv. 9.

to be a sure indication of a perverted understanding, a depraved heart. *In the seat of the scorner, let us never sit.* Let us account that wit contaminated, which attempts to sport itself on sacred subjects. When the offer arises, let us maintain the honor of our God, and our Redeemer; and resolutely adhere to the cause of virtue and goodness. *The lips of the wise utter knowledge; but the mouth of the foolish is near to destruction. Him that honoreth God, God will honor. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and he that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.*

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## SERMON XIX.

On the CREATION of the WORLD.

GENESIS i. 1.

*In the Beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth.*

SUCH is the commencement of the history of mankind; an era, to which we must ever look back with solemn awe and veneration. Before the Sun and the Moon had begun their course; before the sound of the human voice was heard, or the name of man was known; *In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth.* To a beginning of the world, we are led back by every thing that now exists; by all history, all records, all monuments of antiquity. In tracing the transactions of past ages, we arrive at a period, which clearly indicates

the infancy of the human race. We behold the world peopled by degrees. We ascend to the origin of those useful and necessary arts, without the knowledge of which mankind could hardly subsist. We discern society and civilization arising from rude beginnings, in every corner of the earth; and gradually advancing to the state in which we now find them: All which afford plain evidence, that there was a period, when mankind began to inhabit and cultivate the earth. What is very remarkable, the most authentic chronology and history of most nations, coincides with the account of Scripture; and makes the period during which the world has been inhabited by the race of men, not to extend beyond five thousand years.

To the ancient Philosophers, creation from nothing appeared an unintelligible idea. They maintained the eternal existence of matter, which they supposed to be modelled by the sovereign mind of the universe, into the form which the earth now exhibits. But there is nothing in this opinion which gives it any title to be opposed to the authority of revelation. The doctrine of two self-existent, independent principles, God and matter, the one active, the other passive, is a hypothesis which presents difficulties to human reason, at least as great as the creation of matter from nothing. Adhering then to the testimony of Scripture, we believe, that *in the beginning God created*, or from unexistence, brought into being, *the Heaven and the Earth*.

But though there was a period when this globe, with all that we see upon it, did not exist, we have no reason to think, that the wisdom and power of the Almighty were then without exercise or employment. Boundless is the extent of his dominion. Other globes and worlds, enlightened by other suns, may then have occupied, as they still appear to occupy, the immense regions of space. Numberless orders of beings, to us unknown, people the wide extent of the universe; and afford an endless variety of objects to the ruling care of the great Father of

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At length, in the course and progress of his government, there arrived a period, when this earth was to be called into existence. When the signal moment, predestined from all eternity, was come, the Deity arose in his might; and with a word created the world.— That an illustrious moment was that, when, from non-existence, there sprang at once into being, this mighty globe, on which so many millions of creatures now dwell!—No preparatory measures were required. No circuit of means was employed. *He spake; and it was done: He commanded; and it stood fast.* The earth was at first, *without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.* The Almighty surveyed the dark abyss; and fixed bounds to the several divisions of nature. He said, *Let there be light; and there was light.* Then appeared the sea, and the dry land. The mountains rose; and the rivers flowed. The sun and moon began their course in the skies. Herbs and plants clothed the ground. The air, the earth, and the waters, were stored with their respective inhabitants. At last, man was made after the image of God. He appeared, walking with countenance erect; and received his Creator's benediction, as the lord of this new world. The Almighty beheld his work, when it was finished, and pronounced it good. Superior beings saw with wonder this new accession to existence. *The morning stars sang together; and all the sons of God shouted for joy.*

But, on this great work of creation, let us not merely gaze with astonishment. Let us consider how it should affect our conduct, by presenting the divine perfections in a light which is at once edifying, and commanding, to man. It displays the Creator as supreme in power, in wisdom, and in goodness.

As supreme in power—When we consider with how much labor and difficulty human power performs

its inconsiderable works ; what time it costs to rear them, and how easily, when reared, they are destroyed ; every idea of creating power, overwhelms the mind with awe. Let us look around, and survey this stupendous edifice, which we have been admitted to inhabit. Let us think of the extent of the different climates and regions of the earth ; of the magnitude of the mountains, and of the expanse of the ocean. Let us conceive the immense globe which contains them, launched at once from the hand of the Almighty ; made to revolve incessantly on its axis, that it might produce the vicissitudes of day and night ; thrown forth, at the same time, to run its annual course in perpetual circuits through the heavens ; after such a meditation, where is the greatness, where is the pride of man ? Into what total abasement do we sink, before an omnipotent Being ? Who is not disposed to exclaim, *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him ; or the son of man, that thou shouldst visit him ? When compared to thee, all men are vanity, their works are nothing.*—Reverence, and humble adoration, ought spontaneously to arise. He who feels no propensity to worship and adore, is destitute of sense of grandeur and majesty ; has extinguished one of the most natural feelings of the human heart. *Know ye the Lord, that he is God, we are all his people ; we are the workmanship of his hands. Let us worship and adore him ; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*

Of all titles to legislation and rule, none is so evident and direct as that of a Creator. The conviction is implanted in every breast, that he who gave us being, hath an absolute right to regulate our conduct. This gives sanction to the precepts of God, which the most hardened dare not controvert. When it is a Creator and Father that speaks, who would not listen and obey ? Are justice and humanity his declared laws ; and is it we whom but yesterday he called from the dust, whom to-morrow he can reduce into dust again ; presume, in contempt of him, to be unjust or inhuman ?

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*Fear ye not me, saith the Lord; will ye not tremble  
my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound  
of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it's  
stretch forth my hand over the earth, and none hin-*

At the same time, the power of a Creator is encourag-  
a, as well as awful. While it enforces duty, it in-  
duces confidence under affliction. It brings to view a  
Father, which imports tenderness and comfort; for it  
suggests the compassion of a father. In the time of  
tribulation, mankind are led by natural impulse, to fly for  
refuge to Him, who knows the weakness of the frame  
which he has made; who *remembers we are dust*; and  
who is aware of the dangers in which we are environed. "I am  
the Lord, and thou hast made me: Forsake not the work of  
mine own hands," is one of the most naturalejaculations  
of the distressed mind—How blessed are the virtuous,  
who can rest under the protection of that powerful arm  
which made the earth and the heaven? The omnipo-  
tence which renders God so awful, is to them a source  
of joy. In the whole compass of nature, nothing is for-  
midable to them, who firmly repose their trust in the  
Author. To them every noxious power can be rendered  
harmless; every threatened evil, if not averted, can be  
transformed into good. In the Author of nature, they  
find not only the author of their being; but their protec-  
tor and defender, the lifter up of their heads. *Happy is  
that, hath the God of Jacob for his help; whose hope is  
in the Lord his God; which made heaven and earth, the  
sea, and all that therein is; which keepeth truth for*

II. The work of creation is the display of supreme  
wisdom. It carries no character more conspicuous than  
that of wisdom. If, from the structure and machanism of some of  
the most beautiful parts of the creation, we look into the  
mind of the Creator, we shall find a wisdom that is  
infinite, and that is the source of all the wisdom that  
is in the world.

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was designed. All this infinite variety of particulars must have been present to the mind of the Creator; all beheld with one glance of his eye; all fixed and arranged, from the beginning, in his great design, when he formed the heavens and the earth. Justly may we exclaim with the Psalmist, *How excellent, O Lord, is thy name in all the earth! How manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all. No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is high; we cannot attain unto it.*

This wisdom, displayed by the Almighty in the creation, was not intended merely to gratify curiosity, and to raise wonder. It ought to beget profound submission, and pious trust, in every heart. It is not uncommon for many who speak with rapture of creating wisdom, to be guilty, at the same time, of arraigning the conduct of Providence. In the structure of the universe, they confess that all is goodly and beautiful. But in the government of human affairs, they can see nothing but disorder and confusion.—Have they forgotten, that both the one, and the other, proceed from the same Author? Have they forgotten, that he who balanced all the heavenly bodies, and adjusted the proportions and limits of nature, is the same who hath allotted them their condition in the world, who distributes the measures of their prosperity and adversity, and fixes the bounds of their habitation? If their lot appear to them ill sorted, and their condition hard and unequal, let them only put the question to their own minds, whether it be most probable, that the great and wise Creator hath erred in his distribution of human things, or that they have erred, in the judgment which they formed concerning the lot assigned to them? Can they believe, that the divine Artist, after he had contrived and finished this earth, the habitation of men, with such admirable wisdom, would then throw it out of his hands as a neglected work; would suffer the afflictions of its inhabitants to pro-

ceed by chance; and would behold them without concern, running into misrule and disorder? Where were then that consistency of conduct, which we discover in all the works of nature, and which we cannot but ascribe to a perfect being?—My brother! when thy plans are disappointed, and thy heart is ready to despair; when virtue is oppressed, and the wicked prosper around thee; in those moments of disturbance, look up to him who created the heaven and the earth; and confide, that he who made light to spring from primæval darkness, will make order at last to arise from the seeming confusion of the world.

Had any one beheld the earth in its state of chaos; when the elements lay mixed and confused; when the earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep; would he have believed, that it was presently to become so fair and well ordered a globe as we now behold; illuminated with the splendor of the sun, and decorated with all the beauty of nature? The same powerful hand, which perfected the work of creation, shall, in due time, disembroil the plans of Providence. Of creation, we can judge more clearly, because it stood forth at once; it was perfect from the beginning. But the course of providence is progressive. Time is required for the progression to advance; and before it is finished, we can form no judgment, or at least, a very imperfect one, concerning it. We must wait until the great æra arrive, when the secrets of the universe shall be unfolded; when the divine design shall be consummated; when Providence shall bring all things to the same completion which creation has already attained. Then we have every reason to believe, that the wise creator shall appear in the end, to have been the wise and just ruler of the world. Until that period come, let us be contented and patient; let us submit and adore. Although thou sayest, thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore, trust thou in him\*. This

\* Job xxxv. 14.

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hortation will receive more force when we;

III. Consider creation as a display of supreme goodness, no less than of wisdom and power. It is the communication of numberless benefits to all who live, together with existence. Justly is the earth said to be full of the goodness of the Lord. Throughout the whole system of things, we behold a manifest tendency to promote the benefit either of the rational, or the animal creation. In some parts of nature, this tendency may be less obvious than in others. Objects, which to us seem useless, or hurtful, may sometimes occur; and strange it were, if in so vast and complicated a system, difficulties of this kind should not occasionally present themselves to beings whose views are so narrow and limited as ours. It is well-known, that in proportion as the knowledge of nature has increased among men, these difficulties have diminished. Satisfactory accounts have been given of many perplexing appearances. Useful and proper purposes have been found to be promoted, by objects which were, at first, thought unprofitable or noxious.

Malignant must be the mind of that person; with a distorted eye he must have contemplated creation, who can suspect, that it is not the production of infinite benignity and goodness. How many clear marks of benevolent intentions appear, every where around us? What a profusion of beauty and ornament is poured forth on the face of nature? What a magnificent spectacle presented to the view of man? What supply contrived for his wants? What a variety of objects set before him, to gratify his senses, to employ his understanding, to entertain his imagination to cheer and gladden his heart? Indeed, the very existence of the universe is a standing memorial of the goodness of the Creator. For nothing except, goodness could originally prompt creation. The supreme Being, self-existent and all-sufficient had, no wants which he could seek to supply. No new accession of felicity or glory was to result to him, from creatures whom he made. It was goodness communicating

and pouring itself forth, goodness delighting to impart happiness in all its forms, which in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. Hence, those innumerable orders of living creatures with which the earth is peopled; from the lowest class of sensitive being, to the highest rank of reason and intelligence. Wherever there is life, there is some degree of happiness; there are enjoyments suited to the different powers of feeling; and earth, and air, and water, are, with magnificent liberality made to teem with life.

Let those striking displays of creating goodness call forth, on our part, responsive love, gratitude, and veneration. To this great Father of all existence and life to Him who hath raised us up to behold the light of day, and to enjoy all the comforts which his world presents let our hearts send forth a perpetual hymn of praise. Evening and morning let us celebrate Him, who maketh the morning and the evening to rejoice over our heads, who openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing. Let us rejoice, that we are brought into a world, which is the production of infinite goodness, over which a supreme intelligence presides; and where nothing happens, that was not planned and arranged from the beginning, in his decree. Convinced that he hateth not the works which he hath made, nor hath brought creatures into existence, merely to suffer unnecessary pain, let us, even in the midst of sorrow, receive with calm submission, whatever he is pleased to send, thankful for what he bestows; and satisfied, that without good reason, he takes nothing away.

Such, in general, are the effects which meditation on the creation of the world ought to produce. It presents such an astonishing conjunction of power, wisdom, and goodness, as cannot be beheld without religious veneration. Accordingly, among all nations of the earth, it has given rise to religious belief and worship. The most ignorant and savage tribes, when they looked round on the earth and the heavens could not

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avoid ascribing their origin to some invisible designing cause, and feeling a propensity to adore. They are, indeed, the awful appearances of the Creator's power, by which chiefly, they have been impressed; and which have introduced into their worship so many rites of dark superstition. When the usual course of nature seemed to be interrupted; when loud thunder rolled above them in the clouds, or earthquakes shook the ground, the multitude fell on their knees, and, with trembling horror, brought forth the bloody sacrifice to appease the angry divinity. But it is not in those tremendous appearances of power merely, that a good and well instructed man beholds the Creator of the world. In the constant and regular working of his hands, in the silent operations of his wisdom and goodness, ever going on throughout nature he delights to contemplate and adore him.

This is one of the chief fruits to be derived from that more perfect knowledge of the creator, which is imparted to us by the Christian revelation. Impress our minds with a just sense of all his attributes, as not wise and great only, but as gracious and merciful, let it lead us to view every object of calm and undisturbed nature with a perpetual reference to its Author. We shall then behold all the scenes which the heavens and the earth present, with more refined feelings, and sublimer emotions, than they who regard them solely as objects of curiosity, or amusement. Nature will appear animated, and enlivened, by the presence of its Author. When the sun rises or sets in the heavens; when spring paints the earth, when summer shines in its glory, when autumn pours forth its fruits, or winter returns in its awful forms, we shall view the creator manifesting himself in his works. We shall meet his presence in the fields. We shall feel his influence in the cheering beam.

We shall hear his voice in the wind. We shall behold ourselves every where surrounded with the glory of that universal Spirit, who fills, pervades, and upholds

all. We shall live in the world as in a great and august temple; where the presence of the divinity, who inhabits it; inspires devotion.

Magnificent as the fabric of the world is, it was not, however, intended for perpetual duration. It was erected as a temporary habitation for a race of beings, who, after acting there a probationary part, were to be removed into a higher state of existence. As there was an hour fixed from all eternity for its creation, so there is an hour fixed for its dissolution; when the heavens and the earth shall pass away, and their place shall know them no more. The consideration of this great event, as the counterpart to the work of creation, shall be the subject of the following discourse.

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## SERMON XX.

On the DISSOLUTION of the WORLD.

2 PETER iii. 10.

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.*

THESE words present to us an awful view of the final catastrophe of the world. Having treated in the

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preceding discourse, of the commencement, let us now contemplate the close of all human things. The dissolution of the material system, is an article of our faith, often alluded to in the Old Testament, and clearly predicted in the New. It is an article of faith, so far from being incredible, that many appearances in nature lead to the belief of it. We see all terrestrial substances changing their form. Nothing that consists of matter, is formed for perpetual duration. Every thing around us is impaired and consumed by time; waxes old by degrees and tends to decay. There is reason, therefore, to believe, that a structure so complex as the world, must be liable to the same law; and shall, at some period, undergo the same fate. Through many changes, the earth has already passed; many shocks it has received, and still is often receiving. A great portion of what is now dry land appears, from various tokens, to have been once covered with water. Continents bear the marks of having been violently rent, and torn asunder from one another. New islands have arisen from the bottom of the ocean; thrown up by the force of subterraneous fire. Formidable earthquakes have, in divers quarters, shaken the globe; and at this hour terrify, with their alarms, many parts of it. Burning mountains have, for ages, been discharging torrents of flame; and from time to time renew their explosions, in various regions. All these circumstances show, that in the bowels of the earth the instruments of its dissolution are formed. To our view, who behold only its surface, it may appear firm and unshaken; while its destruction is preparing in secret. The ground on which we tread is undermined. Combustible materials are stored. The train is laid. When the mine is to spring, none of us can foresee

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Accustomed to behold the course of nature proceeding in regular order, we indulge, meanwhile, our pleasures and pursuits with full security; and such awful scenes as the convulsion of the elements, and the dissolution of the world, are foreign to our thoughts. Yet, as

it is certain that some generation of men must witness this great catastrophe, it is fit and proper that we should sometimes look forward to it. Such prospects may not indeed, be alluring to the bulk of men. But they carry a grandeur and solemnity, which are congenial to some of the most dignified feelings in our nature; and tend to produce elevation of thought. Amidst the circle of levities and follies, of little pleasures and little cares which fill up the ordinary round of life, it is necessary that we be occasionally excited to attend to what is serious and great. Such events as are now to be the subject of our meditation, awake the slumbering mind; check the licentiousness of idle thought, and bring home our recollection to what most concerns us, as men and Christians.

Let us think what astonishment would have filled our minds, and what devout emotions would have swelled our hearts, if we could have been spectators of the creation of the world; if we had seen the earth when it arose at first *without form and void*, and beheld its parts arranged by the divine word; if we had heard the voice of the Almighty, calling light to spring forth from the *darkness that was on the face of the deep*; if we had seen the sun arising, for the first time in the east, with majestic glory; and all nature instantly beginning to teem with life. This wonderful scene, it was impossible that any human eye could behold. It was a spectacle afforded only to angels, and superior spirits. But to a spectacle no less astonishing, the final dissolution of the world, we know there shall be many human witnesses. The race of men living in that last age, shall see the passages of the approaching fatal day. There shall be *signs in the sun, as the Scriptures informs us, and signs in the moon, and stars; upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity: the sea and the waves roaring*\*. They shall clearly perceive, that universal nature

\* Luke xxi. 25.

is tending to ruin. They shall feel the globe shake; shall behold their cities fall, and the final conflagration begin to kindle around them—Realising then this awful scene; imagining ourselves to be already spectators of it let us,

I. Contemplate the supreme being directing the dissolution, as he directed the original formation of the world. He is the great agent in this wonderful transaction. It was by him foreseen. It was by him intended; it entered into his plan from the moment of creation. This world was destined from the beginning to fulfil a certain period; and then its duration to terminate. Not that it is any pleasure to the Almighty, to display his omnipotence in destroying the works which he has made; but as for wise and good purposes the earth was formed, so for wise and good ends it is dissolved, when the time most proper for its termination is come. He who, in the counsels of his Providence, brings about so many revolutions among mankind; who *changeth the times and the seasons*; who raises up empires to rule, in succession, among the nations, and at his pleasure puts an end to their glory; hath also fixed a term for the earth itself, the seat of all human greatness. He saw it meet, that after the probationary course was finished, which several generations of men were to accomplish, their pretensions should be made to pass away. Of the length of the period when this change should take place, no being can judge, except the Lord of the universe. These are counsels, into which it is not ours to penetrate. But amidst this great revolution of nature, our comfort is, that it is a revolution brought about by Him, the measures of whose government are all founded in goodness.

It is called in the text, *the day of the Lord*; a day peculiarly his, as known to him only; a day in which he shall appear with uncommon and tremendous majesty. But though it be the day of the terrors of the Lord, yet from these terrors, his upright and faithful subjects shall

have nothing to apprehend. They may remain safe and quiet spectators of the threatening scene. For it is not to be a scene of blind confusion; of universal ruin brought about by undesigned chance. Over the show of the elements, and the wreck of nature, Eternal Wisdom presides. According to its direction, the conflagration advances which is to consume the earth. In the midst every convulsion of the world, God shall continue to be, as he was from the beginning, the dwelling place of his servants to all generations. The world may be laid to them; but the ruler of the world is ever the same, unchangeably good and just. This is the high tower to which they can fly, and be safe. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; and under every period of his government, his countenance beholdeth the upright.

II. Let us contemplate the dissolution of the world as the end of all human glory. This earth has been the theatre of many a great spectacle, and many a high achievement. There, the wise have ruled, the mighty have fought, and conquerors have triumphed. Its surface has been covered with proud and stately cities. Its temples and palaces have raised their heads to the sky. Its kings and potentates, glorying in their magnificence, have erected pyramids, constructed towers, founded monuments, which they imagined were to defy all the assaults of time. Their inward thought was, that their houses were to continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations. Its philosophers have explored the secrets of nature; and flattered themselves, that the fame of their discoveries was to be immortal.—Alas! this was no more than a transient show. Not only the fashion of the world, but the world itself passeth away. The day cometh when all the glory of this world shall be remembered, only as a dream when one awaketh. No longer shall the earth exhibit any of those scenes which now delight our eyes. The whole beautiful fabric is thrown down, never more to arise. As soon as the destroying angel has sounded the last trumpet, the eve

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ting mountains fall; the foundations of the world  
 shaken; the beauties of nature, the decorations  
 of art, the labors of industry, perish in one com-  
 mon flame. The globe itself shall either return in-  
 to its ancient chaos, without form and void; or, like a  
 star fallen from the heavens, shall be effaced from the  
 universe, and its place shall know it no more.  
 This day of the Lord, it is foretold in the text, will  
 come as a thief in the night; that is, sudden and unex-  
 pected. Mankind, notwithstanding the presages given  
 them, shall continue to the last in their wonted security.  
 Our Saviour tells us, that *as in the days of Noah before  
 the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and  
 giving in marriage, until the flood came, and took them  
 all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*  
 How many projects and designs shall that day suddenly  
 confound; What long contrived schemes of pleasure  
 shall it overthrow? What plans of cunning and am-  
 bition shall it utterly blast? How miserable they whom  
 it shall overtake in the midst of dark conspiracies of cri-  
 minal deeds, or profligate pleasures? In what strong  
 colors is their dismay painted, when they are represented  
 in the book of Revelations, as calling, to the hills and  
 mountains, to fall on them and cover them? Such des-  
 criptions are apt to be considered as exaggerated. The  
 impression of those awful events is weakened by the  
 great distance of time, at which our imagination places  
 them. But have not we had a striking image set before  
 us, in our own age, of the terrors which the day of the  
 Lord shall produce, by those partial ruins of the world,  
 the visitation of God has brought on countries well  
 known and not removed very far from ourselves?   
 When, in the midst of peace, opulence, and security, sud-  
 denly the earth was felt by the terrified inhabitants, to  
 tremble, with violent agitation, below them; when their  
 houses began to shake over their heads, and to overwhelm  
 them with ruins; the flood, at the same time, to rise

from its bed, and to swell around them ; when encompassed with universal desolation, no friend could aid another ; no prospect of escape appeared ; no place of refuge remained ; how similar were such scenes of destruction to the terrors of the last day ? What similar sensations of dread, and remorse, and too late repentance must they have excited among the guilty and profane.

To such formidable convulsions of nature, we, in these happy islands, through the blessing of Heaven, are strangers ; and strangers to them may we long continue. But however we may escape partial ruins of the globe in its general and final ruin, we also must be involved. To us must come at last that awful day, when the sun shall for the last time arise, to perform his concluding circuit round the world. They how blest, whom that day shall find employed in religious acts, or virtuous deeds ; in the conscientious discharge of the duties of life ; in the exercise of due preparation for the conclusion of human things, and for appearing before the great Judge of the world ! Let us now

III. Contemplate the soul of man, as remaining unhurt in the midst of this general desolation, when the whole animal creation perishes, and the whole frame of nature falls into ruins. What a high idea does this present, of the dignity pertaining to the rational spirit. The world may fall back into chaos ; but, superior to matter, and independent of all the changes of material things, the soul continues the same. When the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat, the soul of man, stamped for immortality, retains its state unimpaired ; and is capable of flourishing in undecaying youth and vigor. Very different indeed the condition of human spirits is to be, according as their different qualities have marked, and prepared them for different future mansions. But for futurity, they are all destined. Existence, still, is theirs. The capacity of permanent felicity they all possess ; and, if they enjoy it not, it is owing to themselves.

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Here, then, let us behold what is the true honor and excellence of man. It consists not in his body; which beautiful or vigorous as it may now seem, is no other than a fabric of dust, quickly to return to dust again. It is not derived from any connection he can form with earthly things; which, as we have seen, are all doomed to perish. It consists in that thinking part, which is susceptible of intellectual improvement and moral worth; which was formed after the image of God; which is capable of perpetual progress in drawing nearer to his nature; and shall partake of the divine eternity, when time and the world shall be no more. This is all that is respectable in man. By this alone, he is raised above perishable substances, and allied to those that are celestial and immortal. This part of our nature, then, let us cultivate with care; and, on its improvement, rest our self-estimation. If on the contrary, suffering ourselves to be wholly immersed in matter, plunged in the dregs of sensuality, we behave as if we were only made for the body and its animal pleasures, how degenerate and base do we become? Destined to survive this whole material system, sent forth to run the race of immortality and glory, shall we thus abuse our Maker's goodness, degrade our original honor, and sink ourselves into deserved misery? It remains, that,

IV. We contemplate the dissolution of the world, as the introduction to a greater and nobler system, in the government of God. We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness\*. Temporal things are now to give place to things eternal. To this earthly habitation is to succeed the city of the living God. The earth had completed the purpose for which it was created. It had been employed as a theatre, on which the human generations were successively to come forth, and to fulfil

\* 2 Peter iii. 13.

their term of trial. As long as the period of trial continued, much obscurity was of course to cover the counsels of Providence. It was appointed, that all things should appear as coming alike to all; that the righteous should seem often neglected by Heaven, and the wicked be allowed externally to prosper; in order that virtue and piety might undergo a proper test; that it might be shown who were sincere adherents to conscience, and who were mere followers of fortune. The day which terminates the duration of the world, terminates all those seeming disorders. The time of trial is concluded. The final discrimination of characters is made. Here the righteous go to everlasting happiness, and the wicked are dismissed into the regions of punishment, the whole mystery of human affairs is unravelled; and the conduct of Providence is justified to man.

Suited to a condition of trial was the state and form of the world, which we now inhabit. It was not designed to be a mansion for innocent and happy spirits; but a dwelling for creatures of fallen nature, and of mixed characters. Hence, those mixtures of pleasure and pain, of disorder and beauty, with which it abounds. Hence some regions of the earth, presenting gay and pleasing scenes; others, exhibiting nothing but ruggedness and deformity; the face of nature, sometimes brightened by a serene atmosphere, and a splendid sun; sometimes disfigured by jarring elements, and overcast with troubled skies. But far unlike shall be the everlasting habitations of the just: Though how they are formed, or what objects they contain, is not given us now to conceive; nor in all probability, would our faculties be equal to the conception. The emblematical descriptions of them in Scripture, are calculated to excite high ideas of magnificence and glory. This one particular we know with certainty, that therein dwelleth righteousness; that complete virtue, and eternal order; and wherever they are found, the most perfect sources are opened of joy and bliss. This earth was never intended for more than the

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outer court, the porch through which the righteous were to pass into the temple and sanctuary of the Divinity. When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.

The inference which follows from what has been said on this subject, cannot be so well expressed as in the words of the Apostle, in the verse immediately following the text; seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Ought not the important discoveries which have been made to us, of the designs of the Almighty, and of the destiny of man, to exalt our sentiments, and to purify our life from what is vicious or vain? While we pursue the business and cares of our present station, and partake of the innocent pleasures which the world affords, let us maintain that dignity of character, which becomes immortal beings; let us act with that circumspection, which becomes those who know they are soon to stand before the judgment-seat of the Son of God: In a word, let us study to be what we would wish to be found, if to us the day of the Lord should come.

I know it will occur, that the prospect of that day cannot be expected to have much influence on the present age. The events of which I have treated, must needs, it will be said, belong to some future race of men. Many prophecies yet remain to be fulfilled. Many preparatory events must take place, before the world is ripe for final judgment.—Whether this be the case or not, none of us with certainty know.—But allow me to remind you, that to each of us, an event is approaching, and not far distant, which shall prove of the same effect, with the coming of the day of the Lord. The day of death is, to every individual, the same as the day of the dissolution of the world. The sun may continue to shine but to them who are laid in the grave, his light is finally extinguished. The world may remain active, busy, and noisy; but to them, all is silence. The voice which

gives the mandate, Return again to your dust, is the same with the sound of the last trumpet. Death fixes the doom of every one, finally and irrevocably. This surely is an event which none of us can remove in our thoughts to a remote age. To-morrow, to-day, the fatal mandate may be issued. Watch therefore; be sober and vigilant; ye know not at what hour the Son of man cometh.

Having now treated both of the creation and dissolution of the world, I cannot conclude, without calling your thoughts to the magnificent view, which these events give us, of the kingdom and dominion of the Almighty. With reverence we contemplate his hands in the signal dispensations of Providence among men; deciding the fate of battles; raising up, or overthrowing empires; casting down the proud, and lifting the low from the dust. But what are such occurrences to the power and wisdom, which he displays in the higher revolutions of the universe; by his word, forming, or dissolving worlds; at his pleasure, transplanting his creatures from one world to another; that he may carry on new plans of wisdom and goodness, and fill all space with the wonders of creation! Successive generations of men have arisen to possess the earth. By turns they have passed away, and gone into regions unknown. Us he hath raised up, to occupy their room. We too shall shortly disappear. But human existence never perishes. Life only changes its form, and is renewed. Creation is ever filling, but never full. When the whole intended course of the generations of men shall be finished, then, as a shepherd leads his flock from one pasture to another, so the great Creator leads forth the souls which he has made, into new and prepared abodes of life. They go from this earth to a new earth, and new heavens; and still they remove, only from one province of the divine dominion to another. Amidst all those changes of nature, the great Ruler himself remains without variableness or shadow of turning. To him, these suc-

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cessive revolutions of being are but as yesterday when it is past. From his eternal throne, he beholds worlds rising and passing away; measures out, to the creatures who inhabit them, powers and faculties suited to their state; and distributes among them rewards and punishments, proportioned to their actions.—What an astonishing view do such meditations afford of the kingdom of God; infinite in its extent; everlasting in its duration; exhibiting, in every period, the reign of perfect righteousness and wisdom; *Who by searching can find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection? Great and marvellous are all thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are all thy ways, thou King of Saints.*

FINIS,

