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IN MEMORY OF
W. DUNKIN OWENS, M. D.

TWO

From **R M O N S ,**

BY

*saac with
Stockton*
DR. I. K. SAXSON,

INDEPENDENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

SAVANNAH.



D BY HIS PEOPLE.

COL:

CASTLE STREET.

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**LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA**



IN MEMO

W. DUNKIN O



TWO
SERMONS,

BY

sac. rit. Johnston
DR. I. K. SAXSON,

PASTOR OF THE INDEPENDENT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

SAVANNAH.



PUBLISHED BY HIS PEOPLE.

LIVERPOOL:
WEBB AND HUNT, CASTLE STREET.

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SERMON I.

“HASTY JUDGMENTS.”

“JUDGE NOT THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED.”

MATT. vii. 1.

You are familiar with those words,—Suffer me to inquire whether you grasp their meaning ? You have read them frequently—do you appreciate their force ? You press them sometimes on the conscience of another—have you subjected your own to their authoritative control ?

They embody a first principle in christian morals, and must not therefore be put on a level with Pagan philosophy. Neither may we cast them aside as obsolete rubbish, which served it may be a good purpose at the outset, but antiquated now, must share with a system that has vanished away.

They are of perennial freshness :—and were spoken for all ages of time and all races of men. The Jew caught the first sound as it floated from the “mountain” where “He opened his mouth,”—but the echo has reached over to the Gentile world ; and for sixty generations the lesson has been ceaselessly repeated. Yet, in all that time what learner has

mastered it? Will you stand up, and submit to be questioned?

The case is manifestly a difficult one:—the disorder chronic. Homilies without number have been written, acknowledgements made, lamentations uttered, charges and exhortations most pungent and powerful pressed;—but under it all, the sick man's amendment has been so lingeringly slow, that perhaps the worst picture of the past may be received for a truthful daguerreotype of the present. To censure and to criticise is the practice of the day: a practice, perhaps not a whit less rife than when on our ancestors of a by-gone century it was charged, that "every gossip had become a court, every seat a tribunal, every table a bar."

Under these circumstances, to consider the text may not be uncalled for. And, however the thing which has been is very likely but a specimen of what shall be,—we must still remember, that each man holds a personal responsibility to the moral Governor; and if we cannot correct other people's faults, we may at least try to amend our own.

With this end in view we proceed to enquire more fully into the meaning of the text,—glancing first at some of the misconceived interpretations that have been put upon it.

It would appear then, that some, by a strange blunder, have undertaken to hurl the text at the head of the magistracy,—reading therein the unlawfulness of the Sword; and that tribunals, with judges and verdicts, and pains and penalties, should as an Institution be rejected from christian communities.*

And some have construed it as prohibiting in the more *private walks*, the exercise of that authority, wherewith superiors undertake to judge of the faults of inferiors, and to administer rebukes, admonitions, and corrections.

And some have inferred that we are herein taught to wink at *religious error*, and to deal charitably even with mutilations of revealed truth. †

* *The German Anabaptists in the sixteenth century maintained that "in the kingdom of Christ civil magistrates are absolutely useless."—And even after their principles were modified by Menno, they "neither admitted civil rulers into their communion, nor allowed any of their members to perform the functions of magistracy."*

Similar sentiments were broached by the English Sectaries at the period when the Westminster Assembly was sitting; (Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History and Edwards' Gangrena in Shaw's Exposition.)

† "The remonstrants founded on this saying, at least toleration toward errors in doctrine."—*Tholuck in loco.*)

And some, (nor need we travel far into antiquity, nor search among the ignorant for examples) interpret the text as repudiating all ecclesiastical discipline, and as forbidding the arraignment of offenders before church courts.*

And some would construe the words as putting an injunction on much that issues from the pulpit in censure of public irregularities,—arrogantly spoken, as they say, and in a spirit which invades the rights of conscience.†

And some go even so far as to read herein a prohibition from holding ever so privately opinions unfavourable to their fellow men,—an excessive

* *Quære.*—*Whether the sensitiveness and opposition sometimes exhibited to church judicatories may not originate in consciousness of personal delinquency?—That is a suggestive incident of which we have account in the history of Jonathan Edwards' ministry at Northampton, where a judicial enquiry was arrested, and process stopped in its very inception, by general church vote, the reasons, as it proved, being, that in almost every principal family of the church, delinquents would thereby have been discovered.—(See Edwards' Life.)*

† *So Tholuck with special eye to the rationalistic teaching of Germany, says, in loco, "The words are wont to be cast up to those who for the sake of God's truth cannot bring themselves to call evil good, and good evil, and to say peace, peace, where there is no peace."*

charity, allowing them to annul the force of the clearest evidence. And misleading them to believe in the face of proof, that the biting man may after all not be a "dog," and the sensual sinner may possibly be something other than a filthy "swine"*

Now that nothing of that sort comes within the scope and prohibition of the passage, must manifestly appear, the moment we apply the true canon of interpretation, and read the words in the self-explanatory light of the Bible. Let us hold up this "Lamp" then, and see what the the text will teach.

The first ray falls;—And that "Judge not," has nothing to do with the functions of *magistracy* appears from all those passages, which testify that God has *ordained* the magistracy, and set up the civil court, and put the Sword into the hand of authorised officers, and said "Bear it not in vain; but, as the "Minister of God," "hear the cause," "judge righteously," "execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." And if Cæsar's judgment seat be broken down, and rulers with their decisions be repudiated, even nature tells us that what follows

* "*Nolite judicare, sine scientia, sine amore sine necessitate; Tamen canis pro cane, porcus pro porco, est habendus;*" (*Bengel.*)

will be a terrible reign of anarchy, terminating in the speedy dismemberment of society.*

Another ray falls:—and in its light we see plainly that “Judge not” cannot be meant to prohibit *Church Censures*:—for another scripture tells us that God hath established the ecclesiastical court likewise:—and as they shall answer for it at a higher bar, requires them to do their duty:—in solemn convocation, as occasion demands, to decide on the character of those “within”:—to “withdraw from such as walk disorderly”:—to excise the transgressor:—and “put away from among themselves the wicked person.” And still another scripture declares that what is thus done in God’s name, and by his authority, and under the guidance of his spirit, shall stand fast, ratified, and confirmed:—so that “what is bound on earth shall

* “*It is a passing evil, whereas there is no government;—for take from the quier the chanter, and the song will neither be in good time nor in good order;—take from the souldiers the captaine, and the same cannot march on either in due number, or decent manner;—take from the ship the pilote, and it must needs miscarry;—take from the flock the shepherd, and they must needs be scattered;—and so take from the people governours, and they must come to destruction;—Ye see therefore the good of government;—(Olis on Jude, 1633.)*

be bound in heaven, and what is loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

A third ray falls:—And every body sees that "Judge not" was never designed to be a gag-piece over the mouth of the ministry—for abundant scriptures tell us, that this Institution is likewise of Divine appointment:— that its incumbents in every generation are called and set apart by the same power which separated the twelve to the apostleship:—that the men who fill our modern pulpits are sent on the same mission which Paul fulfilled:—that they are clothed with similar authority, to preach the gospel and expound the nature and laws of the kingdom of heaven:—and that they are charged, with equal positiveness, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort. And when, as God's mouth-piece, the pastor fulfils this commissison, and brings the customs, and the habits, and the tempers, and the institutions, and the indulgencies of a wayward world, and an erring church to the standard of truth, and shows that they fall lamentably short:—and to the square of revelation and proves that they are crooked and twisted:—and to the spirit of the kingdom, and demonstrates them to be unwarrantable and utterly inconsistent therewith:—and when as such he condemns them,

provided it be done in a spirit of long suffering and love to the delinquents, he does not therein violate the rule which says "Judge not":—he but comes up to his commission; nay, he does *not* come up to it, until he "rebukes them sharply, that they may be in the faith;"—he does *not* come up to it, until he "cries aloud, and lifts up his voice like a trumpet and shows the people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins."

A fourth ray falls;—and a bright light makes it manifest that "Judge not" could never have been designed to interfere with domestic discipline in any form of its administration;—for the family too, the Scripture tells us, is of God's ordination.—Over it the father and master presides by God's appointment;—to that position he is divinely elevated;—clothed with authority, he is solemnly required to discharge that very work;—and he is held responsible, if, no matter from what motive, whether of indifference or indulgence, he fail to meet the full obligations of a household judge. See Gen. xviii. 19. 1st Sam. iii. 13.

A fifth ray falls;—and our conviction is full that "Judge not" is no prohibition against the receiving of personal impressions, and the holding of private opinions respecting one's neighbour;—

for the lawfulness of so doing, when these impressions and opinions are based on outward evidence, is apparent both from the express letter of Scripture, which gives us that for a test of character, and bids us apply it,—Matt. vii. 15. 1st John iv. 1—3. And also from approved examples where this very thing was done. It was what Paul did in the case of Lydia, favourably, whom he judged faithful to the Lord, and went into her house and abode there.

In the case of Elymas the sorcerer, unfavourably, on whom he fixed his eyes and said, “ Full of subtlety and mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of righteousness.”

It was what Peter did, in the case of Cornelius the centurion, favourably, into whose house, though an uncircumcised man, he went, and did eat with him, and baptized him, under the full persuasion that he was a partaker of the Holy Ghost, even as the Jews were;—in the case of Simon Magus, unfavourably, to whom he did not hesitate to say, “ Thy heart is not right in the sight of God—Thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” And after the same manner men may form their private judgment of a neighbour now;—and they must form some judgment unless they can succeed in casting off nature :—a thing they have

no right to do, if they could ; and nothing to gain if they did ;—for should we become Angels, or enter upon the condition of the “Just made perfect,” necessity would even then be laid on us, and the opposite would not be in our option, but judge we must, and make inferences from the data spread before us. So much for the negative view of this precept.

The question now comes up for a positive answer, what *is* forbidden in it? And against what, specially, was it designed to operate as a check, and corrective?

Ans. Comprehensively, *all uncharitable judging of our fellow men.*

The context shows that in its original application the precept was levelled particularly against that spirit of hypocritical fault-finding for which the Scribes and Pharisees were so notorious,—whose defective religion he had been exposing, and had told his disciples that unless *their* righteousness exceeded *such* righteousness, they could not enter the kingdom of heaven.

This general statement may now be parcelled out into a few particulars, which will help to show more clearly the positive force and bearing of the precept.

It was intended then to forbid, for one thing, what we may denominate *obtrusive judgments* : and the force of the precept in this interpretation of it means, thrust not yourself unbidden into the judgment seat : move not beyond your legitimate sphere to find employment in this work : assume not an eager espionage over your neighbours : carry it not after the manner of a self-appointed inquisitor in your church and your town.*

Now, this carriage is actually to be met with. Scribes and Pharisees who assume to act thus are still extant. The spirit did not die with the sect. You have *seen* the people. They have itching ears, and burning fingers, and a prurient curiosity, and a nervous restlessness, which keeps them ever on the alert, and not for news simply, but for scandal. They feverishly thirst for something to condemn. With untiring diligence they look about for it. They imitate the earnestness of the woman who lit the candle and swept each corner for the lost silverling. They out hunt the shepherd too : in rivalry of his toil, though with none of his tenderness, they turn their back on the ninety and nine excellencies which are

* "*Meddle not at all in judging of others without a call, know first whether it be any of your work*"—(*Barter's cases of conscience.*)

patent in the daily carriage of a neighbour, and plunge into the wilderness, and follow the trail all day long, and shrink not to encounter briars and bogs, if so be they may catch one wandering fault; and then they fling it up, rejoicing in the proof that the good man is not so perfect after all as some have given him credit for. Verily there are just such people in this world of ours. You find them pertinaciously prying into matters which neither providence nor community have entrusted them with the oversight of: and practice has made them well nigh perfect. A marvellous tact they exhibit in framing interrogatories which are subtle, and shaping questions which are remote, yet clue-giving. And with these they press the unsuspecting; sometimes the little child, and sometimes the servant; and thus without seeming to aim at any thing in particular, they manage to get hold of many a home and heart secret.

Now we might call it an amiable weakness, and as such consent to have it pardoned, if this curiosity were with good intent always, and a benevolent wish to learn and rejoice over a neighbours fair fame and prosperous condition, but we must re-assert and cannot retract the hint that such inquisitiveness is the off-spring of evil intent mostly. It is slime and not pearls the fingers dive

for:—faults and not virtue, they would drag to light:—the detriment, and not the furtherance of a neighbour's interests they seek after:—and if, as the result of all this scrutiny, nothing is found with some show of plausibility to censure, the heart's disappointment is scarcely less than the vulture feels, whose eyes and nostrils distended in search of a carcase as it floats midair, can see nothing beneath, but waving harvest fields, and can snuff nothing but the fragrance of flower gardens.

One thing the text doubtless intended to condemn, is an obtrusive spirit, which with evil design makes us busy-bodies in other men's matters.

Involved in the prohibition we observe are also to be reckoned, *hasty judgments*; which, by reason of their precipitancy, are apt to rest on a very insufficient basis—hurried verdicts are seldom reliable:—and on just that account the enlightened conscience will forbear to give them:—and especially where character is involved. In such case, above all others, if it be deemed important to have any opinion, sheer justice demands that time and pains be expended, and the merits of the case thoroughly investigated, and the coming even to a mental decision held in abeyance, till evidence

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be sifted.—it is not enough to warrant instantaneous and sweeping conclusion, that you have gotten hold of an acknowledged *fact* in a man's history :—for even that which is *indisputable fact*, if taken out of its connexion and dependencies, and glanced at superficially and in the dimness and twilight of its isolation, will many a time produce an unfavourable impression :—over which same fact an entirely new and very opposite complexion would spread, if viewed in the explanatory light of surrounding and accompanying circumstances.—Abraham had found the boy Isaac, and laid him on the altar, and stood over him with a murderous weapon.—had you been hurrying by the foot of the mountain, and caught a glimpse of the gleaming knife, your hasty inference from *that fact* would doubtless have been, that he was an inhuman monster,—the *angel* whose range of vision had been more extended, pronounced that same arm, uplifted, the evidence of unrivalled *faith*,—and that virtual victim a demonstration of the parent's supreme love to God.

The two and a half tribes whose lots fell on the eastward of Jordan, built a stone altar there,—the fact was indisputable : there it stood,—a solid, compact, permanent piece of masonry. Their hasty brethren having heard of it on the other

side, drew the indignant sword, and were about to exterminate them as *idolators*. Inquiry showed that the supposed proof of the tribes' apostacy was the monument and memorial of their purpose never to forsake the God whom their brethren worshipped.

Circumstances do not alter the nature of facts, but they do help us to interpret and ascertain their nature. It is imperative therefore to consider them, if they be at hand; and to ask for them, if they be not at hand;—and to weigh them carefully before a conclusion be drawn.

But this calm, cautious, deliberate advancing step by step to a conclusion, is what a large multitude of men seem not to feel the importance of. They leap into their conclusions; and no matter though it be a neighbour's reputation, which, so far as that act can effect it, is thereby consigned to remediless infamy, the hurried leap is still made, and too often the conclusion is adhered to; and sometimes with not a tithe of the sustaining evidence which a conscientious jury would require to warrant the verdict of a month's imprisonment.

I wonder if this may not be the true history of that prejudice which some of you perchance have taken up in regard to this neighbour or that. May you not have condemned the man on the ground of an *ex-parte* statement, without asking or waiting

for the rejoinder and explanation? or may you not be treating him with coolness and contempt on what is quite as unreliable ground often, and more intangible sometimes, a vagabond rumor, which claims no specific origin, and can find no mortal man to acknowledge himself its responsible parent? * Can this be right? Would the business man venture a mercantile transaction on no better basis? Would the speculator clear his ship for a distant port, on the indefinite warrant, that somebody, he hardly knows who, at sometime, he hardly knows when,

** We do not mean to assert that no attention should be paid to current reports, but only to insist that they must not be received unchallenged, to the disadvantage of a neighbour. Common fame furnishes ground for investigation, not for decision.*

"Merely hearing a flying and evil rumour about an individual in such a thoughtless and lying world as this is, is far from being sufficient evidence against any one to make us believe he has been guilty of that which is reported:—for the devil who is called "the god of this world," is said to be "a liar and the father of it,"—and too many, alas, of his children are like him in the speaking of falsehoods."—(Edwards.)

"Fame is too ordinarily a liar, and they shall be liars, who will be its messengers."—"If you know it not to be true, or have not sufficient evidence to prove it, you are guilty of lying and slandering interpretatively, though it should prove true: because it might have been a lie for aught you knew."—(Baxter's cases, &c.)

said something he hardly knows what, about the character and condition of the foreign market ?

Let it be registered then, that all hasty condemnations of our fellow men, and such as rest on a scanty basis are by this precept positively forbidden.

A third error which it cautions against, is the pronouncing uncharitably on that which we cannot know in a neighbour, viz:—The *secret springs* of his actions, *the hidden motives* of his heart. To arraign these is always to tread on delicate ground ;—and specially doubtful is the step if we proceed in the face of appearances to condemn them—to do so is deliberately to pass beyond our limits ”—by their *Fruits* ye shall know them, ” is the text to which we are restricted by the Lawgiver. Human opinions must be shaped by evidence, not by conjecture ; and to be legitimate they must strictly correspond with evidence. To set evidence aside, and pretend to base our judgment on something which lies deeper, is to tread hard on treason ; the reading of the heart is a prerogative which God lays exclusive claim to. Yet the arrogant do venture sometimes into that territory:—Yea, many there be, whose trade it is to pronounce *the tree* naught, notwithstanding that the fruit on it is undeniably fair ;—the fountain foul, though the stream be limpid ;—

the actuating impulse a sinister one, though the deed they are constrained to admit is clever enough. This is the very spirit of Satan, the arch-accuser. And it will not answer to plead in justification, as such are wont to do, "that appearances frequently deceive : ' Every body knows that ; and moreover that there is such a thing as washing only the outside of the cup and the platter :—but whether it be so in any particular case, that is for *God* to say, and not for you or me. If a man's carriage in any of the relations of life, domestic, social, or public, civil or religious, be shaped professedly to the promotion of a worthy end, and if what he does have naturally that tendency, we must give him credit for what he professes :—and if he be an hypocrite therein, leave it to be made manifest by the revelations of the Last Day. So means the text when it says " Judge Not."

Once more we observe that specially is there forbidden in this precept, all *unnecessary and gratuitous circulating* of unfavourable impressions that one may have respecting a neighbour. My private opinion, however unfavourable, I have a right to, provided it has been arrived at legitimately and with due caution. But whether or not I am at liberty to communicate that opinion, and when, and where,

and to whom, and how far—is quite another question. To publish it in every case, and indiscriminately, I certainly have no right, not even where I know the opinion to be well based, and the truthfulness of it capable of demonstration:—“*Cui bono*” should precede every opening of my mind to another respecting the delinquencies of a neighbour:—and if “no good” then let me put my finger to my lips. That’s the spirit of the precept. Yea, it reaches further, and holds me bound in conscience to silence, unless it can be shown that I am *driven* to disclosures by the demands of justice to my self, of mercy to the offender, or of antecedent obligations to community. That cases may arise in which these demands will press with paramount force, we freely acknowledge:—and then there is no alternative, but to communicate to the proper parties one’s judgment and convictions in the premises, together with the evidences on which they rest,—or by withholding knowledge that we are in possession of, through that very silence, to sin against justice and charity both.

With this exception, I am forbidden alike by the precept of Christ, and a regard to the peace of community to speak out my unfavourable mind respecting a neighbour, however, from the nature of

the case, I may be compelled to have, and to hold such a mind. *

These particulars might be almost indefinitely multiplied, and still other and serious evils adduced, by which the good order of society, the peace of neighbourhoods, and the harmony of the church, are frequently disturbed,—against all of which the authoritative prohibition of the text is levelled.

But without extending our remarks further in that direction, we proceed to notice briefly in conclusion, the chief argument, as suggested in the passage itself, for compliance with this precept:—which is, *the incalculable detriment that must accrue to the man, who indulges in such rash and unwarrantably censorious tempers*: and that will appear in two respects.

I.—It mars and greatly depraves his own moral character. It does this, by fastening on the soul vicious habits, and driving into the very core thereof the roots of vicious principles. For, after all, what

* “*In the present imperfect state, where every individual, being fallible, must fail somewhere, if every one were at liberty to speak of all the wrong and of all the imperfections of every one whom he knew, society would soon become intolerable from the festering of universal ill will.*”—(*Wayland's Moral Science.*)

is it that lies at the bottom of this prohibited *judging*? It is no good thing. *Love* is not at the bottom of it:* *good will* is not at the bottom: *a desire to be a benefactor* is not at the bottom: not a single element constituting piety toward God, or morality toward man, is at the bottom of it. If any of these affections, or any feelings analogous to them were at the bottom, they would prompt to a course different from what is usually pursued. They would send the faithful counsellor to the erring man himself and prompt him to whisper in his ear. They would never perch the detractor on the house top to publish his brother's fault with the blast of a trumpet. No! What *is* at the bottom of all this judging—is *pride, envy, selfishness, a great lack of candour, and sometimes a satanic wish to look a little taller, by pulling down a neighbour who stands head and shoulders above his calumniator?*

And now, of these principles as of every other it is true, that indulgence strengthens them;—and by practice the habit becomes established. Let one accustom himself to this course, and, except Divine Grace interpose, the result must ultimately be, the

* “*Censoriousness is a vermine which crawleth in the carkas of Christian love, when the life of it is gone.*”—(*Baxter's Direct.*)

measuring a character malignant in the extreme.

II -- A second respect in which detriment accrues to the individual who indulges in such unwarrantable dispositions, is, that he thereby brings down *inevitable retribution* on himself—He that judgeth is judged, and his own measure is meted out unto him. *

In this present world a portion of the retribution is experienced :—for although there be many who listen to the uncharitable man and greedily devour his ungenerous strictures, and that because of a morbid appetite which lapsed nature has for scandal, yet in what sort of esteem is the fault finding, captious, critical person himself held by community, even when listening to him ? Who loves him ? Nobody. Who trusts him ? Nobody. Who indulges the unsuspecting freedom of friendly intercourse with him ? Nobody. Who grasps him by the hand and welcomes him into the house ? Nobody. Whose face lights up with a smile to find him at the fire side or at the table, looking on and listening ? Nobody. Who, deep down at the bottom of conscience

* “ *Punishment is the recoil of crime, and the back stroke proportions itself to the force original blow.*” (Augustine.)

So too, Tholuck, “*the law is elastic, the stroke given it by the transgressor returning with equal force on himself.*”

puts faith and attaches weight to what he says? Nobody. Who's sorry when he is dead? Nobody. And nobody goes out to his grave to weep there. That is the beginning of his retribution, the measure which he receives from man in this world that now is; and in the world to come it is completed and made perfect by having the cup of God's judgment put to his lips. Not that God will judge as *he* did, hastily, obtrusively, and unwarrantably, but God will make it to appear that the recompense of his own hands is given to him :* that his retributions are the legitimate harvest of the seed he so diligently sowed : as he shewed no mercy, judgment without mercy will be rendered to him ; as he loved cursing, so will it from many a quarter come upon him ; as he delighted not in blessing, so shall it from every quarter be far from him.

* “ *It is not the temerity of the sinner's judgment that God will imitate, but the severity of it.* ” — (Augustine.)

NOTE.—Dr. Axson's consent was asked for the publication of the preceding sermon only.—The one following, accidentally at hand, is added without his knowledge, or the advantage of his revision, to comply with the publishers desire for a book of more convenient size for the binder.

SERMON II.

“EVANESCENT GOODNESS.”

HOSEA vi., 4.

“O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.”

I hope that none of you have been taught by painful experience, what deep perplexity and crushing sorrow is sometimes brought upon the parental heart, through the perverseness and wicked propensities of an incorrigible child:—we do all, however, know something of it by observation; and we have been conscious of a heart-felt sympathy, while witnessing, on various occasions, as they joined hands, a father's firmness and a mother's affection, and were taxed even to exhaustion in patiently devising measures, and perseveringly executing plans for the reformation of a wayward youth, which yet proved utterly ineffectual. At one time we noticed how a rigid discipline was instituted, and at another how a kind indulgence was granted. There were constant alternations between the voice of a stern command, and the subduing tones of tender expostulation. But when each in its turn had been pushed to the utmost experiment, the

result was like the fisherman's cry to Jesus, "we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing." Sometimes, indeed, there was felt amid these efforts, the animating influence of hope:—for the prodigal was apparently reached—the rebel relented—the adamant softened—and success seemed, at least, a *possible* thing. But soon all was dark again, and dashed. The unsubdued spirit lifted up more boldly its accustomed front. Rampant propensities snapped the green withes of wholesome restraints by which they consented for a moment to be bound. And the reprobate multiplied his outbursts, and became more obstinate in his perverseness, and rushed further into reckless extremes, as the swollen water when it breaks through the embankment.

And we have heard under these painful circumstances the cry, amounting to an acknowledgement that ingenuity was fairly baffled, and the powers of invention utterly at a stand. What now; what next; what further shall we try? Pictures of this sort, differing only in the slight modification of their shading, are hung up all around the gallery of this apostate world.

But what we are called to notice in the text is the impressive fact, that God represents himself as standing in a similar position with respect to his stiff-necked people. The language of embarrassment, which belongs appropriately only to the earthly parent, he seems to have transferred to the dialect of his own book ; and it was not uncommon for Him, under the old dispensation, to adopt that strain and style. From the mouth of Isaiah we catch the emphatic complaint, that his providential dealings and disciplinary corrections had proved utterly unavailing to recover those reprobates. Diversified measures had been instituted and perseveringly pressed, whose severity at one time, and whose mildness at another, should each and alike have ensured success ; but in resistance of them all, they were bent on backsliding from Him. The goodness of God did not bring them to repentance, even when lavished in extraordinary affluence, and as for the rod, they "despised" it ; even when stricken till by reason of the wounds and bruises and manifold smitings, there was no longer a sound spot from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, where another stroke could be inflicted !

By the mouth of Hosea, as we learn from our text, substantially the same complaint was repeated ! “ O, Ephraim, what shall I do to thee ! O Judah, what shall I do unto thee ! ”—I am brought to a stand, how next to proceed.

By Judah and Ephraim we are to understand the whole Jewish empire, who formed but one people during the reign of David and Solomon, but on the accession of Rehoboam were split into two kingdoms :—Ten of the tribes having revolted, set up for their king, as you know, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat :—and this division constituted the kingdom of Israel, of which kingdom, Ephraim, otherwise called Samaria, became the seat of government. Judah and Benjamin were the two remaining tribes ;—and the name of Judah is commonly made to comprehend them both, because of the comparatively smallness of Benjamin—so that against the entire mass of the people, God in the text brings a serious charge—and in linking the name of Judah with that of Ephraim, he would intimate that although Judah boasted more and had Jerusalem for their capital, and the temple for their place of worship,—whilst Ephraim assembled in a

less holy mount Gerizon, and worshipped around the calves of Samaria, yet when the interior and essential examination of the two people came to be dissected, there was but little difference discernible between them, they were each of them a prodigal child, and what they alike did was to lift up the heel against Him who had nourished and tenderly brought them up.

That we may observe some order, we proceed now to examine the text under three distinctions :—

1.—The charge explained.

2.—The charge established,—(and then by way of use and application.)

3.—The charge generalized.

I.—We take up, first, the Charge itself, and you see that the substance of it is, that the goodness of that people was an evanescent, fleeting, ephemeral thing. This idea is set forth under a striking simile ;—“ The Morning Cloud : the Early Dew ; ” Surely it must have been short-lived, and very inconstant to have warranted in its illustration, the use of such figures. How long does that mass of vapor continue, which is some times piled up in the horizon at the break of day ? Let the sun get up

and all vanishes—the deep grass glitters, and every leaf sparkles with the dew-drop ; but, the husbandman has hardly broken his fast, when the moisture is gone and the earth is dry. And was Ephraim's goodness no more lasting than that ? and the excellency of Judah, was it only such an ephemeral show ? Surely it partook not then of the nature of genuine piety;—it must have been the production of some other principle than true religion. Where grace exists it abides ;—piety is the planting of the Holy Ghost ; and however the fleeting cloud and the vanishing dew-drop may be fit emblems of a spurious profession, the rich gift of Jehovah's grace resembles more the bridegroom who cometh out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race and increaseth in splendour, and shineth more and more unto the perfect day

Judah's goodness and Ephraim's excellency, consisted rather of promises that looked to the future, than in the actual possession of a mind moulded already after the will of God, and renovated through His grace. It was the result not of inward and rooted principles, but of outward and variable circumstances. A mere spasmodic resolu-

tion to be good, —which they were quick to frame whensoever straitened by the oppression of an enemy, or over-awed by the tokens of the Divine presence, or temporarily softened by manifesting of his goodness, but which they were just as negligent of carrying into effect when the occasion had passed away which led them to form it. And that is our explanation of the charge made against them.

2.—Can it be established? Read their history from the beginning all through, it is little else than a running commentary on our text; a perpetual verification of the indictment. (*e.g.*) See them as they stood on the further margin of the Red Sea; God had just delivered them from the mouth of a double destruction; wonderfully He had piled up the threatening billows, and held them fast, till the myriads of Israel crossed through the dry channel, which the Egyptians essaying to do were drowned. And their hearts swelled in seeming appreciation of the favour—only hear that song: surely the desert never echoed to such praise;—the timbrel sends its note over the waters; and the mighty shout of an enthusiastic host is lifted up, “who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods?”

who is like unto Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? The Lord shall reign for ever and ever." Behold their goodness. Run on now over a few miles; they have reached Moreb; and what a different note trembles now upon the air; they come to Elim, and the very palm trees are astonished witnesses to the bold manner with which they insult the heavens. Alas, their fickle hearts!

We turn to another leaf in their history. Sinai has suddenly become a habitation of tents; over its rugged surface the encampment of Israel stretches, and the voice of God has called their leader into the obscure summit of the mount, whose peak rises up in the midst of them. With eager curiosity they wait, and presently He descends with this message on his lips,—“Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore them on eagles' wings, and brought them to myself. Now, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me, above all people; ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation!” And they seized upon the promise, and agreed to the covenant;

and with acclamation expressed their sense of the proffered honor ;—“ All that the Lord hath spoken,” cried they “ we will do, be His pleasure our choice, Henceforth, no rebellions, no re-pinings, but cheerful, constant, universal obedience !” Could the subjection of angels have been more entire ? Behold again their goodness ! Nevertheless forty days had not rolled over, when they were dancing like Bachanalians around the golden calf, and with the sottishness of Egyptian idolatry, were crying “ these be thy gods, O Israel !” Alas, the morning cloud and the early dew !

Read on in the national record. They have entered the land of promise ; the toils and the terrors of that long pilgrimage are over ; the goodly heritage has been parcelled out to the various tribes ; and the aged Joshua assembling them to renew the covenant, rehearses to this generation the same story of their forefathers' adventures. He began with the day when God took Abraham from the other side of the flood, and he follows down the tide of providence, till it terminated in giving to his children this land for which they did not labour, and these cities which they built not, and these

vine-yards and olive yards which they planted not. "And now," said the Man of God, "choose you this day whom ye will serve: shall it be gods on the other side of the flood, or shall it be gods of the Amorites who live in contiguity to you, or shall it be Jehovah, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob? And they answered, and said. God forbid that we should forsake Jehovah to serve other gods; the Lord our God, Him will we serve, and His voice we will obey." Behold their goodness! what more could God have asked? But alas! inconstant people;—the bones of Joshua, and of the elders who survived him a little were scarcely gathered into the sepulchre,—when, an apostatizing crew, they bowed down to Baal and Ashteroth, and served the gods of the heathen; their goodness was but a morning cloud and the early dew.

Will you look in upon them once more, and mark their carriage under the government of the judges? These were men specially raised up, and set over the people as extraordinary deliverers from the different oppressions under which, from time to time, they suffered oppressions which God permitted to come upon them, in just retribution for their manifold apostacies. And what was that whole

period in their history, but a perpetual oscillation between a seeming repentance and a speedy relapse? Let Othniel arise, and so frank are their confessions, and so fervent their cries, and fair their promises, that we spontaneously exclaim, behold their goodness! Let Othniel die, and along with him the "cloud" is scattered, and the "dew" vanishes away.

And so it was at the appearing and the departure of "Shamgar," and "Deborah," and "Barack," and "Gideon," and "Tola," and "Jair," and "Jeptha," and "Ibsam," and "Elam," and "Abdom," and "Samson," and down to the death of "Samuel." Within that space of three hundred years, during which the judges reigned, the alternate making of promises by that people, and base violations of them, furnished I know not how many occasions for God to repeat the exclamation, "Oh, Ephraim, what shall I do to thee! Oh, Judah, what shall I do to thee!"

And here I cease to accumulate examples:—for surely, enough has been adduced;—and surely without collecting further evidence, we may consider the charge against Ephraim and Judah established. Their goodness was never solid, but always specious; their piety never was the abiding fruit of

principle, but only the uncertain result of circumstances.

And now by way of use and application, we proceed to generalize the charge. Will it be hard to do *so*? Was this feature so peculiar to Ephraim and Judah, as that they stood forth, an exception to the rest of mankind? Happy for us if that were true! but my brethren, it is the moral feature which gives complexion to the whole race of man, and was never peculiar to any of the families of earth! It is a trait which has been held in common by every generation. The most ancient, the most prevalent, the most abiding fact in human history, is their inconstancy; it is what we see around us perpetually—the sky is covered with these morning clouds: and the earth sparkles with this early dew.

Now attend, and see if you cannot discover in one, or perhaps in several of the following sketches, your own picture and history:—

Yonder behold a piously educated youth! Before the infant tongue could well stammer out the word, he was taught to say “Our Father, who art in heaven.” And maternal piety watched the early planting: what lessons of heavenly wisdom were not poured into the opening mind. Now the voice pathe-

tically told of Jesus, and how sweetly it woo'd those unfledged affections in language that took right hold upon the infant heart : frequently his eye grew moist as the little one sat on the mother's lap and listened. and the silent promise might almost have been interpreted then upon the face. " Your God shall be my God ! " Behold the goodness—but childhood has passed away, and where is the fulfilment ?

See the bud of promise a little later ! A message from the man of God reached him after that. Oh, there was something solemn in that consecrated church where he sat, that holy and beautiful house where his Fathers worshipped ! something deeply impressive in that sacramental table that he looked upon—something in that reverential movement of the people as they advanced, which found its way deep into his heart :—and when the congregation gathered round the cross, and like a young outcast, he stood afar off, and in that very remove was charged with guilt, and then with a kind pledge of acceptance was entreated to come to Jesus, Oh, there was something in that scene, and the spirit of that hour which he could not resist, and his inward heart replied " Lamb of God I come. " And when the night-shades gathered round him, and the solitary chamber was entered, there was a low

breathing prayer,—and when the searching eye of God rolled about, and rested upon those to whom the message of his love had that morning been sent, behold they found this one bathed in tears—and when the morning broke, and its early dawn shone into his chamber, once more was the youth upon his knees, and the blessed book was in his hand; behold his goodness! And yet seven days had not run their course, when his heart mingled merry with the gay, and the voice of laughter had stifled the sound of prayer, and the book of fiction usurped the place of eternal truth. Oh! Ephraim, Ephraim, was not your goodness as the morning cloud, and as the early dew?

(c.) Come see another. It is the child of affliction. A little while back his heart swelled nigh to bursting, over yonder grave. It was not the dull prose of some canting preacher who told him “earth is vain.” The conviction of its emptiness had been otherwise forced upon him, and so as human eloquence could never have impressed the truth. It was death that had stalked through his accustomed walks. It was the day of the Lord that had fallen upon the pleasantest of his pictures, and then from out of each wound in his bleeding heart, there

seemed to issue the voice of a penitent; "come," he said, reasoning with himself, "I will turn unto the Lord: He hath torn and he will heal me: he hath smitten and he will bind me up." Yet it was *but* a resolution, and whilst he loitered to execute it, he was stretched himself on a burning bed, and a skeleton hand there drew the curtain aside, and visions from across the gulf rushed thick and dreadful on his rolling eye. What a *confession* that was, "Father I have sinned, and am not worthy to be called thy child." What a *prayer* that was, "God be merciful to me a miserable sinner." What a *pledge* that was, "Raise me up and I consecrate this life to thy service." What an *abjuration* that was, "World, I renounce you for ever; sins I crucify you all; pleasures I'll count you no more; blessed angels and ministering friends, witness this vow," and he sealed it with a solemn "Amen." Behold his goodness! But the pulse softened down, the fever cooled off, and the morning cloud or the early dew were no longer to be seen.

Once more come with me, and I step this time into the church of Jesus Christ. Illustrations vivid and mournful as any the world can give, will meet you there, confirming our warrant to generalize this

charge. Mark that wretched professor who has but the name to live, and is pressing perpetually toward the verge of Apostacy. Is he never uneasy? Verily, he has a thousand misgivings. Does he never vow amendment then? Put your ear to his breast and listen, especially when he gets to the sacramental board. Cannot you interpret that murmuring sound? Were it not for the past inconstancy you might call it prophetic of a bright future. It is Ephraim bemoaning himself. "Surely," he says, "I have erred and strayed like a lost sheep. Lord, seek thy servant, lay not my sins to my charge: hereafter the spreading of this table shall find me better prepared for its solemnities. The world too shall not entice me from my closet as it hath done. The sabbath too shall be more sacredly observed; and that altar too, so long thrown down, shall be rear'd again in the bosom of my family, till I prove to thee a better child. Saviour, I'll prove to thee a more faithful disciple, and thou, striving spirit, I'll resist thee no more. Here's my vow: 'tis pledged over this broken body and this shed blood."

Behold his goodness! But look again! Do you recognise that man so frantic in his worship at the shrine of mammon? Do you hear his riotous laugh in the circle of the ungody? Do you mark how

from the early couch, and with hurried footsteps he rushes past the spot where Jesus waits an interview? Can you re-call his features? It is that bleeding, pleading communicant! and the moon has not quartered, since in the full view of Calvary, he bound himself over to an everlasting fidelity. Oh Ephraim, thy goodness was but a morning cloud.

And now my brethren, let every one of us be warned against trusting to these evanescent impressions. Fugitive as they be, and demonstrably unreliable, either as an evidence of present piety, or a pledge of future conversion, they do nevertheless make the foundation on which multitudes build in the absence of a better experience; and too often, as by a fatal magic, they unwarrantably calm the anxieties of the heart. Rightly interpreted they should awaken rather the deepest alarm. It is one of those ways, "which seemeth right for a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Viewed in their bearing Godward, what else can such perpetual oscillations be considered, but a solemn mockery of his mercy, a perilous trifling with his patience.

Viewed in their legitimate and necessary effect on our own heart, what other result can be looked for, than that, like the alternate application of fire and

water to the metal, they harden and stupefy, and ultimately render the man unimpressibly callous to every saving influence.

And are any of *you* interpreting favourably those very symptoms that augur such fatality? Alas! what kind of delusion is it that has seized upon so many of our fellow men? Be undeceived, if you *have* fallen into that mistake.

Rely upon it, this being hot now and cold presently—this weeping in the pew and laughing as you pass out of the church door—this grappling on the kingdom to-day, as if you would take it by force, and relinquishing your hold to-morrow, for a more convenient season—is the infallible receipt for ruin; and all these violated vows likewise, and these broken promises, and these banished impressions, and these purposes of future repentance—be sure you will meet them again, and when least anticipated, and where most you would avoid them: these are those spectres which so frequently enter the sick man's chamber, in advance of the undertaker and the sexton, commissioned to shroud the soul in the sheet of despair, and as its pall-bearers, tramp startlingly by its side, whilst borne onward to the grave that has no bottom.

KEBLE'S

SABBATH EVENING HYMN.

Sabbath Evening Hymn.

KEBLE

When the soft dews of kind-ly sleep My wearied eye-lids

gent-ly steep, Be my last thought how sweet to rest,

For ev-er on my Sav-iour's breast. For ev-er on my Sav-iour's breast.

Sun of my soul! thou Saviour dear,
It is not night if Thou be near :
Oh may no earth-born cloud arise,
To hide Thee from thy servant's eyes.

Abide with me from morn till eve,
For without Thee I cannot live :
Abide with me when night is nigh,
For without Thee I dare not die.

If some poor wandering soul of Thine
Have spurned to-day, the voice divine,
Now, Lord, the gracious work begin ;
Let her no more lie down in sin.

Come near and bless us when we wake,
Ere through the world our way we take ;
Till in the ocean of Thy love
We lose ourselves in Heaven above.

