

THE

PRINCETON PULPIT.

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RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT.

BY

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And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.—MARK i. 35.

THE extreme simplicity and conciseness, which characterize the Scripture narratives, veil, from the casual and unreflecting reader, their full beauty, richness and power. The mere outlines of scenes and incidents are often given, which, when viewed in the light of their attending circumstances, excite us by their interest and melting pathos, or become invested with grandeur and sublimity.

Our Saviour, we are told, had been laboriously engaged the day previous in relieving the afflicted and tormented; for “at even when the sun did set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.” Engaged, probably, in this benevolent work till late at night, He then retired to His couch; but not to rest. His soul was agonized by the sufferings of His creatures; the scenes of anguish and the sights of woe, which had so recently passed before Him, filled Him with sorrow. He, whose heart was so keenly sensitive to others’ grief, and so deeply touched with the feeling of our infirmities, was so burdened with pity and compassion, that

“ rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.”

This simple incident in the life of our Saviour should inspire us with love and gratitude to Him; and His example, in thus flying from the society of man, to seek in retirement and solitude that uninterrupted converse with His Father, that relief, that comfort, and that strength, which the world cannot give, should be sufficient to teach the Christian his duty in this respect, and to show him where he can enjoy the privilege of communion with his God. But when we find that *our Lord frequently and habitually sought retirement*, that He often withdrew from the multitudes who pressed so eagerly after Him, and, threading the mountain defiles, sought in its deep ravines and hidden recesses solitudes for secret prayer; when we see Him frequently retiring to that lovely garden “over the brook Kedron,” and amidst its solemn shades and leafy grottoes, praying and meditating; when we find Him there alone, during the last night before His crucifixion, engaged in agonizing prayer, and earnestly imploring strength from His Father in heaven, the fact becomes invested with tenfold import and interest to all who wish to follow in the footsteps of their Divine Exemplar.

God, *in creating man*, had this important duty and privilege in view. As with His other laws, so with regard to this part of His will, He has impressed its type upon nature. He created the day, with its busy, noisy life, and the quiet night, when stillness reigns and shuts the world from sight; the

restless ocean, with its ceaseless, loud-resounding diapason, and the gentle river, "winding at its own sweet will;" the roaring tempest, with its crashing thunders, and the sunny calm; the earth-shaking volcano, and at its foot the quiet vale. He not only created man a social being, with full capacities of receiving enjoyment from, and gifted him with faculties for imparting knowledge and pleasure to others, but He also supplied him with loftier faculties of soul, and conferred upon him the high privilege of communing with Him, thus affording him the power to cultivate that spiritual part of his being, which places him in the scale of creation "but a little lower than the angels." Therefore he was introduced into a terrestrial paradise of beauty, and surrounded with everything calculated to lift his thoughts to heaven. Out of its leafy luxuriance He formed for him attractive and secluded retreats—places where he might employ his time in contemplation and devotion. And here, in these lovely, sequestered spots, many a bright, angelic being, no doubt, conversed with Adam concerning the mysteries of the upper world, and unravelled the wonders of God's great universe; and here, too, God himself condescended to visit him. When the sun had sunk beneath the rocky ramparts of Paradise, their deepening shadows thickening the sombre twilight, when the beasts had couched to rest, and the carolling of the birds had ceased and they had folded their wings for sleep, when the winds had lulled to the softest zephyrs, and all na-

ture was hushed in repose, in the cool of the calm evening, God walked in the garden.

In accordance with the obvious wish of Jehovah, *the ancient saints*, whose biographies are given in the Old Testament, frequently practised this duty. How eminently was it characteristic of Daniel! Though his life was threatened in consequence, yet did he retire thrice a day to his chamber to pray. With what frequency did David seek retirement! How often do we find him communing with God through the still watches of the night! How often and how eagerly did he fly from regal pomp and the thronging, distracting cares of state, to enjoy the pleasure and privilege of secret prayer and meditation! The sweet music of that magic harp, now quickly vibrating with the joyous anthem of praise and triumph, now trembling with the soft, plaintive notes of sorrow and contrition, has been floated down through ages, finds a responsive echo in the heart of every Christian, and will roll its undulations into the concert of everlasting song.

The primitive Christians, also, practised this duty to a great extent. Prevented by their relentless persecutors from worshipping in public assemblies; hunted like wild beasts; driven from the abodes of men to the shelter of mountains and almost impenetrable forests; in these rocky retreats, in the subterranean caverns of the earth, they adored their God in secret, secure from the intrusion of those who thirsted for their blood. Oh! how precious did this privilege at length become! What sweet sanctuaries were these gloomy rocks

and caves! How often, from these deep ravines, overhung with dark, beetling crags, did the songs of praise and the voice of earnest, soul-wrestling prayer ascend as a cloud of rich, inextinguishable incense to the skies? Highly did they appreciate and enjoy this constant communion with God, for they learned to feel that it was not always solitude to be alone. So powerful was its influence upon those compelled by persecution to resort to it, that men, in later times, mistaking the cause, attributing to solitude and seclusion what was due to the motive which prompted, and the proper and sacred employment of it, sought this retirement from different motives and for other purposes. Many, becoming disgusted with society, and disappointed in their aspirations after wealth, power, and worldly happiness, turned misanthropes, and leaving the busy haunts of men, shut themselves up in caverns and secluded places, there in sullenness to brood over their disappointments and nurse their contempt and hatred of society and of their fellow-creatures. Others made it a pretext for extraordinary piety and sanctity, and thus was originated the unscriptural, pernicious system of monasticism.

But here we have an instance of the beautiful consistency which characterized the life of our Saviour. The whole of the preceding day, even far into the night, He had been actively engaged in relieving suffering humanity, in curing the diseased, and in casting out devils. Although He retired to the mountain to pray, it was after He had fed the thousands who resorted to Him, and preached to

them the word of life. He combined the most laborious efforts to promulgate the blessed Gospel, and relieve the diseased, with frequent seclusion.

To us, however, the days of persecution are over. Every man can here worship God under his own vine and fig-tree, without fear or molestation. The recluse belongs to other times, and is viewed as the being of a romantic, obsolete age; and, thank God! that night of the world is passing away. But have we not some reason to fear that the practice of religious retirement, the frequent, habitual communion with God, which distinguished primitive Christianity, is passing away with them? Is not this duty, in our day, too much neglected? We fear that such is the case. The enterprises of the Church do indeed demand the most energetic activity of Christians, but should not supersede the duty of retired contemplation and devotion. Christ felt as fully the need of activity as any modern Christian. He had as great an appreciation of the vastness of the field of labour, of the world lying in wickedness, as the most active now. None will deny that He laboured as much, as incessantly as the most devoted Christian of the present day, and yet He often retired and spent hours, aye, whole nights, in secret prayer and meditation. The fact is, men are so prone to place reliance on their own efforts, that they are constantly multiplying machinery, and their time and attention are so much absorbed in its improvement in the vain expectation of creating power; there is so much time con-

sumed in parade and ostentatious efforts, that they acquire very little relish for private supplication to God. The same Great Master, who commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations, also advised the Christian—"when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly," and thy labours also. If Christians would resort more frequently to their closets, and thus become more deeply imbued with the spirit of their Master, and of those who devoted their whole substance to the service of Christ, we might, probably, have fewer plans and eloquent speeches, less theatrical Christianity, but more efficient labourers and more fruit.

The importance of religious retirement cannot be doubted in such an age as ours, in which there is so much error and infidelity, and when the very activity and excitement, connected with our ecclesiastical operations, are adapted to divert us from the maintenance and culture of personal and spiritual piety. The tendency of the age is to scepticism, of an insinuating, plausible kind. It does not stalk abroad in its bold, repulsive character, with the hideous, hell-glazed features of vile and blasphemous infidelity, but comes in the attractive dress of liberality, of fashionable maxim, with the soft whisper of expediency and worldly policy. We must suit our conduct, our plans to the prevailing tastes of the day; we must not shock the world by singularity, but yield as far as possible to its

fashions, its theories, and its forms. Thus we are gradually led from the truth, and begin to look for motives and principles in the world, which ought to be searched for only in the will of God. How necessary that we should frequently withdraw from these seductive wiles of our enemies, that we may carefully examine them in the pure light of God's truth, and detect their falsity! How anxious we should be that our breastplate and heavenly armour be entire and impenetrable, even to the finest pointed shaft of infidelity and error! How steadily should we keep in view that bright ray of light which streams from the upper world to guide our steps, for

“The world's infectious; few bring back at eve,
“Immaculate, the manners of the morn.”

Not from this source alone, as we have just intimated, is the Christian in danger. In the present day, his mind is apt to be filled with great operations. The conversion of a single soul, the salvation of his neighbour or child is too insignificant for his enlarged and expanded views. His own personal defects and spiritual wants are gilded by the illusive brightness of the world-grasping plans in which he is engaged, his own individuality is swallowed up in the magnitude and magnificence of the world-regenerating engines in impetuous action around him;—their thunderings drown that still, small voice, which whispers to his own heart, entreating an audience. He is caught in the rushing blast of enthusiasm, dashed along for awhile in the

wake of these powerful engines, but gradually the fires of his own piety go out, the needle has rusted on its pivot, and he is left at last a sailless, chartless wreck upon the treacherous sea of the world. He is like the philosopher, who spent his whole time and patrimony in endeavouring to discover some principle, some magic stone, to save the race from hunger and from want, and died himself at last of poverty and starvation. How insiduously does this out-of-door Christianity operate! How soon, when not balanced and regulated by personal piety, do we become puffed up with self-righteousness, with great conceit of the power and influence we are wielding! How seductive the world's applause! How it betrays us into ostentatious benevolence! How tame and tiresome does that quiet closet become, where are no hosannas to greet our ears, no trumpeting of good works that are seen of men, no brilliant schemes, but the secret converse with our own poor, sinful hearts, the humiliating spectacle of our utter unworthiness and the sense of our necessary and entire dependence upon God. I would not undervalue these organizations and public enterprises. They are powerful means for the glory of God and the salvation of men, but they are still mere means, engines 'tis true with tremendous capacities, but in themselves possessing no power. The power must come from God. Without his blessing, they are worse than useless. That power is called into action by the true holiness of his children. It can be obtained only by the assiduous culture of personal piety, by communion

with him, and by constant prayer. This is the grand conductor between earth and heaven. It is prayer that "moves the hand that moves the world."

It is a great mistake to suppose that they are the most efficient who are always out in the world and in a constant state of bustle and excitement. Christians are too apt to gauge their usefulness, and calculate the success of their plans by the numbers engaged in carrying them forward, and the amount of excitement attending their operations. How often do they measure God's blessing by the number of dollars and cents contributed towards their prosecution! But this is a delusion. The humblest Christian in his closet may be more powerful than the greatest organization. See yon mighty vessel ploughing the ocean, dashing the spray in clouds around its resistless prow; hear the thundering roar of its machinery; the soul of that leviathan, he who governs it at will and directs its course through the stormy, trackless deep, and controls its hidden forces, is in that retired spot upon deck, the quietest being in the ship;—it is he, who has his eye fixed upon the compass, and his hand upon the helm.

Besides in such great enterprises there is the more urgent need of calm, prayerful deliberation, and consultation, not with your weak, short-sighted fellow-mortal, but with God, the author and finisher of every good word and work.

Even for worldly purposes, men find occasional and sometimes frequent retirement necessary.

The *Merchant* often secludes himself for the purpose of forming and arranging his plans. How his mind becomes absorbed with the calculations which involve his pecuniary advancement, in estimating the chances of success in certain enterprises, or in designing means for extricating his property from threatened loss! And do not you find it necessary to withdraw from the exciting and distracting scenes of life, to examine into your account with high heaven? Are you not interested in ascertaining how you stand with your Maker, who will demand a full account of the manner in which you have employed the talents committed to your care? Is it of no importance to you to discover how you may increase your treasure in heaven, a treasure more precious far than all the untold wealth of gold and gems buried in a thousand mines?—Look at that *Philosopher*, bending with intensest interest over alembic and crucible, watching far into the still night the mysterious operations of nature, striving to elicit a knowledge of the laws which keep the created universe in harmonious movement, or to deduce some principle which may contribute to the comfort, the health and the happiness of mankind. And do you feel no desire to investigate the laws of God's moral government? Is not a knowledge of his will as important to you as that of the laws of nature to the philosopher? You cannot be truly devoted to Christ without feeling something of the same absorbing interest, of the same desire to commune with the Father of lights, and to obtain from him.

grace to fit you for your Christian duties. Will you, can you go through life without constantly supplicating God to make you instrumental in saving your fellow-men from that fearful wrath to come? Should the Philosopher consume his time and energies for the benefit of man's physical being, and you not feel it a duty to obtain power and direction from on high, to release them from the bonds of iniquity, and the degradation of sin, and doint out to them the path to eternal felicity? shall the *Poet* court retirement and solitude, that he may indulge in the enjoyments of fancy, revel in the vast, beautiful regions of imagination, and send forth his winged thoughts to bring him unsubstantial visions from the ideal world; and will you refuse to retire that you may commune with the Father of spirits and meditate with rapture upon the glorious scenes of that bright world to which you are an heir, whose splendours far transcend the brightest vision of the *Poet's* dream?

Religious retirement affords *the best opportunity for increasing our religious knowledge.* The value of this is obvious from the truth that *religious knowledge is essential to a true and saving faith.* Faith is the Christian's telescope;—it is the key of heaven;—"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." We must have some true knowledge of God's holy law; of our moral condition, and of the plan of salvation, or we can have no true and saving faith; and the more sanctified light we possess, the more intelligent and acceptable will be our faith. Now, as retirement

affords us the best opportunities for increasing our religious knowledge, it is in this respect of great advantage. The objects that we seek are impalpable, and invisible to the mortal eye. The great God, the Holy Spirit; the denizens of the skies, the celestial city and its mansions not made with hands, its

—————“ Choral song, and burst
Sublime of instrumental harmony,”

are, to the gross senses of the world, vague, indistinct, unappreciable mysteries. For, as it is written, “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth the deep things of God.” The true Christian, who delights in communion with the Holy Spirit, and meditates upon his law, daily acquires a stronger vision and gains a clearer and more distinct appreciation of heavenly realities. They begin to assume for him a distinctness almost equal to that of the objects of natural sense around him; and eventually he is impressed with the unsubstantial, fleeting character of terrestrial things, and the greater permanency and reality of the heavenly world; for,

“ All, all on earth is shadow, all beyond
Is substance.”

In the scientific world, Bacon is a striking example of this wonderful power of knowledge. Becoming intimately acquainted with the workings

of nature and deeply versed in her laws, he was enabled to penetrate far into the future, and view results such as when described by him, were looked upon as romantic extravagance, rivalling and surpassing the fabled wonders of eastern story; and yet the greatest of these visions have been realized. The mighty power of steam is doing the work of the world, impelling sailless vessels which outstrip the wind, and the chariot exceeding in velocity the fleet horse of the desert;—thoughts are flying with the quickness of light around the globe, and the lightning has been forced to act as the amanuensis of man. Thus the Christian, by becoming familiar with the oracles of God, by meditating upon heavenly themes, can acquire an insight of divine things, surpassed only by inspiration. He can thus acquire a faith which is firm, a knowledge which is certain. Thus it was with those blessed martyrs of old, of whom the world was not worthy. By constant intercourse with their God, through their high attainments in divine knowledge, they obtained that powerful faith which supported them through privation, suffering, even the tortures of cruel deaths. God and heaven were to them not merely beautiful imagery, but glorious, living realities, and many a feeble saint, sustained by it, could look joyfully through the fierce flames that were consuming the quivering fibres of their bodies, up to the serene skies above, and see the heavens open, the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God, and the angelic squadrons waiting to escort them to the Lamb slain for them, and for whom he held

ready the martyr's crown of glory. Milton, with his wonderful imagination, which could wing its unwearied flight back through unnumbered ages, and hold him an awed spectator of conflicting hosts, the mighty warfare of Michael and his angelic band with Satan and his swarming myriads of lost and fallen fiends, which could circle in its steady flight the sulphurous atmosphere of hell, and view its dreary caverns, its hideous monsters, and its scenes of horrid, never-ending woe, and then soar to the shining realms of light, gaze with eye undimmed upon the sapphire battlements of heaven, and listen to the entrancing strains of its great chorus of bursting hallelujahs and harping symphonies, possessed no greater privilege than the humblest saint, who, in his secret meditations, dwells upon the glories of his promised heaven, or bathes his soul in the pure light of revelation. Let me take you to yonder cell. The massive walls shut in a human being from the world. Look through the grating. There he sits, wrapt in meditation. The walls are bare, and the rough, untapestried stones chill you with a sense of cheerless solitude and sad loneliness. Yet that prisoner feels not alone. To him, this secluded solitude is more glorious than all the pomps and pageant of the world. That contracted, gloomy cell more enchanting than the thronged presence-chamber of the most potent monarch upon earth. Scenes are passing before his mind, which in beauty and grandeur defy the painter's power to embody, and mock the faintness of his most brilliant tints. The whole Christian life is before him;—he sees

him arrested by divine truth, follows him eagerly to the cross, accompanies him through his toilsome journey. He trembles for his safety in the dark valley and shadow of death, his blood is chilled by the terrific fiends who there assail and attempt to destroy him, he sits down with him in that paradise of loveliness, the land of Beulah, and drinks of the cool, refreshing waters of life. He looks through the shepherd's glass, and feels the thrill of ecstatic delight as he catches with him the first prospect of the celestial city. He sees him passing through the icy river of death, emerging from its dark waters and entering the gates of the New Jerusalem. He sees him passing up through the long vista of glorified spirits, and the crown placed upon his head amidst myriads of angels shouting the anthems of victory, and striking their jewelled harps of gold. Need I tell you that the humble artizan, John Bunyan, was enabled by meditation and private contemplation to obtain these wonderful visions, and to view and record with such vividness all the incidents of the Christian pilgrim's life,—his hopes—his fears—his temptations—his struggles,—his victories and his glorious reward? Such divine knowledge, such an insight of the spiritual world may every Christian obtain, who withdraws himself more and more from earth, and meditates on heaven.

Religious knowledge is also necessary to *correct practice*. Without a knowledge of the will of God, how shall we regulate our conduct in consistency with our duty? Without intelligence, how can we

properly apportion our time and means and personal exertions? Without religious knowledge, how shall we be able to persevere? The reason why some are so inconsistent, indiscreet and fickle, is, because they are so ignorant of the nature of true religion and its divine requirements. Hence, the Apostle says, that men are alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them. They are so much in the world, and so seldom with God, that whilst their tastes, their pursuits, and their conduct, are becoming more and more allied to earth, they gradually lose all spiritual attainments, until at last God is scarcely in their thoughts.

Moreover, religious knowledge is essential to *our personal sanctification*. "Sanctify them by thy truth, thy word is truth." Now, if religious knowledge is thus indispensable to faith and practice and personal holiness, and if religious retirement affords the best opportunities for the acquisition of such knowledge, then must its advantages in this respect be invaluable. In order that man may regain the divine image in which he was created, that he may fulfil the divine injunction, "be ye holy, for I am holy," he must endeavour to become assimilated to his Maker, by frequently communing with him, and seeking to become thoroughly pervaded by the Holy Spirit, and intimately acquainted with, and entirely subject to his will.

Religious retirement is necessary to *a due and profitable self-examination*. In the busy world, how can this be accomplished? The objects around

us, the excitement connected with our pursuits, the false, distorted views which the world gives to everything examined through its medium, preclude anything like an honest examination of our hearts. Its uproar and contentions, its cares and perturbations penetrate to and agitate our inmost soul. It is in retirement alone, in the calm serenity of seclusion that we can look in upon ourselves, and lay bare all those secret springs of action so carefully concealed from the world. Here we can duly estimate the motives that are actuating our conduct. Here we can calmly review the grounds of our professed interest in the Saviour and the evidences of our faith. It is in retirement that we can be honest with ourselves. Here are no inducements to dissimulation and concealment. We feel that we are in the presence of the heart-searching God, and are constrained to cry out, "Lord search me and try me, show me all my defects, my wants and my sinfulness." It is under such searching investigations, such deep probings of the conscience, that we can know our true position. Like the mariner, then, when out of sight of land, with ocean around him, and the sky above, resort to the compass of divine truth, study well its cardinal points, examine thoroughly the records of your past progress, so that you may be able to steer this richly-freighted bark heavenward, and to detect the slightest swerving from its safe and proper path.

In retirement, we have *the best opportunity for confession and contrition*. What Christian is not painfully sensible of constant transgressions of the

law of God?—of great and numerous omissions of duty? How rapidly do these sins accumulate! How they oppress and burden the conscience! He must have relief. The instincts of our nature even, demand a confidant; the heart is tortured by its own consciousness of guilt. Where will he fly from the compunctions of conscience, the lashings of remorse. To whom will he, can he fully confide the sad story of his weaknesses and transgressions? Will he lay his heart bare to the cold gaze of his fellow-sinner? Even the nearest friends sometimes cruelly abuse the confidence reposed in them. Where else can he go, but to his gracious Father, against whom he has offended, and there in solitude, upon his bended knees, exclaim, “against thee, thee only, have I sinned,” and freely confess all the evil he has done. There he can confess fully those secret sins which he would not reveal to his bosom friend. There he feels certain of being understood, when telling God of those sins that do so easily beset him, and with a heart overflowing with emotion, he pours out his soul in sorrow, assured that Christ will not reject him on account of his vileness, that a contrite and broken heart he will not despise. Besides, as many sins may, at the time of their commission, be either unnoticed or else inadequately repented of, it is necessary that we should retire from the world habitually, in order that they may be recalled,—that we may dwell more seriously upon their character and aggravations,—repent of them more sincerely and

deeply, and resolve and pray for grace to enable us to guard against them in future.

Another advantage of retirement is, that it enables us *to obtain more correct views of this world.*

Whilst engaged in its active pursuits and pleasures, we are often under a delusion, and become the victims of our own folly. Well may this world be compared to a great theatre, whose players are madmen. Phantoms are flitting amongst the thronging crowds who view them as realities. Ambition, holding forth its fading laurel,—sharp-featured Avarice, with his piles of gold,—rosy-crowned Pleasure, beaming with her deceitful smiles, and presenting to her followers the cup of sparkling death,—these, and a host of others, are pursued and courted with the most unbounded eagerness. There we see the votaries of Ambition, wasting the energies of a whole life in struggling up to some eminence which elevates them a little above those immediately around them, and yet, scarcely have they placed their feet upon it, when it begins to crumble beneath them, scarcely has the flush of success faded from their excited features, when the laurel is snatched from their brows, and placed by the fickle crowd upon another god of the hour. What thousands do we see toiling from the rising to the setting sun, whose eyes are never turned upward to behold God's glorious universe, but fixed upon the earth, grovelling like worms, all their energies, thoughts and aspirations devoted to the work of scraping together a few handfuls of glittering dust, only to drop from their tight grasp, as

the icy finger of death palsies the hands which hold it. Amidst this ardour of excitement, amidst this struggling, panting crowd, the Christian often becomes infected with the like passions, and overcome by the spell of the tempter, is drawn within the charmed circle, and almost entirely forgets and loses sight of his great destiny and the realities of his heavenly inheritance. But let him turn aside, and calmly contemplate the scenes of earth. How different do they appear! How vain! How transient! Who, in such an hour, can restrain the exclamation, "what shadows we are, what shadows we pursue?" He has retired to the solitude of his chamber; his memory runs back through his past life. It is busy with the scenes and companions of his youth. Where are they now? Gone to the dark and silent tomb. Their familiar voices greet not his ear, their forms no longer meet his eye. How quickly did they pass away! What is the world with all its honours, its wealth, its pleasures, now to them? What will their value be to us when called to leave them for ever? Our early views and high expectations, how few have ever been realized! The honors that we have won and worn, how empty have they proved themselves to be! And the scenes which now surround us,—the objects of present pursuit,—the aspirations and hopes which now animate and impel our souls, are they not equally vain? Will they not prove as certainly illusive? Contemplation now unfolds her wings, and rising above the hazy atmosphere, places us upon some lofty eminence. The world is

beneath us. The loud roar of its merriment cannot be heard so high, the swelling chorus of the orchestra ravishes not our ears, the insignia of worldly honour, the gorgeous robes of wealth and power cannot be discerned, even the bright gems of her richest diadems flash no gleam of light. We can merely see the crowds hurrying to and fro, pursuing with avidity the shadows which are ever mocking their expectations and eluding their embrace. How rapidly do they disappear in the graves at their very feet! The earth closes over them, and there those pampered bodies for whose welfare souls have been lost, lie amidst the decaying myriads who have preceded them, and quickly moulder into dust. We see change, constant change, nothing substantial, nothing satisfactory, nothing permanent. We gaze around upon the mighty mountains, appearing as though they at least were built for eternity, rooted in the heart of earth, and piercing the heavens with their snow-capped summits,

. "and yet,
"What are they, but a wreck and residue
"Whose only business is to perish."

We rise higher. Earth, with its lofty mountains, its extended plains, and its vast oceans, has dwindled to a point. We are surrounded by immense, magnificent planets;—thousands and tens of thousands of worlds are rolling in awful majesty and grandeur around blazing centres;—as far as the

strained vision can reach millions more are flaming in remoter fields.

“A flood of glory bursts from all the skies.”

We are bewildered and overpowered in this vast, mazy splendour of circling orbs. What are all these but the golden dust of the universe, which God has poured forth to beautify and adorn his footstool? What but

“A constellation of ten thousand gems

“Set in one signet, flames on the right hand

“Of majesty divine,

the “blazing seal of his Omnipotence and Love.” These shall all perish, and as a vesture shall God fold them up.—We ascend still higher, up through the starry hosts to the ineffable centre and source of all glory, the throne of God. Tell me, now, what is yonder earth? What its heaps of hoarded wealth compared with these jasper walls, gates of pearl, crystal foundations and golden streets? What its hollow, death-drugged pleasures compared with that flood of ecstatic bliss which rolls its ceaseless tide throughout the realms of light? What are all the tinselled glories of earth, its diadems and gorgeous robes, the baubles of royalty and power, what its greatest pageants, compared with that presented by thousand upon ten thousand thousand saints thronging around the great white throne, crowned with the flashing, full-gemmed coronals of heaven? What are all earth’s painted insignificancies compared with the untold splendours of the New Jerusalem?

Such contemplations, retrospections and reflections cannot but make us wiser and better men;—they cannot but moderate our worldly desires, because they enable us to set a truer estimate upon all earthly things. Behold the effect upon the Puritans, as recorded by the pen of impartial history. “Their minds derived a peculiar character from the daily contemplation of superior beings and eternal interests. To know God, to serve him, to enjoy him, was with them the great end of existence. They rejected with contempt the ceremonious homage which other sects substituted for the pure worship of the soul. Instead of catching occasional glimpses of the Deity through an obscuring veil, they aspired to gaze full on the intolerable brightness, and to commune with him face to face. The difference between the greatest and meanest of mankind seemed to vanish when compared with the boundless interval which separated the whole race from Him on whom their eyes were constantly fixed. If they were unacquainted with the works of philosophers and poets, they were deeply read in the oracles of God. If their names were not found in the registers of heralds, they felt assured that they were recorded in the Book of Life. If their steps were not accompanied by a splendid train of menials, legions of ministering angels had charge over them. Their palaces were houses not made with hands: their diadems crowns of glory which should never fade away. For his sake empires had risen, flourished and decayed. For his sake the Almighty

had proclaimed his will by the pen of the evangelist and the harp of the prophet. He had been rescued by no common deliverer from the grasp of no common foe. He had been ransomed by the sweat of no vulgar agony, by the blood of no earthly sacrifice. It was for him that the sun had been darkened, that the rocks had been rent, that the dead had arisen, that all nature had shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God."

Finally, the contemplations which are appropriate and natural to the pious in retirement, are strongly adapted *to improve their affections, and to increase their attachment to heaven.*

While reflecting upon the vanity of all earthly attainments and pleasures;—while surveying the melancholy wreck of our fondest and most cherished hopes,—while contemplating the uncertainty and shortness of our present career,—how natural it is to turn our attention to those spiritual and heavenly objects which are certain, solid and enduring! The heart, that will and must have some object of interest and affection, turns to these with increased desire, confidence and pleasure. From the vain pursuits of earth,—its unsatisfying possessions and enjoyments,—its sins and sorrows,—its crushed hopes—its hidden griefs and mortal agonies, the soul looks upward and yearns for heaven.

There are, indeed, some green and sunny spots in his earthly pilgrimage, upon which the Christian can look back with pious and grateful satisfaction. The period of his conversion to God—the hours which were spent in devotion—his works of benev-

olence and piety—the sacrifices he has made—the trials he has endured for Jesus' sake are still remembered with lively gratitude and heart-felt pleasure. But will not the recollection and contemplation of these excite and elevate and spiritualize still more the affections and aims of his soul? Will he not long for, and weep and pray for the renewal of his better days? Will he not covet the experience of equal, if not superior communications and displays of the love and grace and power of his God? And will not the recollection of the pleasure which he experienced in communion with God, imperfect as it was, increase his desire to be admitted into the presence and perfect enjoyment of God in heaven?