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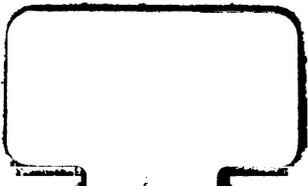
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A D V E R T I S E M E N T .

THE following discourse hath nothing else to recommend it, than the importance of the subject. This, indeed, is confessedly great. The author himself, as a compound being, partakes in the vanity of the things he describes. He is now acting his part on this transitory theatre, and must soon pass into one which will be fixed and permanent. The form of the work is like to be but of momentary existence ; but the matter which it exhibits will be an eternal verity. And if the men who are now wholly immersed in the distracting cares of business, or are continually whirled about by the enchanting dissipations of pleasure, would allow themselves an hour or two, occasionally, for the consideration of it, they would, in all probability, act their parts better on this stage of time, and pass into a world of eternal realities, with less regret, and with more of peace, joy and exultation, than they generally do. To lead to, and assist in, this important consideration, is the motive of the author : May a divine blessing crown his endeavours with success. Amen.

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The transitory and evanescent nature of
all Sublunary things, from

CORINTHIANS, vii. 31.

—*The fashion of this world passeth away.*

THE inordinate love of this present world,
and an undue attachment to its pleasures and interests, is the greatest source of delusion in human nature. It is the fatal precipice, the hidden rock, over which miriads of thoughtless sinners tumble headlong into the pit of destruction. It is the broad way in which blind and stupid mortals are daily crowding down to the chambers of death.

The apostle *John* sums up *all that is in the world* under three articles—*The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life.* These are generally termed by philosophers and divines, the *pleasures, profits and honours of the world*, which are the three principal ob-

jects about which the corrupt lusts and appetites in the hearts of finners are employed. And there is not one impenitent sinner, among the sons and daughters of *Adam*, who is not under the absolute dominion of some *one*, if not *all* of these lusts; who does not pursue some *one*, if not all of these objects, as his chief end and highest happiness; who does not place his choicest affections upon them, and employ his greatest care and thoughtfulness about them.

SOME are entirely devoted to the brutal pleasures of eating and drinking, and make gods of their bellies. Their chief care is to live sumptuously, and they would pawn their very souls for a dainty morsel.

OTHERS, who, perhaps, are neither gluttons nor drunkards, yet, like the filthy swine, are continually wallowing in the lusts of concupiscence. Their thoughts are nothing but a sink of pollution and defilement, and they can scarce open their eyes upon the world,

but they behold some object which inflames their impure desires, and defiles their conscience. Their very dreams are scenes of debauchery, and every desire is an act of adultery or uncleanness.

OTHERS, again, are so much under the dominion of sloth and indolence ; devote so much of their time to sleep and loitering, that they had almost rather steal or starve, than draw a hand out of their bosoms, or employ themselves in any lawful industry to obtain an honest livelihood. And these drones are not only dead weights on society ; but have also *denied the Christian faith, and are worse than industrious infidels.*

Now, all these *make provision for the flesh,* to fulfil the brutish lusts thereof. They may be termed a set of *rational swine,* who deserve not the name of men, much less of *Christians.*

BESIDES these, there are another species of idolators in the world, commonly known

by the name of *misers*. These men, tho' not altogether such sensual brutes as the former, yet have an equally mean passion, and worship as base an idol. *Gain* is their greatest god-linefs; and whether they obtain it honestly, or otherwise, is seldom matter of conscience with such. The heavenly inheritance, or the eternal happiness of their souls, is a very small risque where there is a pretty certain prospect of money. The object of their choicest affections, the idol of their souls, is locked up in their coffers; and their charity is, generally, so cold, that the poor and needy seldom taste of their liberality. I need not, however, detain you longer with these persons. The world knows them so well, and hates them so cordially, that they seldom fail, even in this life, to meet with sufficient mortification.

ANOTHER class of men, of a cast of mind a little more refined and elevated indeed than the former, but who are equally slaves

to the world, are intoxicated with the idle dreams of *greatness*, and are the dupes of *ambition*. These are troubled with a lower species of *Alexander's* frenzy, who would have himself to be thought a *god*, and worshipped by the credulous and superstitious world as the son of *Jupiter Ammon*. And were it not a very serious subject which I am upon, and a soul-destroying delusion which I am exposing, it would be diverting enough to take a survey of the trifles, toys, and vanities; the little supernumerary advantages, and childish baubles which the proud and ambitious part of mankind so eagerly pursue, so much pique themselves upon; and, on account of which, they think themselves intitled to the wonder and adoration of the world.

SOME think they are mightily set above the common level of mankind, by being descended from rich or honourable parents, and imagine that a peculiar deference is indispensibly

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due them on that account.—Others, who cannot boast so much of pedigree, are excessively lifted up in their own minds, because they have, by some chance or other, met with more success in the world than their neighbours, and have amassed more plentiful fortunes than they. They measure their merit and importance by their acres or their interest, and think the world does them injustice, if it does not pay them a great deal of deference and veneration on account of their riches. And truly it must be confessed, that *these* seldom want their share of admirers and flatterers to feed their vanity: though they would do well to consider, at the same time, that it is their *wealth* and not their *persons*, which is so much adored and caressed.

OTHERS, again, are so dazzled and overwhelmed by a sense of their power and elevation of rank, that they almost forget they are *men*, and would have such as are below them possessed with a notion that they are some-

thing above *their* order of beings: not considering that they are only superior by virtue of their office, and that the power and tenure by which they hold that office, is, under GOD, immediately derived from that very people whom they affect to despise. *These*, however, seldom fail to be cherished in their delusion by the voice of flatterers and fawning sycophants.

OTHERS are extremely anxious to be thought wise, learned and politic, and when they have once got themselves persuaded into this opinion, are very much displeased if the world is not of their mind and treats them not accordingly.

NAY, notwithstanding the modishness of vice in the present age, and how much disadvantage it is to a man's character, in a fashionable company, to appear *sober* and *pious*; yet there are not wanting some, even in this libertine and licentious age, who are ambitious of assuming this character, and

appearing *religious* ; and nothing could more offend them, than to suspect their *sincerity*.

OTHERS are so charmed with their beauty, strength, agility or gay attire, that they think themselves sufficiently intitled to the attention of the world on these accounts.

AND as mankind, in general, are so blind and prejudiced as to pay an undue esteem to these outward perishing things, while true moral excellence, unaffected virtue, and inward purity and rectitude are unnoticed and neglected ; so the ambitious part of the world eagerly pursue the *former*, while they overlook and despise the *latter*. They earnestly desire to be thought rich, noble, powerful, learned, politic, gay or beautiful, because these things generally meet with flattery and popular applause ; while piety, virtue and sobriety, which are unfashionable accomplishments, and have their approbation and reward in an invisible world, are passed over without any esteem or regard.

THUS various are the shapes in which the love of the world presents itself to mankind, and draws off their hearts and affections from GOD, religion and eternity.

NOW, as the friendship of this world, is enmity against GOD—As the love of the FATHER cannot dwell in a breast possessed by so impure and base a passion—Nor is it possible that a soul can be devoted to the service of its Maker, and at the same time, a servant to its lusts, a slave to the honors, profits and pleasures which surround it in this perishing scene of things. In a word, as we must either determine to overcome the world, or be overcome by it—either resolve to disengage our affections from its love and pursuit, or to suffer the loss of our souls—So, it is the great business of religion to wean our affections from the things of time and sense, and fix them on future and eternal objects—to moderate our esteem of the present evil world, by shewing its emptiness and vanity, its un-

fatisfactory nature and short duration, and set before us the prize of immortal glory.

AND, perhaps, there is not, in the Christian religion, a more proper argument for this important purpose than is contained in our text—namely—“*That the fashion of this world passeth away :*” That all the glittering appearances which captivate thoughtless sinners, are of a *transitory perishing* nature. They pass away like so many shadows in the moonshine, or like so many golden dreams which please and delude the imagination but a few moments, and so leave the expectation disappointed ; and, therefore, are not to be sought after in the *first place*, or with the *greatest earnestness*.

THE apostle, in the former part of the chapter, had been advising the *Corinthians* about the inexpediency of marriage in that troublesome and distressed condition in which the Christian Church was soon about to be involved, by the persecution of *Nero*—inti-

mating to them that the care of a family in those perilous times, would be attended with a great deal of trouble and difficulty. Wherefore he advises, *That such as already had wives,* should so far abate their fondness for them, *as tho' they had none;* that *they who wept* should be *as tho' they wept not;* *they that rejoiced,* as *tho' they rejoiced not;* *they that bought,* as *tho' they possessed not;* and *they that used this world,* as *not abusing it*—And then adds this general reason, of universal use in all ages of the world and circumstances of life—**FOR THE FASHION OF THIS WORLD PASSETH AWAY.**

I SHALL, by the divine assistance,
1st, **CONSIDER** a little the sense and import of the phrase.

2dly, **PROVE** the truth of the observation, and shew, in a few instances, how the fashion of this world passeth away.

3dly, **DRAW** some practical inferences from the doctrine.

I. I AM a little to consider the sense and import of the phrase.

By the *fashion of the world*, we are doubtless here to understand all that may be called properly *sublunary*; all the objects of our senses, appetites, desires, and pursuits, which are limited and confined to this present world, this transitory scene of things; its customs and manners, its pleasures and enjoyments, its schemes, projects, cares, amusements and vanities; all that, in short, which now engages the eager pursuit of its busy inhabitants. These various fashions and appearances have a speedy period. They are passing away like the morning cloud and early dew. Death will soon hush up all in profound silence, and there will be an end of all things here below.

The words in the original are very emphatical, and some of the ablest critics have observed, that the apostle (who is well known to be frequent, ingenious, and striking in his allusions) seems here to allude to the ancient Greek and

Roman theatres. The Greek word *χρῆμα*, which we translate *fashion*, may, we are told, be as well translated *scene* or *masquerade*. If it be taken in the *first sense*, the allusion is to the *theatre* or *stage*, where the *actors* assume and personate various fictitious characters, and act their several parts an hour or two, for the amusement of the spectators. But when the play is finished and the curtain drop'd, the several actors are divested of their imaginary characters, and borrowed forms, and appear again in their original meanness and insignificance. The fictitious emperors, kings, heroes, statesmen, and politicians, being strip'd of their tinsel'd ornaments, are converted into mere stage-players, and are intitled to no farther honour nor applause, than as they have acted their parts well. How apposite and striking is this allusion? How justly and elegantly is *this world*, and the state of mankind in it, held forth to us under this metaphor?

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For, what else is this world but a great *stage* or *theatre*, whose scenes are as shifting and variable, and whose characters are as vain and phantastic as the former? What a mighty noise, bustle, and parade have we amongst the great and conspicuous characters of this world? How do they shine, and figure away, and fill the world with the eclat of their great exploits and mighty achievements, while the poor, laborious, and most useful part of mankind creep along the stage, either covered with obscurity, or loaded with contempt? Well, in a short time, the curtain is drop'd, and all these vain phantoms disappear. Death, that mighty leveller, sweeps all the busy actors off the stage of time, strip'd of all their short-liv'd honours and ornaments; and being all brought upon a level, they go down promiscuously to the grave in their original nakedness and meanness, and are mingled without distinction with their sister worms and kindred clay. Thus they pass away as

a tale that is told, and in a few years the very remembrance of them perisheth !

AN eminent critic on this place has still gone farther, and shewed that the folly and infatuation of the busy actors on the theatre of this world, even exceed that of stage-players : for, that no stage-actor was ever so far demented, as to fancy that he *really was* what he *appeared to be*, or that the state and dignity he assumed, while on the stage, were real, durable, and permanent things :— Whereas the great, rich, and prosperous in this world, are generally so drunk with the cares of this life, and intoxicated with its honours and enjoyments, as to forget that they are *transitory* and of *short duration*.

IF we prefer the *second* sense of the word *χῆμα*, and translate it *masquerade*, it will point out to us the *deceit* and *hypocrisy* which prevail in the world, and those *fraudulent disguises* which mankind too generally put on, in order to deceive and impose upon their

fellow creatures. Now the apostle affirms, that the present face of things shall be changed; that this stratagem, artifice, and dissimulation shall utterly pass away. Death will soon pull off the masque and vizard under which we act, wash away the varnish and deceitful colouring, and send away the actors into the other world, naked and open to the eyes of the whole invisible creation, without the least covering to conceal their shame and folly. We now proceed,

Idly, To prove the truth of the doctrine, and shew, in a few instances, how the fashion of this world passeth away.

I MAY introduce this head of discourse with this general observation—That this whole sublunary world, in whatever phasis we view it, or in whatever of its parts or appendages we consider it, is of a fading, languishing nature, liable to continual change and final dissolution. There is not any one thing under

the sun, and that properly belongs to this lower world, exempted from that prevailing *vanity* which diffuses itself over this poor scene of change and dissolution : so justly do the *preacher* and the *prophet* represent the present state of things. *Vanity of vanities*, saith the preacher, *vanity of vanities* ; behold *all is vanity and vexation of spirit*. *The earth*, saith the prophet, *mourneth and fadeth away* ; *the world languisheth and fadeth away* ; the haughty people of the earth do languish. Eccl. i. 2. Is. xxiv. 4. But, to descend to particulars,

1st. THE *men* of this world are continually passing away. *Man groweth up like the flower, and is cut down, and so withereth. He dieth and giveth up the ghost, and where is he ?* There is no vestige nor remembrance of him left behind, for *the place which once knew him, knoweth him no more. One generation cometh, and another goeth* in quick successions, like so many waves ranging in upon the beach, the

last always occupying the place, and extinguishing the very being, of that which went before it.

THIS is not, indeed, the original state and constitution of human nature. Had man kept the first covenant, his posterity would have continued in a state of immortal happiness, and never have felt the pains of disease, nor the agonies of dissolution : nor need it perplex us, whether this would have happened by the strength of our original *stamina*, or by any natural *panacea* provided to repair the waste of our spirits, and render our bodies unperishable and immortal. *But by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death hath passed upon all men, because all have sinned; so that, it is appointed for all men once to die.* It is a debt which all our forefathers have paid, and which each of us here present must pay sooner or later. *I know, says Job, thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living flesh.* What

mighty ruin and devastation has that King of terrors, that merciless destroyer of the human race, brought into the world, in every age? How many populous kingdoms, nations, and cities hath he laid waste and desolate, without inhabitant? An hundred years ago, this earth was as well peopled, as active, gay, and busy, as thoughtless and unmindful of the passing and transitory nature of present vanities, as we are at this day; and yet where is the ten thousandth person now living to enjoy the poor dregs and remains of that happiness, which they then so eagerly pursued? alas! inexorable death hath swept them away from all their honours, pleasures, and possessions, into an eternal world: and yet (strange infatuation!) *the living lay it not to heart.* They are slow to learn the important lesson, and act as tho' they believed they should never die. Where are all the mighty heroes of antiquity—those scourges of the world, and butchers of mankind, who made the world

tremble at the sound of their victorious arms, and who were addressed with the vain compliment of "O King, live for ever"—The PHARAOKS, the CAESARS, the POMPIES, the SCIPIOS and ALEXANDERS? Alas! they have all met with the common fate. Death hath found them out, and their dust lies mingled and confounded with that of their slaves and meanest subjects, in one undistinguished mass. None, none are spared. No age, no sex, no condition can plead a respite, much less an exemption, from his cold embraces. Some pass away from the retirements of nature, and are never permitted to breathe the vital air, or behold the light of heaven. Shoals are swept away in infancy, from the hearts and embraces of their tender parents, to the gloomy mansions of the dead. Multitudes in the bloom and vigour of youth, when *their breasts are moist with milk and their bones full of marrow*, and when they are forming schemes and projects for future pleasure

and enjoyment. Numbers in a state of full manhood, and amidst all the enjoyments of life, are reluctantly dragged off the stage ; some from the arms of tender husbands, or affectionate wives ; others from the piercing and pitiable cries of helpless and bereaved orphans ; others from distinguished honours, or plenteous fortunes, upon which they have set their hearts and affections ;—and (mournful consideration !) others from the lewd embraces of a harlot, from a drunken frolick, or some other scene of iniquity, are hurried in a moment before the tribunal of GOD. At the very best, indeed, man that is born of a woman, is of *few days*. If he should chance to escape the jaws of this roaring lion, thro' the stages of infancy, youth, and manhood, yet the infirmities and decrepitude of old age will force him off the stage. *Four score*, or *four score and ten* will put a final period to his life and his present enjoyments together, and oblige him to yield to his fate.

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THE general brevity of human life is an awful and alarming subject, and nothing furnishes a more striking proof of the stupid incogitancy of mortals, than the *little* impression it makes on the human mind. On a calculation which I have made with some accuracy, of the length of human life in these islands, it appears to me that it does not exceed *fourteen years*. How contracted a span? and yet in no part of the Christian world, perhaps, is the precious talent of all-important time more lavishly squandered, or worse employed.

AGAIN, how numberless and various are the instruments by which this ruthless executioner does his office? how countless the diseases by which he cuts the slender thread of life?—"Those thousand ills which man is heir to." Every pore almost in the human body is sufficiently wide to admit his poisonous shafts.—Some descend to the grave by painful gradations, and die, as it were, piece-

meal, by slow and lingering disorders.—Others are hurried into eternity at an hour's warning: a raging distemper seizes their vitals, and there is no parleying with the messenger, nor resisting his summons.—Others are taken with a burning fever; a delirium deprives them of their understanding, and, perhaps, they are suddenly snatched away, without the exercise of reason in their last moments. And what multitudes are carried off, in a second, by accidents, without the privilege of one petition for mercy. Instances in all these kinds almost daily occur to our observation. They are loud calls from God to prepare and be always in a state of readiness; as we neither know the day nor the hour when the son of man cometh, with the keys of death, to open the door and usher us into the world of spirits. Nay, who among us knows but that death may be, even *now*, whetting his glittering sword and aiming the fatal blow which he may, in a few

days, for ever separate us from this world and all its cares and enjoyments. Thus you see that the *men* of this world are continually passing away off the stage of time, into the unseen regions of eternity, and that there is none abiding.

THIS, perhaps, may be deemed, by some, a trite topic of common-place declamation. Granted, if you please: yet it is a topic which should ever be held up to the mind of man, until it is suitably impressed and affected by its interesting import. I come now,

2dly, To say, That the *things* of this world pass away. We have already observed that *the things of this world* may be summed up under three classes—its *honours, riches, and pleasures*. For *these* sinners toil with incessant fatigue. These employ their earliest thoughts and latest cares. Their rest is interrupted, their dreams disturbed, their strength consumed, and their spirits wasted in a laborious and unwearied pursuit after these lying va-

nitities. And yet, after all, *they sow wind & reap the whirlwind*; they sow labour and disquiet, and reap vexation and disappointment.

ASK the happiest rake, the most splendid prodigal, the most honoured and prosperous sinner that ever lived, what he thinks of the honours, riches, and pleasures of the world, when he comes to a death-bed. And he will just answer you in the language of old divines; or in the style and manner of that neglected book, called the *Bible*; “That they are momentary vanities and empty bubbles—that they appear to him, in the light of eternity, as *empty nothings*, which have neither solidity nor permanency; that they are unsatisfactory in their nature, and, without the blessing of God, prove fatal snares to the souls of men; consequently, can claim a very small share in the cares and pursuits of an immortal spirit; and that he himself has been cheated and deceived by their false appearances, and meretricious charms. In short, he will preach the

very doctrine of our text “ That *the fashion of this world passeth away* ; that all its most valued enjoyments are short-lived and perishing, and that they appear to him *now* as a troubled dream, which galls and torments his conscience. How many such death-bed lectures have been preached to us by departing sinners, and yet how little, how very little, alas, is the world the wiser ?

I WOULD be very far from depreciating *these things* below their proper and intrinsic value. They are, undoubtedly, the gifts of indulgent heaven, and make a suitable and necessary part in the plan of things here below. Our natures are framed for *bodily pleasures* ; we have likewise a natural appetite for *honour and esteem* ; and without some measure of *wealth*, we could not subsist, much less live comfortably. Hence it appears plainly, from our nature and situation, that our Maker designs we should *desire and use these things* moderately—but still so as not to *abuse* them

—As not to set things *of a day* highest in our affections, and neglect the things of eternity ; —to employ all our cares, thoughts, and pursuits about the *fashion of this world, which passeth away*, and entirely to overlook, or lightly to esteem, our souls and a future state of existence. Surely reason cannot approve such a conduct as this, and religion every where condemns it. For, in good earnest, what are riches?—Observation, as well as scripture, assures us, that they take unto themselves wings, and fly away. All that treasure which is not laid up in heaven, is subject to the devouring moth and corroding rust. Thieves may break through and steal it, or it may be speedily wrested from us by the hand of fraud or violence. What can we count upon honour ? It is indeed a gay and airy fashion of this world ; but, alas, how unstable its foundations ? and how quickly may it pass away ? An empty blast of popular applause swells it to the eye, but how

soon may it be sullied by the breath of envy? How soon may the fairest name be tarnished, and even rendered odious to the prejudiced and undiscerning multitude, who are always miserable judges of true merit. A *hosannab* to-day may be, and often is, changed into a *crucify* to-morrow; and how many have been suddenly precipitated from the highest pinnacle of honour and fame, to the lowest abyss of ignominy and disgrace? And, with regard to *sensual pleasures*, I might appeal to their votaries themselves whether they are lasting or substantial, or in any respect worthy the highest ambition and most eager pursuit of a rational immortal creature. But even supposing these things what the sinner would have them to be, VERY GREAT GOODS, yet as they belong merely to the *bodies* and *senses* of men, they cannot possibly survive the dissolution of *these*. They must fall at the grave, and the fashion of them entirely and for ever pass away. When these clay tabernacles, are once

dissolved, death will blow up all the sinner's schemes and projects, cut short all his pleasures, and lay all his titles and honours in the dust. These things can be no longer *goods* to the man whom death hath bereaved of the power of possession and enjoyment. I now proceed to a

3d INSTANCE, and that is, The *distinctions* in this world pass away. It hath pleased GOD, for wise purposes, to fix such a constitution of things here below, as that there should be various ranks and degrees of men, for the sake of order and subordination in human society. This constitution gives rise to a number of distinctions among men, into high and low, rich and poor, rulers and ruled, obscure and conspicuous. A long and splendid line of rich and noble ancestry gives the pre-eminence to some; others by shining talents have rendered themselves conspicuous in the literary or political world; the invention or improvement of ingenious arts or use-

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ful manufactures have deservedly raised others into notice and respect of the public, others are elevated above the multitude, by holding posts and offices in the state; or by military prowess and warlike exploits; or by power, wealth, or the favour of the great: and it is very observable, how much all of us are apt to overvalue ourselves on account of these *outward distinctions*, and to regulate our esteem and respect for others by them, while those, whose little power, retired life, and silent virtues, render them obscure, are either entirely overlooked, or little regarded by us. The sterling worth of moral integrity and perfection, the real and essential differences among souls, is neglected; while these outward distinctions attract and claim the whole attention of the world, in so much, that a *little gold*, without any other valuable qualification, shall gain more esteem to a fortunate or covetous worldling, tho' an idiot or a knave, than a thousand virtues seated in a

man's soul, which render him truly respectable.

SUCH is the *fashion of this world*; but it shall entirely pass away at death, and can have no place in the world of spirits, whose customs and manners are widely different from ours, and whose esteem is merited and regulated by quite different qualities and considerations. Death strips the several ranks and orders of men of their badges of honour and distinction, and levels the most exalted stations: it pays no regard to honour, power, or riches; nor do crowns, titles or preferments stamp a value on the dust of those who once possessed them: but the meanest and most contemptible of the human race may then address the haughtiest monarch in the style of the prophet *Isaiab*: *Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become as one of us? thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the sound of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee and the worms cover thee.*

IT must, indeed, be allowed that there will be very important distinctions among departed spirits, in a future state. We learn, that there will be an eternal separation between two grand classes of them, of essentially different general characters, under the different denominations of the *righteous* and the *wicked*, the obedient and the disobedient, the penitent and impenitent, and that the one shall *go away into everlasting misery*, and *the other into life eternal*, where they shall be for ever limited and confined to their different abodes, by an impassable gulph, never to mingle any more. All that are deemed worthy to enter the gates of the *new Jerusalem*, the celestial city of our God, shall be crowned with diadems beautified with immortality, and advanced to honours incomparably more resplendent than any here below. Nor is it improbable that some of this holy and happy nation will inherit much more shining honours than others, (as much as one star dif-

fers from another in glory) according to their different capacities, or different degrees of moral perfection. Whereas all the inhabitants of the opposite region, will be perpetually fixed in the lowest state of shame, misery, and disgrace; and, among these too, some will be more miserable and wretched than others, according as they have been more vile and wicked here. Now, if we enquire into the grounds and reasons of these important distinctions in the other world, we shall find that they are not regulated by the fashions of this, but by reasons quite of a different kind. *Riches and power, trick and artifice, oppressive greatness and deceitful councils, the very things which here give importance to human characters, and raise them in the estimation of the world, shall have that vizard stripped off, which they wore on the stage of time, and expose their infatuated votaries to universal shame and contempt;—while virtue and holiness, now so much despised by*

the world, will then shine forth in their eternal beauty, and become the only reasons of approbation and esteem. True religion and undefiled before God, even the Father ; virtue impregnable and immaculate, or such a change of temper and conduct in sinners, as is termed *sincere repentance*, now the mock of fools and libertines, constitute the only nobility, and entitle to the highest honour, in a future state. *Then* there will be no respect of persons in favour of the fashions and distinctions of this world. The piety and virtue of a slave will there be as highly honoured, and as bountifully rewarded, as those of an emperor ; and the smallest victory over a lust, more applauded than the conquest of a kingdom.

WHAT a change of fashions, what a reverse of fortunes and characters will this be ? How astonishing and disgusting a scene must this afford to those unhappy men, who have been wholly engrossed by the fashions, customs,

and distinctions of this world? How must it humiliate and abash the haughty tyrant to pass into a world, in which the humble virtues of a beggar will meet with more veneration than his crown and sceptre? How must it chagrine the imperious master to see his pious slave caressed and dignified, while he himself will be treated with everlasting ignominy and contempt? How shamefully must the accomplished fop and fluttering coxcomb be looked out of countenance in a world, where all their gay apparel, all their cuts and capers, cannot procure them the least degree of respect or deference; and what an awkward and impolite figure will they make in a country, with the fashions and manners of which they have never made themselves acquainted? And as for the purse-proud worldling, all his bags will not procure him one friend or dependent there. The least virtue, the smallest seed of grace, will nobilitate the poor and despised things of this

earth, and give them the pre-eminence above the highest titles and richest treasures.

4thly, THE *relations* of this world pass away. God hath so ordered it in the present constitution of things, that there should subsist a great variety of relations or connexions among men, such as parents and children, magistrates and subjects, husbands and wives, masters and servants. But all these modes and fashions of society shall have a final period at the grave, as the reasons of them will then cease for ever. At the grave the king effectually abdicates his throne, and the subject lays down his allegiance: the slave also obtains his liberty, and the master is deprived of his authority. *There the prisoners rest together; they bear not the voice of the oppressor: the small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master.* In that more perfect world even the most tender and endearing domestic relations of husband and wife, parent and child, shall be for ever superseded, and

give place to the more noble charities of a heavenly friendship, and the divine relation of the children of GOD. *For they, we are told, who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that better world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God.*

How many are the political disorders which prevail in this wretched world of ours? On the one side tyranny and oppression; on the other slavery, vassalage, and misery. Nor are the most perfect constitutions, or the best administered and regulated governments, free from such blemishes and defects as often disturb the order, and militate against the tranquility and happiness, of human society. Indeed, in this imperfect state of things, it is scarcely possible to guard against many and grievous abuses, or secure the rights and privileges of every individual. But in that better world, all the defects of human go-

verment, and all the disorders of society, will be rectified. The eternal King, seated on a throne of impartial equity, and extending his views to the most hidden principles and secret desires of all his subjects, will take immediately into his own hands the government of the world, and execute it in a way altogether suitable to his own excellencies and perfections. It shall then no more be said, that *in the place of judgment, iniquity presides*; but beauty, harmony, and order shall reign thro' the universe for ever. Unerring wisdom and boundless compassion, seated upon the throne of the world, shall hold the reins of irresistible power, and mitigate the rigours of stern and inflexible justice. No right of the meanest subject shall be forgotten, or invaded; nor shall tyranny, oppression, or partiality have place any more. Love, joy, and holy triumph shall diffuse themselves thro' all the regions of heaven, and fill every soul with the sentiments of complete and uninter-

ed felicity ; whereas only the malignant, the polluted, the obstinately incorrigible and irreclaimable, whom no goodness could move, nor any dispensation of mercy reform, shall sink down to those regions of horror and misery prepared for the devil and his angels.

5thly, THE *moral* and *religious* fashions of this world pass away.

THE English word *fashion* seems well adapted to point out, both the *futility* and *transitory* nature of those things and enjoyments on which the hearts of men so fondly doat. It is chiefly, if I am not mistaken, confined to the *cut* and *figure of garments*. These fashions, as they are perpetually changing, and in a continual rotation, so they generally employ the attention only of the lighter and vainer part of the species. Their futility and unimportance is such, that it would degrade the more rational part of either sex, to make them the objects of their anxious care or sedulous attention. But if we tran-

state the original word *scene* or *masquerade* it will give us a still more humiliating idea of the present state of things ; more especially as it relates to *religion* and *morality*, the matters which we are now more immediately considering.

If any thing in this world were built upon a firm and immoveable basis, one would think it was religion and morality ; the one being founded on the veracity of God, and the immutability of his attributes, and the other on the essential properties of human nature, the law of God written on the heart of men, and those relations, which ever have subsisted, and ever must subsist between man and man in the present state.

Now, one would imagine, the main and leading principles of religion and morality would have been ever and invariably the same. Yet, will not history and observation convince us, that nothing, in fact, hath been more changeable and variable than the modes and

fashions of religion and morality? How many different theories and principles of morals does almost every age produce? How many *virtues*, which have obtained the suffrage, and stood the test of antiquity, have been expunged, and transferred to the column of vices, by some of our modern improvers and reformers of philosophy? And has not one reason to tremble for the fate of those few which still remain uncanceled in this reforming age?— This, indeed, is a blow at the substance itself, rather than at the mode or fashion. But, with regard to the mode, every age, and almost every writer, hath given a new theory, and so dressed off morality in a new fashion. With some, the duties and obligations of morality are founded on the will of God; with others, upon some abstract nature and reason of things; with others, upon the moral sense; with others, on sympathy, &c.

WITH regard to religion, which is founded upon a clear and well authenticated divine re-

velation, hath it been more fortunate in this respect? How many various garbs and fashions hath it put on—not only under different dispensations, where there has been a real ground for some diversity—nor merely in its modes and external ceremonies, where a diversity is not so pernicious—but even in its essential doctrines and principles, in which, from the smallness of their number, and the clearness of their revelation, one would expect that all ages and all denominations of those who hold the same revelation, would be fully agreed. Almost every system writer in divinity, hath trimmed off religion in his own fashion. The divinity in fashion, at, and shortly after, the Reformation, is now quite obsolete and unfashionable; and he must be a hardy veteran, indeed, who, at this day, would dare to preach or publish reformation doctrines to the modish world. Nor is this the case with *Protestants* alone, who, through the want of an infallible head and judge of controversies, are

thought to be much given to change: but even that church which claims the high prerogative of infallibility, is found to have varied considerably from many of the tenets it held sacred about two centuries ago.

IN a word, what hath been already observed of *morality*, may not the same be said of religion, That many of its doctrines, which have obtained the suffrage, and stood the critical test of antiquity, are now expunged, and transferred to the column of errors? All this, indeed, is termed *reformation*, and ascribed to the greater critical acumen of the present enlightened age. Be it so, if the great moderns please: yet it still tends to prove and illustrate my general doctrine, namely, that all sublunary things, morality and religion, as they are modified by the pens of men, not excepted, are mere *fashions of this world, which pass away*.

WE now have been considering the word, according to its most common import in our

English translation : but, if we translate it *scene* or *masquerade*, it will open a new field for observation. The fair pretences and appearances of morality and religion, which men put on, how frequently are they mere *masques* and *vizards*, to conceal their iniquitous purposes, and to impose upon their fellow men? The more we are acquainted with mankind, the more we shall be convinced that this is a very prevailing fashion, both in the moral and religious world; and that this great stage of time is little else than a *masquerade*, where people act under false and feigned characters. This is so very true and obvious, that the fairer mens promises are, and the more sanguine their professions of friendship, the more every wise man ought to be on his guard, lest he become the dupe of his own simplicity and credulity, and the victim of their artifice and dissimulation. How common a thing is it to *love in word* and *in tongue*, but *not in deed* and *in truth*? How many empty careffes, faith-

less promises, and inconstant, if not pretended or perfidious, friendships are in the world? How few express their real sentiments, or speak the truth to their neighbour; and when they do, how few act agreeable to this sincerity of speech? Insincerity, duplicity, and dissimulation are arts which have gained such a currency and countenance among mankind, from the court down to the lowest ranks of the people; that the upright and sincere man is stigmatized with the opprobrious epithets of simpleton and fool. And even, with regard to the better sort of the species, how often do little by-ends, selfish views, and counterfeit pretences mix themselves with their conduct, and give it a base alloy; as being all inconsistent with that noble candour, and generous simplicity, which is the glory of men, and the ornament of Christians.

AND, in matters of religion, are not the very same base and disingenuous arts often made use of to varnish over a deceitful heart,

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and cheat the world? Hypocrites, by their loud and noisy pretences, impose upon the credulous multitude, and gain more honour and applause, by mere grimace, and affected austerity, than the sincere Christian can do by all his real, but silent and modest virtues. How often hath *Satan* transformed himself into an angel of light, in order to deceive the nations, by lying wonders, and false pretences? How many *tartufs* have obtained the reputation of sanctity, while real saints, whose shining virtues have done honour to religion, have suffered reproach, defamation, persecution, and death? How many *whited sepulchres*, inwardly full of stench and putrefaction, have been raised to the highest honours and dignities of the church, while men of the most undissembled piety and ornamental probity are thrust into the shades of obscurity, where, like candles put under a bushel, the light of their exemplary sanctity and edifying virtues is totally eclipsed?—

SUCH is the *religious fashion* of this world, but it shall utterly pass away at death, as mists and vapours vanish before the rising sun. We shall then step into a world of eternal realities, where *masques* and *pretences* shall find no place, and where all dissimulation and deceit will be for ever banished into outer darkness. The piercing eye of omniscience, and the light which surrounds the eternal throne, will quickly unveil the most hidden subterfuges of hypocrisy, and reveal, to the abhorrence and detestation of the whole universe, the turpitude and abomination of the deceitful heart.

AND, indeed, if we consider *religion*, even in its fairest and most inviting forms, the fashion of it will then pass away, or be changed much for the better, in that more perfect state of celestial worship. The best Christians now worship God by many prayers and tears, with much self-denial and mortification, with many doubts and fears, with much weakness,

languor, and infirmity, with much conflict against temptations and corruption, often with much weariness of the flesh, and in the exercise of a patience, put to painful trials by calamities and afflictions, and all this in expectation of a distant, future, and invisible reward. But, oh! how changed will this fashion be in heaven, where the exercise of all the painful graces and duties of the Christian will cease for ever—where faith will be swallowed up in vision, and hope in fruition, and where all that holy and happy society shall see God, as they are seen by him, and know him as they are known of him, and love him according to his infinite beauty, and praise him according to his infinite greatness, and worship him with the ardour and activity of seraphs, and where all the paths of religion shall be watered by those rivers of pleasures, which flow from the right hand of God for evermore.

6thly, THE fashion of this world, as it is a state of trial and probation for an eternity of happiness or misery, will pass away at death, An awful consideration this, which may well awaken and alarm the most stupid and careless sinner! Here, indeed, upon the theatre of time, saints and sinners, the righteous and the wicked, they that swear and they that fear an oath, are promiscuously blended together, and enjoy the mercies of providence and the offers of grace in common. But when the scenes are shifted to eternity, matters shall be quite otherwise. The clean and unclean, the holy and profane, shall be separated by an eternal partition. An impenitent sinner shall never, to eternity, hear another sermon to ridicule, nor another offer of mercy to neglect and despise; for *the former things are for ever passed away*. Hope, the last refuge of the wicked, must relinquish him at the grave, and consign him over to the horrors of darkness, and the heart-rending pangs of

raging despair; even to *that worm which dieth not*, and *that fire which is not quenched*. Nor can he, as we have observed before, longer flatter himself with the prospect of any favourable change in his circumstances, after that decisive sentence is pronounced by the sovereign arbiter of things: *he that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still*.

But I hasten to a

7th, AND my last observation on the words, which is, That, not only are the *scenes* of this world continually shifting, its *actors* vanishing like so many shadows in perpetual succession, and its admired *fashions* passing away, like a tale that is told; but also the *stage* itself, the spacious *theatre* of this visible material world, will be shortly pulled to pieces—Its scaffoldings, and all its works and ornaments, shall be quickly tumbled into ruin and destruction. All its airy forms will be for ever dissipated, and itself give place to

those new heavens and that new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

ITS inhabitants, we learn, were formerly cut off by an universal deluge, a *flood of water, which covered the world of the ungodly*. And *St. Peter assures us, That the heavens and the earth which now are, are kept in store, reserved to fire, against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men*. The mountains, which now rise with awful majesty, and which, on account of their strength and stability, are called *the everlasting mountains*, and serve for an emblem of the truth and faithfulness of God—those surprizing and magnificent monuments of divine power, shall totter at their very foundations, and vanish into nothing at the presence of the Judge. The fruitful valleys, which are now covered with inhabitants, and adorned with strong and beautiful cities, shall then be wrapt up in the universal flames, and left desolate, without inhabitant. All the proud monuments of human vanity ;

those mighty works of art, which seem to defy the rust and canker of time, shall be swallowed up in the general conflagration. The wide and extended sea, which is now the medium of trade, and the busy scene of merchant-adventurers, together with its numberless inhabitants, shall flee away and find no place, at the expiring groans of universal nature. These islands, upon which we dwell, together with the larger continents, shall equally share in the fate of that day, and be consumed to ashes. The visible heavens, together with all their shining glories, the sun, moon, and stars, shall be rolled up as a scroll; *they shall pass away with a great noise*; and *the elements* of which they are composed, *shall melt with fervent heat*: and then, indeed, shall happen, as *Mr. Addison* beautifully expresses it, “The war of elements, the wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds.”

I PROCEED now to some practical reflections upon the whole. And,

It, In general; we have seen the transitory nature and unstable condition of all sublunary things; that they all pass away, and are of short continuance: and what valuable *instruction* does this consideration afford us?—Why, just this one important and very interesting lesson, which the Apostle inculcates in the words immediately preceding our text—namely—That *we should use this world as not abusing it.*

HERE we may observe, that the Apostle freely grants that we may *use* this world. He prohibits none of its lawful pleasures, enjoyments, or gratifications; but only lays in a caveat against a *wrong* and *immoderate* use of it, and would not have us abuse it. But here a question may be moved. What are we to understand by the *abuse* of this world, and how may we learn to use this world, so as not to abuse it?

FOR a solution of this question, I must refer my hearers to *reason, conscience,* and the

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revealed will of God. These three, if properly consulted, will never fail to enlighten the path of our duty, and fully to inform us, on all occasions, and in all circumstances, how we ought to use this present world, and where the transition commences from its *use* to its *abuse*.

Do the *men* of this world pass away in their successive generations? Does death pay no respect to the brave, the mighty, or the wise, but bring all to the grave with an impartial and undistinguishing severity; so that all flesh, as well that of the great and powerful, as of the mean and obscure, is but as grass which groweth up, and is immediately cut down and withereth? Then reason and scripture will both inform us, That we should regulate our esteem for mankind in general, by a consideration of their mortality; so as not to put too much trust or dependance upon a creature so frail, weak, and dependent. To this purpose the Psalmist: *Put not your trust*

in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help ; his breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish.

ARE the *things* of this world of a passing transitory nature? Do all its honours, pleasures, and riches vanish and disappear at death? Then, reason, as well as scripture, will instruct us not to set our hearts and affections too eagerly upon those things which must leave us at death, and can stand us in no stead in that world to which we are going. Why should we suffer our eyes to be dazzled with the honours of this world, our hearts to be intoxicated with its pleasures, or our minds to be oppressed and overburthened by its cares and riches in our Christian course, seeing the fashion of these things quickly passes away, and in a few years, the things themselves must prove as absolutely useless to us, as though we had never possessed them? Why should we suffer its cares to distract us, its fears to torment us, or its hopes to elevate

and exalt us above measure, seeing all these cares, fears, and hopes are employed about trifles of a moment, in regard to our endless duration ?

THE transitory and evanescent nature of the things of this world should also regulate our amusements and recreations. Scripture and reason assure us that we are immortal beings, designed for an eternal existence—that we are here placed in a state of trial and probation, and, according to our present conduct, must be either happy or miserable for ever. Revelation every where represents our present state as a state of warfare, a state of labour and activity, and a Christian race and course ; which point out to us the need we have of diligence to make our calling and election sure, and the greatness of our work in this world, if we would obtain eternal life in that world which is to come. Hence it appears, that our *present time* is very precious, seeing a happy or miserable eternity depends

upon the improvement of it ; and that every moment of it which can be spared from the care of the body and necessary recreation, should be employed in cultivating and improving the soul, enlarging and adorning its faculties, and so fitting and preparing it for the enjoyments and employments of a future state of retribution. Now, if it were properly considered how short the state of our trial is at best, and what important purposes it is designed to serve, Is it possible that any person endued with reason and consideration, would lavish away so much precious time, as the world generally does in a round of thoughtless dissipations and giddy diversions, which soften, enervate, and debase the human soul, and unfit it for its proper exercises? Moderate recreations, if I may use the expression, brace the nerves of the mind and refresh the body, and so render us more fit for the business of our callings, as men and Christians. But when diversions become excessive and

immoderate, they not only occasion a sinful waste of that little time which God hath allotted us here below, but also create such a levity of mind as is very unsuitable to a dying creature, who knows not at what hour he may be called off from the stage of time, and therefore should be always in a posture of readiness to obey the summons.

THE fashion of this world, as a state of trial, passeth away ; and therefore both scripture and reason direct us to be *moderate in all things ; to redeem our time ; so to number our days, as to apply our hearts to wisdom ; to work out our salvation with fear and trembling ; whatever our hand finds to do, to do it with all our might, seeing that there is no wisdom, knowledge, device, or repentance in the grave ; not to be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the LORD ; to be faithful and persevering unto death, that we may receive the crown of life.* Certainly, if we considered our diversions in the light of eternity, they would be

a little better regulated than they generally are. We would not dare to squander away whole days, and nights, and months, and years of that precious time, for every moment of which we must give an account to God, in giddy riot, and intemperate frolick. And there is a certain period approaching, when every minute of that time, which now hangs so heavy on our hands, and which we know not how to pass it quickly enough away, will appear to us a precious and invaluable treasure, which should have been better improved. And this leads me naturally to another reflection, suitable to the present subject.

THE shortness of our state here, as probationers for eternity, ought to make us frequently thoughtful, how we have improved this state, what part of our great work we have done, or what remains for us yet to do. And what time can be more suitable to excite such salutary reflections, than the present sea-

on ; alas ! too frequently appropriated to quite different purposes !

God hath lately added another year to the days of our pilgrimage, and we are now entered into a *new one*, which is also passing away ; and the omniscient God alone, by whom our days are determined, and with whom are the number of our months, knoweth who among us may be spared to see the accomplishment of the present year. Nay, there is the highest degree of probability that *some*, perhaps *many*, who are here to-day, may shift the *scene* to eternity, before the expiration of the present year. Such a consideration as this, methinks, should put each of us upon the enquiry : may it not be I ? And, surely, if it should, which is a very possible thing, I have great reason to enquire into my by-past life, and examine how I have employed it ; whether I have been *doing the work of my day, in its day, as the duty of the day hath required*, or whether I have been pursuing empty

dreams, and lying vanities, all the days of my life—only making provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts—passing away my few days of trial in a routine of giddy amusements—In a word, whether I have lived like a creature destined for eternity; like a pilgrim and a stranger here, whose native country is heaven; or whether, on the other hand, I have lived like a citizen of this world, who have no rational hopes beyond it, and, therefore, may be, with good reason, afraid to die?—Alas! my dear brethren, I fear that many of us, upon such an examination as this, will find that we have lived twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years in this world, to very little purpose, and that, should we be called this night to an account for the stewardship of our time, we could give but a very uncomfortable reckoning for the improvement of this precious talent.

SEEING then that so much of this valuable treasure is, already, so wretchedly squandered, and so little of it, in all probability, remains,

wherein to finish our work, how should each of us seize the precious moments, and redeem mis-spent time with double diligence? We would give the whole world for a few of these days of health, when we are laid upon a death-bed, and begin to look the king of terrors in the face. What, therefore, stupifies us *now*, when God is favouring us with these days of forbearance, and seasons of mercy, that we should not wisely improve them? All our past time is irrecoverably gone: the span of our life is shortening every moment: our days, and hours, and minutes are passing away, swift as a post, or a weaver's shuttle: none of us know how many sands are yet in our glass; how soon the slender thread of life may be cut, and we fixed in an eternal state. Why then do we not *use time, so as not to abuse it*? Have we not great reason to bless God, that we are not *to-day* in a place of torment, lamenting the abuse of seasons and opportunities of grace—and to pray

that, seeing a gracious God is lengthening out space for our repentance, he would also give us grace to repent; to lead new lives, and perform new obedience?

THESE are certainly sentiments suitable to the commencement of a new aera of time—sentiments pleasing to GOD, and profitable to our selves—ininitely more becoming a rational immortal creature, than all the expressions of outward joy, and crazy riot, so much in vogue.

THAT I may not detain you with more particulars, it may be concluded, in general, That reason and religion, if properly consulted, will fail in no instance to shew us *the proper use of present things*. They will effectually moderate our esteem, our desires, our hopes, and our fears of this world, with all its enjoyments, and with all its terrors, as things which, on account of their passing nature and short duration, are intitled to a very moderate share of our care and concern, a very small num-

ber of our projects or designs; and make us willing to prepare for a departure from this perishing scene of change and folly: they will convince us, That our highest wisdom consists in acting that part, which Providence has assigned us here below, *well and faithfully*, so as to gain the approbation of our Judge; having a steady regard to the recompence of reward in a future world, seeing that *the fashion of this world passeth away*, and the scenes will be quickly shifted to eternity!

AND ought not this weighty and momentous consideration engage us to seek after a more solid and enduring portion than this transient scene of things can afford us? *Happiness* is the grand, the universal, pursuit of mankind. But we plainly see that this is not the place of our happiness. If this world could afford it, then, indeed, it would be our wisdom and prudence to seek it in this world. But as this world has already deceived multitudes in this pursuit, and left all

who have made the experiment unsatisfied and disappointed, we may be assured it is not to be found here. God hath set a nobler object in view ; the glories of an eternal state, which are as extensive as our faculties, and as durable as eternity. *Here* are honours big with immortality ; uncloying pleasures for ever more ; and durable riches which neither moth nor rust can destroy. *Here* are crowns of glory which shall but begin to sparkle, when all the tinsel toys of time shall be sunk into everlasting oblivion. *Here* are immortal youth, and beauties which shall but begin to bloom, when our mortal bodies are devoured by worms, and mouldered into dust. *Here* are heavenly mansions and cities, which have foundations, the delightful abodes of the blessed ; when the empires and kingdoms, the cities and dwellings, of this world shall be consumed by the flames of the last conflagration, and sunk, perhaps, into the barren womb of nothing. And *these* are

all purchased by the REDEEMER's blood, and freely offered in the gospel, and unworthy sinners are solicited to accept them without money and without price; by a humble reliance on a SAVIOUR's merit, and a dutiful obedience to his laws and precepts.

WHEREFORE then do we not speedily comply with these gracious overtures, that we may be intitled to those rich and substantial mercies? This actual closure with the astonishingly gracious offers of the gospel, would most effectually teach us to regulate our use of present things; to set *our* most ardent *affections on things above, where CHRIST* our divine Lord and lawgiver, our pattern and our portion, *is seated at the right hand of GOD; to look, not at the things that are seen and temporary, but at the things which are unseen and eternal; to walk by faith, and not by sense.* Conscious of such a firm and immoveable foundation of our hope, and exhilarated by the cheering reflection, that thus

we have spent our lives and employed our faculties, in prosecuting our true happiness, and *exercising consciences void of offence towards God and towards man*, with what tranquillity and serenity of mind may we quit this mortal stage, and with what full assurance of faith and hope, expect that blessed eulogium from our merciful Judge: *Well done ye good and faithful servants; enter ye into the joy of your LORD?*

THE END.