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TO THE
MOURNING FRIENDS
AND
RELATIVES

OF THE DECEASED,

THE FOLLOWING

DISCOURSE

IS VERY RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY

INSCRIBED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

Lexington, 9th April, 1816.

A SERMON,

&c.

It remaineth that *“they that weep be as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world as not abusing it : for the fashion of this world passeth away.”* 1 COR. vii. 30, 31.

“ALL flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field ;—the grass withereth, the flower fadeth ; but the word of our God shall stand forever.” Such was the colouring of truth and nature, with which the lips of “the evangelic prophet” were accustomed to portray the superlative excellence of those great concerns about which his mission was conversant. The words just quoted are calculated to excite in us feelings of the most opposite character :—feelings of melancholy ; because they vividly portray the thousand desolations with the sight of which our hearts are almost daily pained : and feelings of the most exhilarating and heart-felt triumph, because they strongly intimate that this unstable and turbid state of human things is not to be

the last ; that the reign of many horrors shall not endure forever ; but that a light from on high, durable as eternity, shall supercede this gloom, and an order more stable than the frame of this great universe shall give security to every creature while walking in that light. God, intimates our prophet, God has promised this ; and “ the word of our God shall stand forever.”

We need hardly say to any christian assembly that the great object of the religion of the Saviour is to mould the principles and lives of men upon the realization of these important truths. Hence we see that in making her appeal, christianity exhibits the present and the eternal scene precisely as they are. She depicts most graphically the sorrows of this world, and the heightened sorrows of a world unseen ; and as her object is to gain triumphs by the truth, she “ nothing extenuates, nor sets down aught in malice.” She dilates on all those species of felicity which either the obedient or the disobedient boast ; and she proves, without “ leaving a loop to hang a doubt on,” that the height of wisdom is “ the fear of God”—that “ to serve him is to reign.” Hence the bible is so far from teaching its votaries to shun the house of mourning : hence it so often leads them down to the gates of death. These things are all realities, whether remembered or forgotten ; and to fathom the deep counsels, to trace the awful footsteps of the God of truth, can never be but profitable to a disciple of the truth. It raises us on an eminence from which we can survey the universal scheme ; it enables us to blend the future

with the past ; it assigns to every incident its dimensions and its station ; it gives to that immortality for which we so much pant, “a local habitation and a name ;” and because it does these things, it enables us to say of all beneath the sun, to say in the very spirit of “the apostle of the Gentiles,” to say without a sigh, without even a momentary feeling of regret, “it remaineth that they that weep be as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world as not abusing it : for the fashion of this world passeth away.” “The fashion of this world passeth away !” Friends, it is a matter in which all have like concern : We will

I. Inquire into the nature of the fact. We will then

II. Shew you the reasonableness of the deductions which our apostle has drawn from it.

I. “The fashion of this world passeth away.” This is the fact asserted by our apostle. The word upon which the force of the expression turns is of very extensive, and perhaps it may be thought of *dubious*, application. It occurs but twice in the new testament scriptures, but in those instances, as is also the case generally in the writings of that language in which the testament was penned, its import is extensive ; in either case somewhat peculiar ; and in both limited only by the nature of the subject. Thus of the Saviour it is said that “though he were in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God,

yet did he take upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and *being found in fashion as a man*, he humbled himself," &c. Being "made in the likeness of men," he was also "found in *fashion as a man* :"—The phrase obviously indicates that in all the lineaments of the human character, in all the circumstances of our common lot, in all the feelings of our common nature, in all that was in him and all that was around him, he was as ourselves, and to be affected like ourselves—he was "IN FASHION" as a man. Thus too in the text by "*the fashion of this world, which passeth away*," we are not merely to understand that the frame of this visible creation shall be dissolved, though that is doubtless included ; but we are to understand in general that the ~~whole~~ system of human things, all with which as inhabitants of the world we are connected, and all by which we can be affected, is in its own nature and in the constitutions of providence mutable, fugitive, evanescent. All with which we are concerned is so ; we ourselves are so ; the world, the scene of such mutation, is likewise so. These particulars probably embrace the whole meaning of the apostle ; and a very short recurrence to each of them will sufficiently answer our present purpose.

1. All with which we are surrounded, all by which we are affected, is evanescent.

Such was the experience, such the declaration of one of the wealthiest as well as wisest of the sons of men, after he had, to use his own quaint style, "proved his heart with mirth." "Vanity of vani-

ties," was at last his exclamation, "vanity of vanities ! all is vanity !" He had erected palaces ; but scarcely was the first blush of novelty departed, when he turned away from them with all the impatience and restlessness of infancy, when it lets fall the bauble that had just before been every thing, and grasps at something new. He had planted orchards, he had decorated gardens ; but the orchards and the gardens had scarce been, till they grew wearisome and worthless. He found in every avenue disappointment ; in every rose a canker. The king of Israel stands not singular in this experience of shortlived pleasure. Like him we have our object, which when attained we imagine we shall be happy ; and like him we are doomed to find that each successive conquest is but the birth of new desires ; and that each acquisition of enjoyment is snatched as a hasty morsel, fit only to sustain us while in pursuit of something better. Thus do our solitudes, thus do our plans, thus do our triumphs, thus do our disappointments rapidly succeed each other ; and only give us time, as they cower lowly on the wing, to notice that each one bears the common inscription, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Friends, it is the yearning of boundless faculties for something this world was not created to bestow—the yearning of faculties lasting as eternity for something unlimited and lasting as themselves. And to this fact we must refer a great proportion of the changes that agitate, and often distress, this changing scene of things.

But should we assume that the case is different with

many persons, in respect to many things ; that their affections do not alter nor their pursuits change with every waneing moon ; yet the same stability can hardly ever be predicated of the object to which they cling. Take, if you please, the purest and most enduring sources of mere earthly enjoyment : suppose a heart uncontaminated with those low and selfish feelings which we can hardly avoid contracting in the ordinary tug of life ; suppose a taste uncorrupted by fashionable pursuits, and a mind unbiassed by fashionable maxims. To what will persons thus circumstanced naturally attach their fondest and finest feelings ? Doubtless to those scenes of childhood and youth amid which those feelings grew : doubtless to those friends of early years whose tenderness is a guarantee of incorruptible integrity, and whose taste, like our own, has been formed upon a model unvisited by the elbowing crowd :—Doubtless to those relatives whose accents of kindness first taught our hearts to love, and whose assiduous care warded off the evils to which our childhood was obnoxious. But let a few years roll round, and where is the magic that bound our affections to the scenes of infancy ! See you not that death has entered the doors, and brought down one by one the objects of your tenderness. The voice of that anxious and ever affectionate parent, whose accents always fell so welcome on the ear, is no more heard in the hall of your fathers ; the companions of your childhood are fallen one by one ; or else dispersed to the four winds of heaven, wherever necessity may have driven or choice directed them. Let others sooth their sorrows in listening to the ex-

pressions of parental tenderness ; let others revel in the luxury of filial fondness : it is yours to sigh and say, I once had a father, I once had a mother too. What mean we then by attachment to the scenes of youthful years ? We will find it was the objects enlivening those scenes that shed the charm upon them ; we will find it was the peace which played around the heart that instructed us to prize them. For go now once again to the scenes of your infancy, and mark the changes that have passed upon them. A stranger perhaps occupies the gates of your father ; a stranger has usurped the loved apartment of your mother—a stranger has new modelled the scenes of youthful sportiveness—and every thing around you wears the guise of strangeness. It is not, as formerly, the rustling breeze that fans you ; the wind sighs dolefully among the groves : the sun itself appears to shed a fainter and melancholy ray : and in every act you discover, at every pass you meet the heart of a stranger, hard and cold as stone.

Thus do years make havoc of our happiness, thus does their course bring down desolation on the very scenes with which our first and purest notices of felicity are allied. All early friendships, all youthful patriotism, all the finest feelings of the human heart are blunted or obliterated by the incessant revolutions of terrestrial things.

Nor does the selection of our object from the more busy scenes of life afford much additional security. Court, if you please, the homage of the multitude. To-day their suffrage may exalt you above the clouds,

to-morrow their clamour abase you in the dust. To-day their whim or their interest may demand the sacrifice of your honor and of your better judgment to the furtherance of their measures ; to-morrow they will despise you for your mean compliances, and transfer their homage to some new-fledged sycophant.

Or found, if you prefer it, your schemes of happiness, independent of the world. Live only for yourself while you live among the multitude, and render every event tributary to your main design. Still, whatever be your purposes, however you may drive them, the voice of the scriptures will ever be found the language and the lesson of experience : “ Trust not in oppression, become not vain in robbery : if riches increase set not your heart upon them.” And still we are compelled to recognize the warning attached to this admonition : “ God hath spoken once ; twice I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy : for thou renderest unto every man according to his work.”

Nor yet, should we take refuge in the sanctuary of God, will we find ourselves escaped from the melancholy contemplation of revolutions and of wrecks. Those things that first allured us, the things that attached and fastened our affections there, may have long departed to return no more forever, before our obligation to attendance ceases. Another, perhaps a very unwelcome voice, may issue from that stand whence once had dropped expressions no less

grateful to the ear than salutary to the heart :—And the hundreds who once raised the voice of joy and thanksgiving—the hundreds whose aspect was as the host of God, may have given place to other hundreds in whom we take little interest, and for whose principles or practices we feel very little respect.

Thus then do the sources of our most innocent enjoyments, thus does the aspect of our multiplied engagements, thus do all the interests of the domestic circle, and the more extended concerns of commonwealths and kingdoms, thus do the occasions of our shortlived sorrows as well as fleeting pleasures, thus does every thing with which we are connected, all by which we are surrounded, all to which we are attached, stamp the character of mutability on this unstable world.

2. But why should we regret this evanescence of human pleasure ? Why mourn the instability of human grandeur ? This world which we inherit is not our lasting home ; its contents, if they were stable as the everlasting hills, could not be long in our possession : for we too are evanescent—we must soon be gone. We shall not detain you, friends, on that very common topic the mortality of man ; we will not dilate on the very obvious truth that we too are mortal as well as all our fellows, we too must be gone. Perhaps the very frequency with which we receive assurance on this subject—the great variety of forms in which that assurance is brought home, may be a mean, through the perverse obliquity of our character, to render us less sensible to the awful truth than

we might otherwise be. In every family we see an occasional gap, in every neighbourhood an occasional rupture of the social tie : and because these things are frequent, because they fall so much in the ordinary course of things, and especially because we are in the habit of contemplating each case as an isolated occurrence ; and within a little while perceive the breach made up ; we form no adequate conception of the immensity of the havoc which a few years make, and scan little of the lesson it addresses to ourselves. The wounded-heart may brood long and constantly over its private woe ; may long lament the blank which death has made in the beautiful creation : but we, who are not immediately concerned, with sobriety inurn the remains of departed worth ; ponder for a moment the instruction of the scene ; then forget the inference and the facts together.

In order to form just apprehensions on this subject, we would advise you to place the objects of attention in such circumstances that the blanks cannot readily be filled. Let them, if possible, be definite in number ; let them all be objects personally known. Take, for instance, a christian congregation ; or persons compacted together in any other association by which they stand discriminated from the mass :—then see how speedily their ranks are thinned—how quickly their numbers are diminished more than half. This year you may frequent the sanctuary of God—you may see health and contentment displayed in every countenance, and hear the voice of joy proceed from many a person who expects long to

fill a place in that assembly of worshippers. Return a few years hence and look around for that company of gay-hearted expectants. They that look out of the windows are darkened ; and many of the daughters of music are brought low.

Or let your eye pursue the votaries of renown. Inquire now for the men who but twenty years ago levied the tribute of universal homage, and directed the counsels of the cabinet of state. Some few still appear on the stage of public life : of those who are gone, some few are still remembered, and will be long remembered, with admiration and respect. But the mass have gone down to the sides of the grave :—and while they themselves are slumbering in deep silence,

“ ——— On their fall’n fame
Exultant, mocking at the pride of man,
Sits grim forgetfulness.”

Or take, if you will, a still more ample survey. Fix upon a single generation as it is spread over the whole habitable world. Let that generation be “ multitudinous as the ocean,” but let it be *but one*. Then see how rapidly its throng diminishes ; see how speedily a new one has succeeded ; while of the one that existed when you made your count, and whose were then the riches and the cares and the honors of the earth, of the one which claimed empire over this capacious globe, there is but here and there a solitary individual, like the solitary berry on the party-coloured bough, the sceptre wrested from his feeble grasp,

and the glory departed to another generation. Thus race follows race as wave chaces wave upon the bosom of the deep ; the bosom of old ocean bears each one aloft, the winds urge forward its obstreperous course ; till it breaks upon the beach, then disappears forever. Thus may you mark the generations as they roll ; thus estimate their interests evanescent as their lives ; and then say, thus *I* shall go.

3. But earth itself, the scene of these mutations, shall not retain its present form forever. Firm as are its foundations they shall one day be unfixed ; stable as are its hills they shall e'er long be uprooted : even in this sense, therefore, "the fashion of this world passeth away." You are, of course, aware that we allude to the change that shall take place on this creation at the time allotted for the general judgment. Vast as is the revolution contemplated in this instance, it has precisely the same source as the other revolutions and changes we have been noticing. Sin produced disorganization in the moral world—sin therefore prostituted to unhallowed purposes much that was bestowed upon us in this fair creation ; and it has seemed good to the sovereign Arbiter of all things to punish this abuse by unsettling in a measure the frame of nature and letting the very elements run riot, in unison with human passions.—But it is not his intention that disorder shall fix a lasting blot on any part of his visible creation. The materials of this fabric shall be taken down, but not destroyed : Many parts of it have been polluted ; they must, say the scriptures,

be “purified by fire:” many parts of it are so circumstanced as to stand the lasting monuments of human crime; they must be released from the degrading office:—Every vestige, every memorial of human crime and of earth’s degradation must be erased forever. Therefore it is that the world itself “shall burn as an oven,” and “the elements shall melt with fervent heat.” And then, say the scriptures, “we, according to his promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.” All that is polluted and all that can pollute shall be separated from it eternally; and earth, taking her station among the stars of God, shall hold on her course forever. Thus shall the present fashion of this world pass away: thus shall the polluters of the world be banished: thus shall the hope of their return be cut off by the interposition of that immeasurable abyss which is eternally to prevent their slightest incursion into this fair universe.

Such are the facts upon which our apostle founds the inference of the text, You will therefore be fully able

II. To judge for yourselves whether the inference is not moderate and natural; whether in a world of such incessant changes, “they that weep should not be as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it.”

Let it, however, be remarked that the views of the

apostle give no sort of sanction to that stoical apathy, more properly denominated brutal insensibility, of which mankind so often make their boast, as the only wise and certain antidote against the miseries of life. God endowed us with affections and with exquisite sensibilities ; and we should degrade, we should villify our nature and arraign his wisdom, if we never loved because things are evanescent, and if we never mourned because ills are unavoidable. We leave it to the men who have no God and father, to the wretched outcasts who will not trust the Saviour, to arm themselves against the yearnings of their nature, and like wretched maniacs to sport amidst their sorrows. Insensibility to sufferings, indifference to the charms and felicities of life, is a species of attainment which christianity does not acknowledge ; it is a boast most abhorrent from the nature we inherit : it strips the veil from off this fair creation and shocks you with a skeleton ; it converts the world into a very charnel house. Nay, says the apostle, weep you may ; if you have not eradicated the sweetest and tenderest sensibilities of the heart, you can not choose but weep. The Saviour himself wept when he surveyed the horrors coming on Jerusalem ; tear coursed after tear while he marked the rooted sorrows of a little family of love, as they stood bereaved and unprotected by the tomb of a departed brother. Weep you may, be in bitterness you must, amid the bereavements and disappointments of this life : and therefore we have the privilege of enlisting the kind offices of an Almighty friend ; of calling upon him in the day of

trouble, in the faith that he will answer us ; of committing our ways to him in the midst of difficulties, in the hope that, as he has promised, he will direct our paths : and therefore, we are told, we have an advocate in heaven, who himself having suffered and been subjected to temptation, will indulge the fellow feeling of a man of many sorrows for all the sons of grief.

So too, says our apostle, you may cultivate a due regard for all the pleasures with which the world is stored ; you may acquire and you may appreciate the treasures of this world : they were made to be possessed ; they may be serviceable to you while here ; and if properly applied, may be useful to your successors long after you are gone. Only remember that you must soon be gone : indulge no such regrets, and form no such attachments, as might be proper if you were destined to live here forever : much less pervert the faculties you inherit and the good you seek to such uses as must unfit you for a better inheritance in a better world. Such are the principles which my text inculcates : such is the rational, the dignified footing upon which christianity places the feelings and the conduct of mankind in all the vicissitudes of life. She does not acknowledge that stubbornness of nature which allows no affection to penetrate the heart ; she will not admit that the eye is ever elevated in true devotion to the heavens, which is never seen to glisten with a tear amid the heart-rending sorrows that we witness upon earth ; she will not even suppose a fitness or a disposition for the tender affections and bril-

liant scenery of the heavens among those coldblooded mortals who so far degrade their nature as to smother every just and appropriate feeling toward the profusion of beauty and of blessedness with which the skill and liberality of the same Almighty hand have enriched the lap of earth. But she at the same time will not suffer an undue attachment to the things of earth, to estrange the affections from a nobler portion : she will not admit that because the heart is withered and blighted by bereavement, our feelings should seek vent in unhallowed murmurs against the dispensations of the most High. Yet she does not teach you to suppress your feelings, but she furnishes you the means to sooth and elevate them. She tenders you the hope of “an inheritance incorruptible ;” she gives the pledge of perpetuity in a life that is “immortal ;” she portrays the scene of your enjoyment as being “eternal in the heavens.” And then she asks, with another of our apostles, “what manner of persons ought we to be, in all godliness and honesty ?”—Lift up thy head, thou son of many sorrows ! thy pangs shall not be felt nor thy bereavements last forever. Lift up thy head ! thou too art evanescent. A few years more, and other cheeks shall be wet with other tears ; others shall lament their bereavement in thy loss ; thou shalt lie cold and quiet in the grave.—Man of many cares, lift up thine eyes to heaven ! “the fashion of this world passeth speedily away :” know then that that inheritance is mainly worth the having, that hope most worthy assiduous cultivation, which only then BEGINS TO BE PRODUCTIVE when all other hopes have perished.

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Friends, if any fact can bear these reflections home, let it, we pray you, be the melancholy fact that furnished occasion for your assemblage here to-day. Ask you for an instance, for an heart-rending instance of the instability of every human prospect, and the meagre advantage which all externals boast? Know then, there was once a being, her remains are not far distant, who might boast these advantages in no ordinary measure : a being whose worth shone conspicuous in her sphere, and attracted the homage of very many hearts : a being surrounded by a numerous tribe of friends who were able to perceive and do justice to her worth : a being to whom there were persons so tenderly attached, that they seemed but to live in the light of her countenance : a being whose mild and equable temper, whose tender affections, cultivated understanding and highly prosperous circumstances, seemed to give assurance of a happy life ; while the blood that mantled in her cheek of youth and loveliness gave equal promise of a long one. But the wisdom of the eternal had otherwise appointed : and while yet she

“ ——— Put forth the tender leaves of hope
And bore her blushing honours thick upon her,”

Her frame was blighted by lingering disease, and all her advantages rendered almost nugatory. Yet was she, apparently, for a long time sustained by the buoyancy of youthful spirits ; and seemed not unfrequently to rise above the feeling of her sufferings and bereavements. Hope, the earliest of earth born-con-

solutions ; hope, the last remedy to lose its efficacy on the unhappy ; hope, that never palls by use a thousand times repeated—hope still afforded the prospect of happier times ; and often seemed active to communicate the vigour necessary to enjoy them. But still the arrest of death was on her ; and at length his work was finished. Would you estimate the value of this ever-changing world, the “fashion” of which so speedily “passeth away ?” we ask you to reflect how its advantages must at this moment be estimated by our departed friend : for she survives, though we see her not : she is accessible as ever to pleasure or to pain, though the objects with which her spirit comes in contact are hid from mortal vision. Objects most stupendous have long since burst upon her view : scenes that shall forever be strangers to mutation now constitute her home. Should the dead then burst her cerements ; or should the spirit stand revealed ; what, to-day, would be the language of our amiable and lamented friend ? We know that that voice which once was music to our ears, would reiterate the warnings and consolation of my text, “let them that weep be as though they wept not.” Such, no doubt, is the sentiment of our friend ; such, to us, is the language of her death ; and such, in a little while, will be the language of our own.

But if to the consideration of the shortness of human life, you add the recollection of its extreme uncertainty, you will see still more abundant reason to carry home with you the lesson derived from this sad scene. Though it was the affliction, yet it was also the pri-

vilege of our departed friend to have borne about with her so long a strong memento of her mortal state. The delay so long protracted of the uplifted stroke, the frequent experience of reviving strength after the springs of life had seemed well nigh exhausted, appear to have materially contributed to that hope, which, we said, did not desert her till the very last. Yet at length did it burst like a very bubble, and left nothing but the hand that created to sustain her—to sustain her while it bore her to that last tribunal before which every destiny is cast in an eternal mould. Yet, though she were weak, though she were an incessant sufferer, hers was still a case in point to lecture all on the uncertainty of life. You see how hope still flourished, while health, the stem on which it ordinarily grows, had long been withered to the very root. How much more then may you feel secure, on whom disease has made no perceptible attack; and how much more needful the lesson that should teach you the delusiveness of every human calculation founded on the appearances of human things!

But while from this instance, as only one among ten thousand, you are taught the little value of every earthly good; while instructed not to mistake the delusions of hope for the stability of assurance; suffer me to entreat you to make that use of your well established health, which my departed charge is well known to have made of her intervals of ease. In the midst of distress I have said that she was cheerful: in the midst of feebleness she was also on the alert. Though the martyr of disease, though she shrank be-

fore the blast, though almost every sound grated harshly on the nerves, yet she was active ; and that feebleness was exerted in the best of causes : for when in her power she was a cheerful frequenter of the house of prayer. The last time my eyes beheld her—the last time my voice saluted her, the scene was laid in the sanctuary of God. With pallid cheek and emaciated frame, “ she sat like patience on a monument,” till the service was completed ; and that once done, she saluted the officiator with a smile that illumined her dark brow of sorrow, and in a voice of which the tones will never be forgotten. They seemed to say her heart was in the sanctuary of the most High ; they excited strong hope that she had not been there in vain. They seemed to bespeak an expectation that it would often be revisited ; they excited an hope that the expectation would be realized.—But it was the last these eyes were permitted to behold of MARY CASTLEMAN. Before another week had completed its full round, she was laid upon that bed from which she never rose. So passes away “ the fashion of this world.” So perished one among the loveliest in creation.

Friends, if the facts do not speak to your hearts ; if they do not say to you “ be ye also ready,” we despair of being able to make a good impression by any comment we could add. We will not attempt such comment. We will only ask you to join us in extolling “ the glorious gospel of the blessed God,” which has given us assurance that these ruins shall be repaired. We will only invite you to appeal, in the

moments of health, to that Saviour, whose arm will uphold the feeblest of his people, when all is changing and sinking and perishing above, beneath, around them. Then living by the hope and acting in the spirit of the apostle of the Gentiles, be it life or be it death, your hearts will be at rest, for your triumph will be sure. Like him you can say, "for me to live is Christ;" like him you can lift up "the voice of joy and thanksgiving" on the precincts of the tomb: "O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." AMEN.

FINIS.