

THE AMERICAN NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 2, Vol. XXIII.

FEBRUARY, 1849.

Whole No. 866.

SERMON CCCCXIII.

BY REV. I. S. SPENCER, D.D.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

SOLOMON'S EXPERIENCE AND OBSERVATION.

"Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit."—Eccles. 2: 17.

THERE are few parts of the sacred Scriptures more difficult of interpretation than the one which contains this text. The style of the Book is peculiar; and the rapid transition of thought from one subject to another, and from one state of mind to another—a transition often made without any express mention of it—throws an air of obscurity and, indeed, sometimes an appearance of contradiction over the sentiments uttered.

Hence, the most extravagant ideas have sometimes been deduced from it;—the most mischievous, the most absurd. Some expressions in it have been employed in a manner which might well rejoice libertines; and the licentious themselves have sometimes seized upon ideas contained in it, to justify all the extravagances of an unbridled licentiousness. They have very eloquently repeated that passage in the seventh verse of the ninth chapter, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart," as if it were a fit motto for a man of pleasure. With equal animation and eloquence, they have recited that passage in the twenty-fourth verse of the second chapter—"There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor," as if it were designed to give loose reins to indulgence.

And infidelity, as well as libertinism, has made itself merry over the supports supposed to be found in some of these chapters. It has called ideas found here contradictory—the whole Book a jumble of inconsistencies. Bringing together the second verse of

SERMON CCCCXCIV.

BY REV. I. S. SPENCER, D. D.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

HATRED OF LIFE.

“Therefore I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me : for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”—Ecclesiastes 2 : 17.

WE directed your attention to this passage on a former occasion. At that time, we desired to lay the foundation of a just interpretation of it. We could not *then* do more in the space of time your indulgence allows to us. We propose now a more close attention to the text itself. But it will be necessary to advert to the principle we then laid down—a principle needful to be kept steadily in mind by any and every man, who would have a right understanding of the book of Ecclesiastes.

The principle was this : that Solomon wrote this book to persuade men, especially young men, to religion, by an argument drawn from his own life. On the ground of that life, he holds up the world before the eye of a young man, simply to have him look at it as it is, in all its forms and promise, and then make up his mind whether it is worth the consideration he gives to it, while for its sake, he continues in his irreligion, and does not *seek first* the favor of God. To show the world in its just light, Solomon speaks as an old practitioner, and an old observer—a man of feelings and of eyes. And while he adverts so constantly throughout the book to his own experience and observation, as a man who had tried riches and pomp and pleasure, and who had lived long enough to see all that the wide-spread shiftings and fluctuations of this world can heave up ; he distinguishes three points of his own heart's history :

First, Sometimes he tells what he felt and thought, at the period when he was going on in the full tide of worldly enjoyment and hope :

Second, Sometimes he expresses the sentiments he entertained at the period when he had found that the world could not answer his purpose, and found himself heart-sick and disgusted with it all ; and *before* he had turned to God, placing his affections and directing his aims upon something better than earth :

Third, Sometimes he expresses the sentiments he entertained *now* ; when he had chosen “the fear of God” and “the keeping of his commandments ;” and when, as an old hand in the

matter, he could tell irreligious young people what the world's offers were good for; and what was the only thing that was worth living for.

The text before us expresses the sentiments he entertained in the second of these periods, which we have denominated the period of disgust. You perceive he speaks of the past—he speaks of himself—he speaks as a man of experience and observation: “I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” You perceive, he saw the world in its true light, so far as it is considered by itself, and *not* considered in its relation to another. He was heart-sick of it all; he even *hated life*; i. e. he was disgusted with it—he saw it useless, and found it distasteful. Things met his eyes which threw a cast of vanity over all human existence; and feelings came up in his heart, which made even life itself in such a world as this, a sickening portion, a burden, an empty and distressful dream.—So he felt without religion. So he found life. So he would have all the irreligious feel. So he would assure them that they shall find life, sooner or later, just as surely as they live in this world without God. Sooner or later, (much as they love the world, and eagerly as they pursue it,) they shall half wish, or quite wish, they had never lived at all.

Let us enter into this subject. Let us spread out this lesson. Let us cast our eyes over the whole scenes of an irreligious life, and see if anywhere we can discern anything which ought not to make an irreligious man sympathize with Solomon in his period of disgust—*I hated life*.

Not to exhaust this subject, but to give some hints of its extent, we name to you six ideas:

1. The confusion and darkness which cover life;
2. The results of a worldly experience;
3. Knowledge of men;
4. Excessive fondness for the world;
5. Failure in worldly endeavors;
6. Failure of even that intellectual excellence, which rises above “amusements” and sensuality.

I. It needs no argument to prove that the dispensations of God are often shrouded in impenetrable darkness. But the *depth* of that midnight hovers over the head of an irreligious man. God's promises cast light where nothing else can; and one of the present, and often realized advantages of religion, is to be found in the fact, that the Divine dispensations are all of them confirmatory of the Divine promises, and all illustrative of their significance. There is not a thing so strange, a distress so deep, a night so dark, but the very unacceptableness of the matter brings along with it to the Christian some lesson of profit, as it bears on an immortality to come, or some balm of comfort, as God stands by his people in

the furnace of trial. With the wicked, with the worldly, it is not so. They read time by the light of time's own torch, flickering and fitful. They read the world aside from the light cast back upon it from the anticipated fires of its coming conflagration. Hence they cannot read rightly. Time, the world, life, are all misunderstood; and so misunderstood by an irreligious man, that he is compelled to be disgusted with life, or else act very much on the proposal of licentiousness, *let us eat and drink for to-morrow we shall die*—(Is. 22: 13.)

How can a man be satisfied here, or be anything better than sickened with life, when at every glance over society, his eyes meet with instances of virtue depressed, and vice prosperous? Where is the equity in this? On what principle is it, that the man who has done most good to society is often least rewarded and least esteemed by society; and the man who has done most evil to his generation shall be the very man upon whom earth confers most of her advantages, and men of the world lavish most of their smiles? The wicked often prosper. The righteous often suffer. Confusion seems to reign over life. As a man looks upon it, his eyes behold strange things; and as he thinks in the days of his youth, of entering upon that capricious scenes wherein awards are distributed, not according to merit, to industry, to worth; how can he avoid being disheartened and disgusted with a life which proposes to him, he knows not what? He has no religion. He cannot think or feel on religious principles. He sees only uncertainty and confusion. On the one hand, he beholds men, whom he is compelled to despise, seated in high places of honor and trust; and on the other hand, he beholds men, whose transactions are detestable, gifted with every desired prosperity. He says to himself "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to the men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all"—(9: 11). So he thinks. He knows no better. He sees no farther. And can you wonder, that he should be thoroughly heart-sick of a life, which he must go and spend amid such a scene of turmoil, confusion, and uncertainty? Is it any wonder, if, disgusted with all that life and the world can offer, he should just let *time and chance* dispose of them as they will? Or if he looks forward to the end, all the end that his now worldly soul cares anything about, how can he avoid dissatisfaction, the most perfect disgust with life, while he says, as man "came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to God as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand? And this is a sore evil, that in all points, as he came so he shall go; and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind? All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness."—(5: 15-17.) How can he

avoid disgust with life, while his lips, untaught in the language of Israel, are saying, (9 : 2-5.) "all things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good so is the sinner, and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath: this is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all; yea also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead: for to him that is joined to all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion: for the living know they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten?" As the mind of this irreligious man sweeps over all human life, from the time of man's birth in nakedness, down to the period when time has worn the letters from his tomb-stone, and the *memory of all is alike forgotten*; is it any wonder, if such a life disgusts him? if, sick at heart, he turns away from its darkness, distresses and perishing memory? Life, the world, time, were never designed to be read in their own light simply. They were designed to be read in the full blaze of eternity. A wise man cannot be anything else than dissatisfied with life, while all his ideas linger on things this side the tomb. He may prosper here, he may not. And whether he does or not, he deems a matter of *chance*,—and since all die alike and alike are forgotten, a matter of indifference. He is dissatisfied with the world: he is dissatisfied with God when he thinks of Him; and dissatisfied with himself, whether he considers his experience or contemplates his prospects. "I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me."—He should look *beyond* the sun,—beyond the world,—beyond time. His disgust with life cannot be easily cured in any other method. Eternity alone can explain the darkness and disorders of time.

II. After all the earthly bounties of God, and all the provisions He has made to meet the wants, capacities, and tastes of our common humanity; there never yet has been a man who arrived at anything like a full satisfaction. This was one of Solomon's stings of experience. He tried hard to attain contentment. He run the full round of pleasure. He tried wealth. He tried honor. He tried pomp and splendor. He tried science. He tried wine. He was resolved to be happy: "whatever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion of all my labor"—(2: 10.) But it all would not do. He tried in vain. His hopes were blasted, and his heart saddened and sickened by the very profusion in which he sought satisfaction. And then he sums up the matter in a method most instructive to a votary of the

world: "I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on all the labor that I had labored to do, and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun"—(2: 11.) "I hated life."—The difference between Solomon and our worldlings is this: *He* succeeded; most of our worldlings fail! He was disgusted by success; most of our worldlings are disgusted by failure! His disgust with life bore off his mind towards the *life that is to come*; *THEIR* disgust, confined to experienced things, and not calling their thoughts to things hoped for, only fastens their mind more fixedly on the *life that now is*. But it will all be in vain. They cannot compel the world to satisfy them. They will be as much disgusted when the next year is closing upon them as they are now, when the last sands of this are falling, and when their hearts are so far from satisfaction. No matter what a worldly man attains, it does not answer his purpose. It disappoints him. It cheats him. It cheats him just as much in successes as in failures, "neither is his eye satisfied with riches"—(4: 8.) And it is a thousand wonders, that he does not become more disgusted with life than he is, and sooner disgusted. It is a thousand wonders that he does not *perceive* that his dissatisfaction springs, not from the limitation of his successes, but from the very nature of the objects he pursues. Such objects never can satisfy him. Give him anything and he will crave more. And, if he would only stop now, and take one sober thought about the ashes, the phantom, the dream he is pursuing, he could not avoid being disgusted with a life distressfully expended on such vanities. Every unbeliever in the world would be disgusted with life, if he would only notice the emptiness of that for which he is spending it. He is doomed—*no*, he dooms *himself*, to walk in a valley of trouble. Its end is as dark as its portion is troublesome; and it is no wonder, that as long as he is an irreligious man his most sober and deep thought compels him to wish or half wish, that he had never lived at all!—There is but one rock of repose for an immortal soul,—and *that rock is Christ*.

III. The same, or a worse species of dissatisfaction with life may very well result from what is often experienced amid once valued and sought intimacies and attachments.—Let us do the melancholy justice. Let us not attribute all their downcast feelings to a dark and gloomy disposition, nor to the east wind that has shattered their nerves. Where is the man, whose heart has not saddened at the recollection of professions once made to him? Who is there that has not found occasion to exclaim, what a world!—what friendships!—what friends! How soon their affections cool! How readily they fly from me in trouble! They could love me in prosperity, but they forsake me in adversity! Perfidious wretches! They could bask in the sunshine of my favor, when my favor was good for anything for them; they could de-

sert me in trouble, unshamed at their perfidy and their mean selfishness! "Two are better than one; for if they fall one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up"—(4: 10.) Such laments do not all come from a disordered fancy, from unstrung nerves, or from a melancholy disposition. They come sometimes from the realities of distressful experience; and that distress strikes so deep and so disgustfully upon the heart, (not now to say so common), that there is little ground to wonder, if life itself, to be spent among such sunshine friends, becomes a matter of disgust:—"I hated life." If you cannot realize it, I can only say, the realization is yet in store for you. You have but one way of avoiding it. You must have a *friend that sticketh closer than a brother*, to whom you may flee in every time of trouble, and with whose spirit you must be so deeply imbued, that, instead of hating the treacherous that pierce you, you shall pity them, and pray, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."—It is very common that an unbeliever's own companions make him hate life itself.

IV. There are instances in which this detestation of life results in its strongest measure from an excessive valuation of what one proposes to gain from the world, while life lasts. As ministers of the Gospel, we have something to do sometimes with this strange aspect of human nature. Let us tell you a secret: the most extravagant *fondness* for the world which we are ever called to notice and compelled to deplore, is indicated to us in the language of laments and dissatisfaction. Our acquaintance is unbosoming himself to us. He tells how he feels. He says, I detest the world; I despise it; I could wish to be dissolved from it; it has done me injustice; life in such a world is little more than a burden!—How is this? Does this complainer realize the world's emptiness? Has he risen superior to its charms? No such thing. Its charms are as dear to him as ever. He is heart-sick; but does not half know what makes him so. Its charms have escaped him; and his contempt of the world just springs from that fact. He had an excessive love for it, and his lamentations *now*, are just in proportion to his fondness once, aye his fondness still. He is not sorry for sin; he is only sorry his sin cannot find the means of indulgence. He is not about to repent; he is only taking revenge upon a world that has cheated him, by calling it hard names, and pouring contempt upon it. Take a little leaf of his heart's biography: I write it in this way: He commenced life in raptures with the world: his heart bounded to its embraces: he did not imagine that friends would be treacherous, fortune capricious, hopes vanishing, riches have wings, and the blood of youth and health soon circulate pain through his bones instead of pleasure. But his dream of fancy was soon broken. Its gilded spell

gave place to a hated reality. And now he is disgusted with life in such a world as this, just in the very proportion as he loved and loves still, the things beyond his reach : he hates life just as much as he loves the world ; and he rails at the world simply because it eludes him.—That is a leaf of his heart. He does not own it ; he does not believe it, simply because he does not know himself, because his *heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. His disgust with life is just the result of an excessive worldliness. It does not result from the serious reflections which an immortal soul ought to have—reflections controlled by the contrast between *the life that now is and that which is to come*.

V. A disrelish for life often springs from the cutting contemplation of the end of all man's endeavors, (2 : 11.) One does not like to labor in vain. It is disheartening to expend much toil for little good ; and it becomes the more so, when the good falls nowhere, either to the man himself or to those who come after him. If there could be any fixed certainty, that beneficial results shall come *somewhere*, and that, though the laborer does not reach them himself, yet his labor shall bless his successors ; the recollection of this might bring some solace to weary mind and weary muscles ; pride if not benevolence might then extend its regards onwards beyond life, and as far as the results of present exertion shall reach—and the man might value life on much the same principle as some men put value on the tomb-stone, that shall tell where they lie—it gives their earthly existence a kind of extension.

But behold the reality. Even worldly men are often compelled to see it. There is *no* certainty ; none that is solacing. Toil and labor must be expended very much in vain. At least the wicked think so, whenever they really think at all. Solomon thought so. Hear him. He asks, (2 : 23)—“ For what hath man of all his labor and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun ? for all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief, yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. (2 : 11). Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do ; and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.” So much for the present.—And what in the future ? The future is no better. “ There is no remembrance of the wise man more than of the fool forever, seeing that which now is, in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man ? as the fool. Therefore I hated life.”—And the future is no better when contemplated in respect to those who shall take the fruits of our labor—“ Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun ; because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me ; and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool ? Yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed

myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity." (2: 18, 19). Fools may take our possessions. Fools may be our heirs. All our labor, instead of profiting them, may only be a curse to them. Reboboams may inherit the crowns of our Solomons! and personal dissipation, and divided and ruined kingdoms, may be the fruits of all our earthly successes! Who then, can blame a disgust with life? If this is all, who ought *not* to be disgusted? Oh, that men would see it! certainly we do not live here for life's sake! most certainly, the world's history, almost every heart's history, is made by God himself, as bold a lesson to turn man's eyes towards the life to come, as could be written by the sunbeams on the ashes of a burnt world!—There is only one thing which never cheats endeavor, and never cheats hearts.

VI. But Solomon tried other resources. He was a man of science. Seldom, if ever, hath he been equalled. The wisdom embodied in his Book of Proverbs is unparalleled. Not to speak now of its religion, it is unequalled in its wisdom in reference to the common principles and economy of life. You have been taught how he coined those proverbs. To make a single one of them demanded great labor—extensive and acute observation. His mind examined and weighed everything connected with the subject; and having attained its knowledge and formed its judgments and made its discriminations, it condensed the whole matter in one short proverb, the embodied wisdom of a world of thought. There never was such a man. He studied everything. He says, "I turned myself to behold wisdom" (2: 12). "I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven" (1: 13). He applied himself to the sciences; and he expresses the superiority of his opportunities and means, by the question, (2: 12)—"What can the man do that cometh after the king?" *i. e.*, who can have such advantages for science as royalty furnished him? And he improved them. In the first Book of the Kings, fourth chapter and thirtieth verse, it is said—"Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt, for he was wiser than all men." The twelfth verse of the third chapter of that Book, tells us what God himself said to him—"Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee." The thirty-second and thirty-third verses of the fourth chapter furnish us a catalogue of some of the subjects on which he composed treatises, part of which are lost to the world—"He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. He spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things and of fishes."

A moralist, a poet, a philosopher, a historian, a botanist, a master in the natural history of beasts and birds and fishes and creeping things; there is no danger of extravagance in affirming, that his extent of science has seldom or never been equalled. He *gave his heart* to it, as he says; and he signally succeeded.

If, therefore, there was ever a man, or ever will be one, qualified by the knowledge and experience of the matter to estimate literature and science justly; that man was Solomon. And what does he say? Does he deem all this worth living for? Does it give him a relish for life, any more than his pleasure, "I said of laughter it is mad, and of mirth what doeth it?" or any more than his labors and his possessions, which might fall into the hands of a fool? Not at all. Take his own testimony. He does, indeed, in one sentence, express a preference for knowledge. He says—"A wise man's eyes are in his head," *i. e.*, a man of knowledge is not blind, while a fool "walketh in darkness." But after all, the whole array of his literature and science could not hinder his disgust of life, or make him feel it was worth living for. Read the eighth verse of the first chapter—"All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing;" science cost him more labor than it furnished him satisfaction; it could not fill an immortal soul. Read the eighteenth verse—"But in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth in knowledge, increaseth in sorrow." How is *this*? How is it? Why, it comes in a hundred ways; one is, that the point of satisfaction is never reached, not only, but is pushed further off, and appears more inaccessible, as knowledge increases, "that which is far off and exceeding deep, who can find it out." (7 : 24) : this is an affliction. Another is, that, as knowledge increases, you will see more and more to deplore in the world, and more and more to detest in its inhabitants. As your skill unmasks selfishness, and sees through the disguises of insincerity; and as you find the very man who has a smile for your presence, will have a sneer for you in your absence; you will have less bliss, than when you had more ignorance; you will be disgusted with men, and blush to think that you belong to the race. Another way is, that your increasing knowledge will have little justice done to it. You have laboriously fitted yourself for a station, that the world will not give you. A dolt, a simpleton, a profound block-head, whose stupidity is his only qualification, will be ushered before you, into the station, place, or business, for which you have laboriously qualified yourself in vain. Another way is, that knowledge will bear hard upon an irreligious pride. Fools may be vain. Vanity is a vice of the superficial. But men of extensive knowledge cannot have the stupid bliss of a high self-esteem. To say all in one word, when you have explored the heights and depths

of all earthly science, and gratified your zeal for knowledge in all that is knowable among men; you will be compelled to an *increase of sorrow*, because all this comes no nearer to satisfy your immortal soul, than did the ignorance in which you began. You will say like Solomon—"As it happeneth to the fool so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity" (2: 15).—Considered in view of eternity, the longest periods of time are no more than the shortest; and measured by the wants of an immortal soul, the most extensive science hath no more sufficiency than ignorance and stupidity. And if you could try it all, and on the ground of your experience should desire to leave your advice as a legacy to your son; you would just copy the twelfth verse of the twelfth chapter of this Book—"By these, my son be admonished, of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness to the flesh. Therefore I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me, for all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Disgust with life, when life is spent for any mere earthly purposes, will be an inevitable result of all sober thinking. Men cannot avoid it, but by avoiding thought, by shutting their eyes, by drowning their senses in the intoxication of thoughtless merriment, or gilded and baseless hopes.

It were easy to add to these items. Let these suffice.

But we cannot close without some other ideas, some lessons by way of inference.

1. Man was made for religion. He must have been. If not, he was made by an enemy, made for *vanity and vexation of spirit*. His life, and all he can gain as he spends it, will sooner or later become matter of disgust, contempt and sickening; just as surely as he lives and must die, if he does *not* live for immortality, and die to inherit it. If an immortal life is not within his reach; his life is itself a dark riddle, his world a riddle, his heart and conscience and hopes are only curses to him, all cheats; and it matters scarcely a song, whether he dies this year or the next, or lives a century! If he will not live for immortality, he will soon hate life, and soon wish he had never lived at all! He was made to "fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man."

2. The felicities of the irreligious, in this life, all depend upon lack of thought, and the power of deception. They cheat themselves: the world cheats them; their hopes, their aims, all cheat them! They are not what they think, and the world is not what they think it. Life, spent as they are spending it, will do them no good. How mournful, to see young people, (while life is on the wing, and its years one after another are rushing by,) spending their hours, their hopes, their energies, in a way, not only to do them no good; but in a way which if not speedily abandoned, will force

them to curse the day in which *they were born* ! Let we tell you, my young hearers, your life was not given for this world's purposes ; and if you spend it for them, you will spend it very much in vain. Your souls, your immortal souls cannot be satisfied as you hope. You need what the world cannot give. The sooner you are convinced of it the better. You need the favor of God. You need the blood of atonement, and the sustaining grace of the Holy Spirit. As you pass on in life, your hopes will be often disappointed, your world will become a blank to you, and your life a burden ! What gives you most happiness will soon give you most pain ; what now multiplies your joys will soon multiply and embitter your sorrows ; for death will cut down your friends around you ! It will make the world a solitude, and life itself a distress. As you part with them, as you bear away their bones to the land of silence, your hearts will sink within you : and how will you bear the superadded distress of the thought, that your impiety embittered the dying hours of the friend, the father, the mother you will see no more ? Oh, if you but had then that sweet hope that you should see them in heaven, how it would blunt the sting that enters into your soul ! how it would make you realize that life is something more than a sickening scene, and death something else than an eternal separation.

Therefore,

3. How greatly desirable is early piety. This was one of the conclusions which Solomon drew from his varied experience and extensive observation. He had tried the world. He well knew its worth. He had tried religion too ; and having felt how strong an enforcement for religion could be gathered from all that the world contains ; in this Book his mind takes a truly philosophical sweep over the whole range of an earthly existence, and then comes to the conclusions which such a view could not avoid. Early piety is one of these conclusions—" *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.*" Notice how he arrives at this conclusion. Both observation and experience help him to it. " *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,*" is an expression containing the condensation of all that he felt and knew about the world. *I hated life,* is a description of one of his bitter experiences, after he had tried to force the world to make him happy. He wished to save young people from the toilsome and tearful career that he had himself run, while seeking his happiness in luxury and splendor and " *amusements,*" in songs and science, and *whatsoever his heart desired under the sun.* He holds up before them the whole world as it is, when taken as a portion, *vanity, vanity, vanity,* written in letters of fire all over its splendor and pomp and merriment, and even science. He opens to them his heart, his own heart, torn with *vexation*, and sick of life even, while its fondness hung round things *under the sun.* They may glance at the picture, and

then at the heart; and having done so, may take their choice, whether they will spend their earliest and best days for such *vanity*, only to give such *vexation*. But if they will hear him, an old practitioner, an old observer, he tells them in the twelfth chapter, the sentiments which he now entertains, burnt into his heart by the bitterness of an experience from which he would dissuade them. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened; nor the clouds return after the rain. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders shall cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows shall be darkened. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low; and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird; and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goeth to his long home; and the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel be broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

What is it all? all the world? all life? *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity. I hated life.* And shall the young run the same round? shall they lend their minds to the same dream, and their hearts to the same sickening? Shall their best energies be expended in vain? Will they not *believe*, without the bitterness of a trial, that the world cannot answer their purpose? Will they not believe philosophy, gathering up all the worth of the world, and labelling it all, *vanity*? Will they disbelieve history, biography, experience, the grave and God,—all which urge them to the *conclusion of the whole matter*, that, to *fear God and keep his commandments is the whole of man*? (12: 13). But, by and bye, (if they should live), their best days spent, old, worn out, and good for nothing, their bones shaken at the grave's mouth; will they then first begin to think, that *God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*? (12: 14).—Early piety would save them from a world of vexation. Nothing *but* early piety can save many of them from hell. Few of them will live to be old.

My young friends: living in such a world, and hasting to such a tribunal, does thoughtlessness or merriment become you? Must you live to be "amused," and then die to be lost? Remember, you must have a meeting with God! Hide, you cannot! Shrink,

you cannot! You must stand *there*, where the throne blazes, and endless ruin or eternal bliss begins! Despair, perdition, are unnecessary. God *waits to be gracious*. He calls you to Christ. He offers you heaven. You may be saved, if you will. But let me tell you, He will soon take back His offers of fatherly and gracious kindness and love. That *throne of grace* on which He sits, shall soon be taken down, and He will rear on the spot His throne of judgment! "*Every man's* work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is." (1 Cor. 3: 13). "For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, that it shall leave neither root nor branch." (Mal. 4: 1). If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Peter 4: 18). In view of that dreadful day and all its results—*now*, in your youth—*now*, before you hate life, make your choice betwixt vanity and heaven—truth and falsehood—sin and holiness—the eternal friendship and eternal enmity of God! But, oh! choose wisely, and live for ever.

If you will not choose so, reflect,

4. How strong is the power of sin over the human heart! Men will spend their lives in the very way to make life itself a distress. They will live for the world in a way to poison life's good, and force from their own lips the bitter confession, "I hate life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." It need not be. This life, as an introduction into heaven, may be joy in God, and the triumph of hope over gloom, dissatisfaction, and anguish.

5. Finally, this discussion ought to be a lesson to us on the matter of a worldly prosperity. One of the most amiable sins (if I may speak so), certainly one of the most excusable (if again I may speak so), is the anxiety of parents for the prosperity of their children. But amid that desired prosperity, their very children may *yet hate life*. Let us not expend our affections unwisely. Let us be more anxious, that our children shall be disgusted with a life spent for the world, than that they shall be satisfied with it. Let us be more desirous that they shall be happy in heaven, than prosperous on earth. Let us consult for them, not merely as formed for this world, but as accountable, immortal beings, formed for eternity. If we live to the next Lord's day, let us come to the Lord's table with prayer for them; that our life and our death may not be embittered with the thought of their impiety. If the God of mercy will hear our prayers, and bring them yet to that table with us, we will no longer say—"I hate life"—we will exclaim, Lord, "Now lettest thou thy servants depart in peace, for our eyes have seen thy salvation."—God grant it. Amen.