

THE VANITY AND GLORY OF MAN.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED

IN THE CHAPEL OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGE,

ON THE 9TH OF OCTOBER, 1842,

On occasion of the Death of Benjamin R. Maybin,

A MEMBER OF THE FRESHMAN CLASS.

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To the Students of the South Carolina College,

THIS Sermon, originally composed for their benefit, is now, most respectfully dedicated. A sincere desire to promote their spiritual interests has induced the Author to commit to the Press what he is aware is recommended by no other excellence than the simplicity of truth and the sincerity of Christian affection. He has hoped that while the event which gave rise to the discourse is fresh in the memory of his young friends, they may be induced to lay seriously to heart the solemn admonitions which the preacher attempted from the desk, and now endeavors from the press, to fix upon their minds. That the Eternal Spirit, through whose instructions alone we can be made wise unto salvation, may impart His blessing to the feeble effort which is here put forth to glorify His name, is the fervent, heartfelt prayer of the

AUTHOR.

SERMON.

JOB 14: 10.

“BUT MAN DIETH AND WASTETH AWAY; YEA, MAN GIVETH UP THE GHOST, AND WHERE IS HE?”

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IN the mysterious providence of God, we are called, my Friends, upon our first assembling together to enter the house of mourning. One of your companions has departed “to return no more to his own house, neither shall his place know him any more;” he “hath given up the ghost, his sun has gone down while it was yet day.” He had just begun to look abroad upon the world, and to acquire that manly discipline which was to fit him for acting an honorable part in its affairs, when, lo, the destroyer came, and by a single stroke blasted all his hopes, scattered his youthful dreams, and laid him low in the dust. “The voice of one preparing in the wilderness the way of the Lord” was directed to cry, and “he said, what shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it; surely the people is grass.”

The ravages of death and the vicissitudes of time so constantly impress the mind with the vanity of earthly pursuits, that the folly alike of our hopes and fears has been, in all ages of the world, among philosophers,

110797

moralists and poets, the fruitful theme of declamation and of song. We are prone, however, to indulge in a sort of vague and melancholy musing, in which the decay of kingdoms, the revolutions of empires, the fashion of this world passing away, and the whole race of man, in successive generations, travelling down to the chambers of the dead, are suffered to affect the imagination with solemnity and awe without being permitted to penetrate the heart. If we contract our views within a narrower compass, to a single victim of mortality, we are rather inclined to dwell upon the accidents of death, in which much is found to awaken our sympathies, than to look upon it as it is, in its own nature, the porch of the judgment hall. We are willing to lament in the language of the text, "man dieth and wasteth away," but we forget the still more solemn truth, "he hath given up the ghost;" he hath surrendered an immortal spirit into the hands of God, and its eternal doom is sealed.

That poetical solemnity, if I may so express it, which springs from the contemplation of death merely as the close of life, when an end is put to our hopes and fears; the eye has gazed for the last time upon the light of day; the heart has ceased to beat with affection, and friendship and the dearest ones on earth can awaken no token of recognition or esteem; when a family is involved in mourning, and weeping friends refuse to be comforted; that solemnity which is produced by circumstances like these, will inevitably pass away as the morning cloud or early dew; or rather it will vanish like an arrow through the air, leaving no trace behind of solid improvement or substantial good. He that

has thus wept at the grave of a friend, and sighed at the vanity of earthly pursuits, will soon forget his griefs and plunge with increased alacrity into the cares of life. The scene which death had just disrobed of its decorations will be adorned again with brighter colours of hope; the delusions of sense will resume their accustomed grasp, and the house of mourning be exchanged for the laughter of fools and the frivolities of mirth.

There is a voice, however, which cries to us from the tombs, and which, aiming far higher than to awaken a few transient emotions, instructs us in lessons of everlasting importance. It is the voice of God confirming by His providence the solemn monitions of His word, and as it proclaims the vanity of all things earthly; riches, pleasures, learning and friends; its design is not to inspire a sickly disgust of life, nor to torture the heart with bitter complaints of our perishing state, but to turn our eyes from this dissolving tabernacle and this fading world to "that building of God, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The grave, like the ancient pillar of cloud, though dark on one side is bright on the other; it shrouds the earth in gloom, throws a damp upon its brightest joys, and withers its fairest honours only to teach us, that here "we have no continuing city; that we are only strangers and pilgrims upon earth," and that our abiding home, the true rest of the soul, is beyond the skies. At the grave we stand upon the confines of two worlds, and occupy the best position for estimating rightly our highest duties and truest interest. We can look back upon life, we can look forward to eternity, and from the indissolu-

ble connection of the two can learn the value to be set upon the one and the required preparation to be made for the other.

In pursuing this train of reflection which strikes me as best suited to the occasion, it shall be my object to illustrate the vanity of man, apart from his immortality, and then conduct you by a necessary inference from the wisdom and goodness of God to a full and distinct conviction of the reality of that future state which is brought to light in the Gospel.*

To him who acknowledges the perfections of God, and yet denies the immortality of the soul, human life must appear an inexplicable mystery. No end commensurate with the faculties of man, or worthy of his exalted nature, can possibly be achieved within the short compass allotted to the continuance of his being upon earth. Even if the objects which are so eagerly pursued by the mass of our race were capable of yielding the happiness for which they are coveted, our time is so limited that the toil of securing them would be too costly a price for the pleasure of enjoyment.—Wealth, pleasure, learning and honor, the painted vanities which share the affections and homage of mankind, whatever blessings they confer, require them to be purchased with arduous sacrifices and painful privations; with prayers and tears and blood. Like all other idols, they doom their victims to inexorable bondage. If by laborious diligence and severe self-denial

* See the admirable discourse of John Howe, entitled, "The Vanity of Man as Mortal." Robert Hall has also a sermon on the same subject, to be found in vol. 6th of his works, Eng. Edition.

we could have at our command the gold of ophir and the pearls of the sea; if we could call the world our own, with all its pleasures, honors and glories; if we could travel that mysterious path of wisdom which no "fowl knoweth and which the vulture's eye hath not seen," who would feel rewarded for his toils, for his anxious days and his sleepless nights, by the few moments of hasty fruition redeemed from the pursuit? The period allotted to enjoyment would be so exceedingly short, that all our possessions would be stamped with unspeakable vanity. In the grave, whither we are all hastening, the rich and the poor are promiscuously mingled together; the distinctions of honour vanish away as colours disappear in the dark; the fascinations of pleasure lose their power to intoxicate the heart, and royal dust is found to be as perishing as the clay of the beggar. "Surely man, at his best estate, is altogether vanity."

No good can be perfect which is not durable. The prospect of termination, however remote, is a source of anxiety, and the pain of apprehension is increased just in proportion as perpetuity is desired. The most exalted objects, therefore, in the gratifications which they afford, are subject to the largest deductions; and he who would dash his cup with the smallest ingredient of bitterness, must be content to waste his life upon the least honourable and worthy pursuits. Man, by nature, a prospective animal, is the creature of hope and fear, and the complexion of the present is determined by the phantoms of the future casting their shadows before. Calamities foreseen are hardly less bitter than calamities at hand; and he who

looks forward to the time when his richest joys shall be driven from his breast, experiences already a portion of the anguish which actual bereavement will entail upon his heart. Poets and philosophers have combined in denouncing the folly of "forestalling our griefs, and running to meet what we would most avoid," but neither poetry nor philosophy can change the essential constitution of our nature. However unwisely they may act in this respect, men will always anticipate the future; and if it cast a lowering frown upon the present, it will divest that present of all its charms. The vale below may be beautiful and verdant, but its atmosphere is chilled by the eternal snows which rest upon the mountains around. The ghastly image of death, obtruding into all our pursuits, must diffuse a feeling of insecurity and terror which the richest possessions are unable to expel; and as that class of futurities which are apprehended to be near at hand more sensibly affect us than those which are distant, death, which is always at the door, which is forced upon our thoughts by every opening grave, every funeral bell, every groan of agonized, smitten humanity, must often involve our thoughts in gloom before we are driven to the land of darkness and despair.

In some it might be that the prospect of a speedy dissolution would inspire additional ardour in the career of indulgence, the heart being maddened by despair of durable good to extract from the present every portion of enjoyment which its objects were capable of yielding. But the eagerness of desire would frustrate its own end; it would itself become a source of uneasiness and poison the cup which it intended to

exhaust. As the miser by his greediness to hoard loses all the satisfaction which money can impart, so these miserable votaries of sense, in their anxiety to secure every fragment of pleasure, are in danger of corrupting what they might enjoy by grasping at too much. In their zeal to drain the bowl to the bottom, they mar the flavour of the wine by the infusion of the dregs. He who is tormented with the fear that some possible indulgence shall escape him, is just as truly miserable as he who "through fear of death is all his lifetime subject to bondage." Both are strangers to that serenity of mind which alone is worthy of being dignified as happiness, in which all the powers of the soul are harmoniously adjusted; in which it is free from the perturbations of fear, the seductions of fancy and the impatience of hope, and all the faculties rest in the enjoyment of a satisfying good. The degree of misery does not depend upon the real magnitude of the cause which produces it: the disappointment of the sensualist may be to him the occasion of as keen an anguish as the loss of character or the loss of kingdoms to wiser men. Such, in fact, is the constitution of man that a single element of uneasiness, however trifling in its own nature, may outweigh a thousand sources of felicity. Our impressions of pleasure or of pain depend upon the character of the objects which absorb our attention; that only having a real existence to us which exists in the mind. Whatever, therefore, concentrates the thoughts upon itself virtually annihilates every other object, and renders us incapable of any other emotions but those which its own nature is suited to produce. It becomes the master of the man

and imparts its own complexion to the feelings of his heart. Hence a single want, whether real or imaginary, by engrossing the whole attention to itself, may make even the favourite of fortune truly miserable in the midst of his affluence and honours. The glory of his riches, the multitude of his children and the distinguished favours of the king were nothing to the wretched Haman so long as he saw Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate.

If the objects of sense upon the supposition of their intrinsic value,—a supposition justified neither by reason nor experience and made only for the purpose of setting the argument in a stronger light,—if upon this gratuitous supposition these objects, in their relations to us, are fraught in vanity and vexation of spirit, on account of the shortness of our mortal career, the toils and sacrifices which it requires to secure them, the gloomy prospect of approaching dissolution and the impatient suicidal desire of seizing all possible indulgence, how much darker is the picture upon the true statement of the case, that the world and all its charms are empty, worthless, delusive! In this view, the true view of our condition,—if our prospects are to be bounded by the limits of the grave and no hereafter exists beyond it,—man is not only vanity himself, but the tenant of a vain world. In the beautiful language of the Psalmist, “he walketh in a vain shew.” A shadow, at best, he is doomed everlastingly to grasp at phantoms and to be mocked with images of unreal good. The earth becomes but the pomp of a theatre where a succession of busy scenes is presented, “full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing.”—

He spends his “days as a dream or as a tale that is told.” The melancholy picture which Job draws of his own condition may be applied to the human race, if there be no reason for believing that “a change shall come and that, if a man die, he shall live again.” “I am made,” says he, “to possess months of vanity and wearisome nights are appointed unto me. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle and are spent without hope. Oh, remember that my life is wind; mine eye shall no more see good. As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away, so he that goeth down to the grave, shall come up no more.” And if this be the true statement of the case who will not join with the patriarch in his solemn expostulation: “Therefore I will not refrain my mouth, I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than my life. I loath it, I would not live alway—let me alone—for my days are vanity.”

Whatever is proposed as the supreme good of the soul must be something congenial with its nature. Happiness consists in enjoyment, and perfect enjoyment is found in the complete adaptation of external objects to the affections and desires of the mind. Such is our helpless and dependent condition that we must go abroad from ourselves in quest of felicity; and such the exquisite sensibility of our spirits that without the fullest sympathy with the objects of our pursuit, our hearts are lonely and desolate. To Jehovah alone it belongs to be sufficient to Himself—to find in the fulness of His Own being an inexhaustible fountain of blessedness, so that when “the youths shall faint and be

weary and the young men utterly fall, the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary. Finite minds require the sympathy of superior natures, and where this cannot be afforded, their way is beset with thorns and their light expires in darkness. To him who considers the distinguishing excellence of man, his moral and intellectual capacities, the assertion will not seem extravagant, that the world in all its glory is too poor to present a single object fit to be pursued as the ultimate portion of the soul. A perfect good, suited to the nature of the mind, in which it can fully and completely sympathize, which leaves nothing to be sought and from which nothing can be feared, has been, for ages and generations past, the object of anxious desire and diligent pursuit—the whole family of man with hardly a single exception has been embarked in the enterprize—the ocean's depths have been sounded—the caverns of the earth explored and the powers of nature put to the torture, and all have answered and all will forever answer, each for himself, "it is not in me."

They who bound the destiny of man by time, destroy his hopes of immortality and divest him of the prospect of everlasting communion with his God, represent him, with most detestable cruelty, as an orphan in the world. To the wretch who is burdened with a wounded spirit and seeks in the sympathy of a superior nature a solace for his woe, all the consolations which earth can suggest are like the voice of strangers to him who is dying in a foreign land. The soul, true to its refined and spiritual instincts scorns communion with the gross and senseless elements of matter. Raised by

his illustrious powers to an exalted station in the earth man may consistently make the world his servant, but never with impunity his God: and he who degrades his moral and intellectual being so low as to seek a portion with the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, must expect, as he sows the wind, to reap the whirlwind.

The only class of pleasures which are suited to the peculiar constitution of man are those of the understanding and the heart; all others he enjoys in common with the brute. It might be supposed from the refined and exalted nature of intellectual pursuits that the investigation of truth, the perception of moral distinctions and the practice of duty would redeem his condition from the imputation of vanity and yield him, in this world, short as his stay is, a satisfying good. We are apt, however, to be misled by the splendid declamation in which master spirits have indulged on the delights which accrue from the possession of knowledge, and indulged with safety, because the mass of mankind have not the experience by which they might correct the extravagance of the picture. To them it is only a painting, and their task is done when they have admired the richness of the colouring and the beauty of the outline, while those who know that it has no adequate prototype in nature are so charmed with the delusion that they are unwilling to break its spell. In all such high-wrought descriptions no abatements are made for human infirmity and weakness. They place man upon an eminence which he never yet has attained, and which, it is not too much to assert, he never will attain in his sublunary state, from

which he is "greeted with goodly prospects and melodious sounds on every side" without being disturbed by the "errors, wanderings, mists and tempests in the vale below." To the infinite mind of God, the contemplation of truth is undoubtedly a source of pure and ineffable delight. Free from the distracting anxieties of doubt, unruffled by prejudice and unmoved by the seduction of fallacious appearances, His breast, like the tranquil bosom of a lake, reflects the image of things in unbroken beauty. To Him there is no horizon of darkness, bounding the limits of His view. Dwelling in light inconceivably glorious, the night shineth as the day; from the mysterious depths of His eternity, He surveys all possible and real things—embraces the past, the present and the future in a single glance of unerring intuition and claims the distinguished prerogative of being the Father of truth. But how different is the state of mortals like ourselves! Perpetually exposed to the fascinations of falsehood, the delusions of prejudice, the torment of doubt, and the insatiable demands of curiosity, intellectual pleasures to us are by no means unmixed, and we feel constrained, however reluctantly, to justify the verdict of him who had had great experience of wisdom and knowledge, that in "much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." To say nothing of the intense application, the self-denying vigils, the wasting of the frame and the exhaustion of the spirits which must usually be paid as the price of truth, the conviction of ignorance, always painful and distressing, keeps pace with the expansion of the mind. As light is let into the soul, the circle of darkness is enlarged; and the utmost diligence of ef-

fort brings it no nearer the successful termination of its labours. We are always, relatively, just where we began—the original proportions of our ignorance and knowledge remain unchanged, and if our materials of mental enjoyment have accumulated, the sources of anxiety and suspense have been correspondingly increased. So many allowances indeed must be made for the unavoidable weaknesses of man, that if our existence is to terminate at death, it may justly admit of doubt whether the balance of happiness, on the whole, be found with the wise man or the fool.

The supreme good, in whatever it may be thought to consist, should possess the double property of imparting pleasure and resisting pain; it should be at once "a sun and a shield." The rest of the soul implies a peaceful serenity which no clouds can darken, no winds can agitate and no storms disturb. But what a feeble barrier is knowledge against the encroachments of calamity from either within or without? Though it has been compared to the harp of Orpheus, it possesses no power to quell the impetuous passions of the breast, to soothe the troubled conscience or to eradicate anger, ambition and revenge—those master lusts which have disturbed the peace of empires, deluged the earth in blood and made the world a field of skulls. It cannot relieve the anguish of want, allay the pangs of disease or soften the couch of death. In our moments of deepest distress, when the heart, torn by sorrows which it cannot pour into the bosom of mortals, bleeds in retirement, its ear is heavy that it cannot hear and its arm shortened that it cannot save. It is the decree of God, and no mortal tribunal can reverse

it. "Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks—walk in the light of your fire and the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." When the judgments of God were denounced against Babylon—and one of the grounds was, her "wisdom and knowledge had perverted her"—her men of science and philosophy—her "astrologers, stargazers, and monthly prognosticators," were required to stand up and save their city from the impending doom; but, oh, the deplorable blindness of man! they were unable to deliver even their own souls from the power of the flame.

When we turn to our moral constitution by which we are enabled to recognize the distinctions of right and wrong, and become the subjects of moral obligation, so far are we from perceiving, if this be our final state, any end consistent with the perfections of God or the happiness of man which can be accomplished by this crowning glory of our nature, that conscience seems to be given only to mock, mislead and annoy.

The pleasures which result from the consciousness of rectitude are undoubtedly the most pure and elevated of which the human mind is susceptible. But whether virtue would not lose its strongest attractions, whether, indeed, all sense of moral obligation would not be entirely obliterated, deserves to be seriously considered by those who, professing to be the friends of morality, are yet the deadliest enemies to the most cheering hopes of mankind. Philosophers have involved the question of duty in much obscurity and confusion by not properly discriminating between the grounds of

obligation and the nature of virtue. What virtue is, as a natural object, or how it is distinguished from vice, is a very different inquiry from the reason of man's being obliged to cultivate and practice it. Definitions of virtue only ascertain *what* is binding, and not *why* it is binding. The natural properties of things should not be confounded with their moral qualities. Virtue and vice, or rather those principles and actions to which these qualities belong, may be contemplated merely as natural objects, without any reference to their moral character, or the obligation upon us to cherish the one and avoid the other. In this view, though they will be found to be vastly different, the difference will be purely natural—arising from their essential attributes, as distinct existences, and analagous to that of light and darkness, of heat and cold, or any other physical entities. As results of their natural and essential differences, we may perceive the fitness of virtue to promote the harmony, peace and well being of society, and the tendency of vice to destroy the order and happiness of the world, just as we perceive the adaptation of the eye to the laws of light and its unsuitableness to a condition of darkness. But the fitness or unfitness of things to particular ends can never impose a moral obligation. The understanding may admire the harmony of parts, and the skilful adaptation of the whole, but the understanding is not the seat of duty. It may show us the *expediency* but not the *obligation* of adapting our conduct to the fitness of things. We may be even struck with the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice regarded still as only natural objects. We may be pleased with one and abhor the other; but the plea-

sure derived from virtue in this case, is the pleasure of sentiment and not of conscious rectitude,—a pleasure of the same kind as that which we receive from a fine description, a verdant landscape, or a finished painting; a pleasure addressed to taste and not to conscience, and founded on the inherent tendency of virtue, apart from its moral character, to excite pleasant emotions. This pleasure would exist if all sense of obligation were banished from the world. We advance no nearer to a satisfactory account of moral obligation by resolving virtue into sympathy, benevolence, utility, or any other single principle or combination of principles. These various theories are only efforts—whether successful or not, it is not my present purpose to inquire—to define what it is and to distinguish it from vice; they rise no higher than a description of its natural properties and consequently leave the question of obligation wholly untouched. Granting these accounts of the nature of virtue to be correct, we may still ask why it is obligatory? The natural and essential differences of actions, however striking and important, can never give rise to the feeling of duty. We must look to some other source besides abstract contemplation upon things themselves or their relations to each other for a true solution of this moral phenomenon.

It is evident that obligation implies authority, and supposes a law. And as man cannot exist to himself in the double and contradictory relations of master and servant, ruler and subject, obliger and obliged, he must look beyond himself for the true foundation of duty. Again, law is the expression of will, and will is the attribute of an intelligent person—so that we can never

reach the source of obligation until we have been conducted to a person who is capable of enforcing his will by adequate sanctions. The will of such a person is the ground and measure of moral obligation.*

* "Each animal hath its instinct implanted by nature to direct it to its greatest good. Amongst these man has his, to which modern philosophers have given the name of the *Moral Sense*; whereby we conceive and feel a pleasure in right and distaste and aversion to wrong, prior to all reflection or their nature or their consequences. This is the first inlet to the adequate idea of morality; and plainly the most extensive of all; the atheist as well as theist having it. When instinct had gone thus far, the *reasoning faculty* improved upon its dictates: For men, led by reflection, to examine the foundation of this moral sense, soon discovered that there were real essential differences in the qualities of human actions, established by nature; and, consequently, that the love and hatred excited by the moral sense were not capricious in their operations; for, that in the essential properties of their objects, there was a specific difference. Reason having gone thus far (and thus far too it might conduct the *Stratonic Atheist*) it stopped; and saw that something was still wanting whereon to establish the *morality*, properly so called, of actions—that is, an *obligation* on men to perform some and avoid others; and that, to find this something, there was need of calling in other principles to its assistance: Because nothing can thus *oblige* but a *superior will*; and such a *will* could not be found till the being and attributes of God were established, but was discovered with them. Hence arose and only from hence a *Moral Difference*. From this time human actions became the subject of *obligation*, and not till now. For though *instinct* felt a difference in actions and *Reason* discovered that this difference was founded on the nature of things; yet it was *Will* only which could make a compliance with that principle a *Duty*." Warburton, *Div. Leg. Mos.* Book 1, sect. 4.

The author would specially commend this and the succeeding section of Warburton's celebrated work to the attention of his readers as triumphantly sustaining the conclusions of this Discourse.

"Various are the principles"—says Bishop Van Mildert, "which have been adopted as the basis of morals, by ancient and modern theorists; such as Utility, Expediency, the Fitness of things, the Beauty of Virtue, the Moral Sense or Conscience—Justice, Veracity, the Public Good, and the like; some of which differ from each other rather in name than in substance. But in every system which proposes to establish morality on any other basis than that of the Revealed Will of God there is one fundamental defect that no satisfactory account is given of *moral obligation*, properly so called. For supposing any of these theories to be sufficiently well founded, the question will still return "why am I obliged to act thus? Why am I obliged to act in conformity with truth, utility, fitness of things or any other criterion which may be proposed as the test of right or wrong?" To these questions

We are bound or obliged because we are commanded, and that is right which is directed or prescribed by competent authority. And since the highest authority in the universe is that of the Almighty, the will of God is the real foundation of the moral differences of virtue and vice. Their natural differences may be the reason why He enjoins the one and prohibits the other, and may supply to us the probable media of ascertaining His will, but until that will has been made known, in some way or other, we are not the subjects of moral obligation. The various theories of virtue which philosophers have proposed, are of no other service than as they enable us to understand, or rather to discover, what has been commanded, or what has been prohibited. The command itself determines our duty. It is the office of the understanding, availing itself of the light of nature, or where it can be had, of the still clearer light of revelation, to ascertain what the will of God sanctions or condemns. When the law has been discovered, there is provision made in another part of our

no effectual answer can be given but that it is the *will of God*; and that if we obey not His Will, we must abide the consequences and suffer the penalties attached to disobedience. This is the *sanction*, the *only* sanction which can strictly be said to *oblige* us to any particular rule of conduct." Boyle Lect. Sermons. Sermon 15: Vol. 2nd, p. 86.

"All reasoning on morals presupposes a distinction between inclinations and duties, affections and rules. The former, prompt; the latter, prescribe. The former supply motives to action; the latter regulate and control it. Hence it is evident, if virtue have any just claim to authority, it must be under the latter of these notions; that is, under the character of a law. It is under this notion, *in fact*, that its dominion has ever been acknowledged to be paramount and supreme. But without the intervention of a superior will it is impossible there should be any moral laws, except in the lax metaphorical sense in which we speak of the laws of matter and motion." Rob. Hall. Sermon on Mod. Infid. Works, vol. 1, p. 22.

constitution for recognizing its authority and enforcing obedience. The rule is no sooner acknowledged by the understanding than a sense of duty is excited in the conscience. Conscience, accordingly, is the distinct recognition of God's authority, and the sanction of God's law in the human breast.

It is no objection to this statement that crimes and duties are sometimes confounded and men have felt impelled by their consciences to perpetrate enormities which provoke the vengeance of heaven. The error arises not from the imperfection of conscience; but the weakness of the understanding. It is not the office of conscience to discover, but to sanction; and if the understanding is deluded in receiving as the will of God what, in truth, He condemns, conscience enforces it only on the ground that it is His will. It proceeds upon a false hypothesis, but its decisions would be right if its hypothesis were correct. The sanction would be just, if the law as received by the understanding actually existed. It performs its own function properly, which is not to judge of the reality of the law, but supposing it to exist, to enforce its authority.

If obligation depends ultimately upon the will of God, and conscience is the sanction of that will in our own breasts, the pleasures which we receive from conscious rectitude are anticipations of the favour, and the pangs of remorse are dreadful apprehensions of the vengeance of God. The charms of an approving conscience arise, in other words, from expectations of the Divine benediction and the terrors of guilt from a "certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour" the rebellious. If it were not so, the pleasures

and pains arising from our moral nature would have no other peculiarity than that which accrues from their dignity and importance. They would be merely the gratifications of intellectual taste, of the same general character with those of sympathy or abstract contemplation. They would never suggest the idea of a law-giver and judge—the patron of righteousness and the enemy of sin. We should simply feel that the objects themselves were pleasant or painful—to be courted or avoided as a matter of comfort without dreaming of any higher motive than that which arises from the natural desire of happiness. But we know from our own and the experience of all mankind that there is something peculiar in the operations of conscience, something which distinguishes it in kind as well as in dignity from all other instincts or feelings. The least attention to our moral emotions and the language by which the universal consent of the race has uniformly described them, must convince us that conscience is a prospective principle—that its decisions are by no means final, but only the preludes of a higher sentence to be pronounced by a higher court. It derives all its authority from anticipations of the future. It brings before us the dread tribunal of eternal justice and almighty power,—it summons us to the awful presence of God—it wields His thunder, and wears His smiles. When a man of principle braves calumny, reproach and persecution—when he stands unshaken in the discharge of duty, amid public opposition and private treachery—when no machinations of malice or seductions of flattery can cause him to bend from the path of integrity, that must be a powerful support through

which he can bid defiance to the “storms of fate.” He must feel that a strong arm is underneath him, and though the eye of sense can perceive nothing in his circumstances but terror, confusion and dismay, he sees his mountain surrounded by “chariots of fire and horses of fire,” which sustain his soul in unbroken tranquillity. In the approbation of his conscience, the light of the Divine countenance is lifted up upon him, and he feels the strongest assurance that all things shall work together for his ultimate good. Conscience anticipates the rewards of the just; and in the conviction which it inspires of Divine protection, lays the foundation of heroic fortitude. When, on the contrary, the remembrance of some fatal crime rankles in the breast, the sinner’s dreams are disturbed by invisible ministers of vengeance—the fall of a leaf can strike him with horror—in every shadow he sees a ghost—in every tread he hears an avenger of blood and in every sound the trump of doom.* What is it that invests his conscience with such terrible power to torment? Is

* “Sith every man’s heart and conscience doth in good or evil, even secretly committed and known to none but itself, either like or disallow itself, and, accordingly, either rejoice, *very nature exulting, as at it were, in certain hope of reward, or else grieve, as it were, in a sense of future punishment,* neither of which can, in this case be looked for from any other, saving only from Him who discerneth and judgeth the very secrets of all hearts, therefore He is the only rewarder and revenger of all such actions.” Hooker. Eccles. Polity. Book 1, chap. ix, sec. 2nd. (Kemble’s Edition.)

“The power of conscience is seen in all men; it is common to all countries—to all religions; to the learned and unlearned; to rich and poor; it is an essential character of a rational mind; and therefore, to man, who is a rational creature, it is natural. When we offend wilfully against our sense of good and evil, conscience never fails to reproach and torment us with the apprehensions of evil and misery to befall us; and though nature has not furnished us with a distinct knowledge of the misery prepared for the wicked, yet natural conscience gives

there nothing here but the natural operation of a simple and original instinct? Who does not see that "wickedness condemned by her own witness and being pressed with conscience, always forecasteth greivous things;" that the alarm and agitation and fearful forebodings of the sinner arise from the terrors of an offended Judge and insulted lawgiver? An approving conscience is the consciousness of right, of having done

every wicked man—a certain expectation of it." *Sherlock's Discourses*. Dis. 27, Pt. 2d. (Hughes' Edition, vol. 2, p. 69.)

"God and our conscience are like relative terms, it not being imaginable why some persons in some cases should be amazed and troubled in their minds for their having done a secret turpitude or cruelty, but that conscience is present with a message from God, and the men feel inward causes of fear when they are secure from without; that is, they are forced to fear God when they are safe from men. As it is impossible that any man should be an atheist, if he have any conscience; and for this reason it is, there have been so few atheists in the world, because it is so hard for men to lose their conscience wholly." Taylor. *Duc. Dub. Rule 1. sec. 4. Works*. vol. xi, p. 371. Heb. Edit.

"Conscience is nothing but that judgment which men do make, and which they cannot but make, of their moral actions, *with reference unto the supreme future judgment of God*. Hence the apostle, treating of this future judgment, Rom. ii, 12, 16, diverts to shew what evidence all mankind had in the mean time, that such a judgment there should be, ver. 14, 15. And this he declares to consist in their own unavoidable thoughts concerning their own actions, good or evil. This, in the meanwhile, accused them, and forced them to own a judgment to come. Yea, this is the proper language of conscience unto sinners on all occasions. And so effectual was this evidence in the minds of the heathen, that they generally consented into a persuasion, that by one or other, some where or other, a future judgment would be exercised with respect unto things done in this world. Fabulous inventions and traditions, they mixed in abundance with this conviction, as Rom. i. 21, but yet, this made up the principal part of the notions, whereby a reverence for a divine being was preserved in their minds. And those who were wise and sober among them, thought it sufficient to brand a person as impious and wicked, to deny an unseen judgment of men's actions out of this world, wherewith Cato reproached Cæsar in the business of Catiline. This sense being that which keeps mankind within some tolerable bounds in sin, the Psalmist prays that it may be increased in them, Ps. xix. 13. See Gen. xx, 11." Owen on Hebrews, chap. vi. vs. 1, 2. Tegg's Edition, vol. 3, p. 190.

what has been commanded, and of being now entitled to the favour of the Judge. Remorse is the sense of ill-desert. The criminal does not feel that his present pangs are his punishment, it is the future, the unknown and portentous future that fills him with consternation. He deserves ill and the dread of receiving it makes him tremble.

The terms by which the common feelings of mankind have led them to describe conscience, afford no slight confirmation of the views which have here been suggested. According to Bernard, it is "the brightness and splendour of the Eternal Light—a spotless mirror of the Divine majesty and the image of the goodness of God." Tatian declares that it is "God unto us." Jeremy Taylor calls it "God's substitute; yea, the very image of God." In common language, it is spoken of as a Judge, and as God's vicegerent; all which expressions denote the full conviction of men that conscience has special and pointed reference to the sanctions of Jehovah's will. So clear indeed is this connection between conscience and the authority of God, that Tertulian pronounces it to be "God's witness," and the best and wisest philosophers have not hesitated to assert the absolute impossibility of atheism so long as conscience existed among men. This would be a witness for Jehovah when every other light was extinguished.

If this view of moral obligation be correct, all sense of duty is ultimately founded in religion, and especially in that great principle of it to which all nations have assented, and upon which the laws of society rest for their strongest support—that the guilty shall surely be

punished and the just received into favour. The atheist may acknowledge the natural and essential differences of things, but he would leave to virtue no principle of attraction more cogent or resistless than its own charms or its manifest utility in upholding the institutions and promoting the order of society. As his hypothesis removes the lawgiver, virtue itself must cease to be a law demanding obedience upon solemn sanctions and dwindle down into a mere abstraction which might or might not be regarded according to the dictates of appetite or passion. Conscience, as a prospective principle, anticipating the favour or displeasure of God could not exist. Whatever shadow of it might remain under the withering influence of atheistic principles, would be merely an animal instinct, entitled to no superiority over other propensities of the soul, and not likely to be gratified except at the call of convenience or caprice.

Our present state, upon the hypothesis that death is the destruction of both soul and body, would be no more favourable, although the Being and perfections of God should be admitted, to the interests of virtue than absolute atheism. It would as completely remove the sanction as the scheme of atheism the authority of the law. Conscience, upon this hypothesis, would be a liar and a cheat. It represents God as the patron of righteousness and the inflexible enemy of sin; and hence the sanctions of conscience, having reference as they do to a condition of moral government infinitely more regular and uniform than any which is experienced here, necessarily imply either an extraordinary Providence or a future state of rewards and punish-

ments. A future state is excluded by the terms of the hypothesis—an extraordinary Providence most certainly does not exist. The moral government under which we live is so evidently feeble and imperfect, if regarded as an entire system in itself, that virtue is perhaps more frequently depressed than vice. The complaint of good men in all ages of the world has been that the wicked prosper while they are doomed to reproach, persecution and calamity.* If, in fact, we had no other evidence of the moral character of God than that which is afforded by the distributions of pleasure and pain in the present life, we should be at a great loss to determine whether rebellion were not a safer method of securing His favour than obedience to His law. “No man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them—all things come alike to all—yea, there is a vanity which is done upon the earth—that there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again there be wicked men to

* Sæpe mihi dubiam traxit sententia mentem,
Curarent superi terras, an nullus incasset
Rector, et incerto fluerent mortalia casu.
Nam cum dispositi quæsissem fœdera mundi,
Præscriptosque mari fines, annisque meatus,
Et lucis noctisque vices; tunc omnia rebar
Consilio firmata dei, qui lege moveri
Sidera, qui fruges diverso tempore nasci,
Qui variam Phœben alieno jussisset igni
Compleri, solemque suo: porrexerit undis
Littora: tellurem medio libraverit axe.
Sed cum res hominum tanta caligine volvi
Adspicerem, lætosque diu florere nocentes,
Vexarique pios; rursus labefacta cadebat
Religio.—Claud. in Ruf. Lib. 1. 1 sec.

whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous."

Under these circumstances what becomes of the apprehensions of a guilty, and the smiles of an approving conscience? Is not her testimony for God found to be false and delusive? Does she not deceive with promises of good never to be realized, and torment with threatenings of misery never to be endured? What is she more or less than a liar and a cheat? Such deception could not long exist. The voice of conscience would soon be entirely disregarded, and all sense of moral obligation would just as completely evaporate under this system of fraud and imposture as under the withering curse of atheism; while it would forever remain the profoundest mystery in the universe how a God of infinite perfections should undertake to govern His creatures by gross and flagrant deceit.

Conscience being thus annihilated, there could be no law, and all the happiness which a good man now experiences from virtue, considered as his duty—all his hopes of the Divine favour, would be forever destroyed. Virtue would be intrusted with no rewards but the paltry satisfaction resulting from its pursuit as a matter of taste. In this view would it be the satisfying portion of the soul? Remove from men all obligation to practice it and how many would regard it from the natural relish which they have for its beauty? What would be its charms to the mass of our race? The mournful fact that the solemn sanction of religions avail so little to check the disorders and curb the enormities of the human heart will afford a sufficient reply. To minds rightly constituted, the result might be different;

but our race is in ruins; we have lost that exquisite sensibility to moral beauty which might quell the clamours of appetite, passion and selfishness; and when virtue actually came down in its purest exemplar among us, and set before us a model of most finished perfection, it was without form or comeliness; a root out of dry ground—it had no beauty in it that we should desire it. Those who declaim most eloquently upon the natural attractions of righteousness experience much more satisfaction in the elegance of their efforts than the beauty of their subjects; and while they endeavour to persuade themselves that they are really the admirers of virtue, they are only paying homage to their own vanity. It was not virtue that rendered the stoic indifferent to the ordinary passions of men—but unconquerable pride. What he absurdly mistook for firmness of principle, was invincible stubbornness, and whatever satisfaction he derived from his stern and repulsive system, was owing to the conviction of superior courage and superior hardihood to the rest of men. Pride was his idol, and with him virtue was simply the fuel which kept his reigning passion in a constant flame. He used it just as other men employ power, riches, honours and fame.

That this view of moral obligation and the unavoidable effects of an atheistic system upon the interests of virtue exposes good men to the imputation of a mercenary spirit, is a groundless objection. Men sometimes talk of the glory of disinterested virtue, as if the blessings which God conferred upon those who please Him were gewgaws and vanity—the pitiful dust and ashes for which the miser squanders his time and loses

his soul. The reward which conscience proposes to the righteous, is the favour of God, and if we are to dispise it because it is a reward, let us distinctly understand what we disclaim. What then is the favour of God? It consists in rendering us like unto Himself, capable of admiring, praising and rejoicing in all His glorious perfections—of sympathising in His ineffable blessedness, and of feeling that we are what He approves. It is, in other words, the highest perfection of which our nature is susceptible. Instead of being doomed to contemplate abstractions, and amuse ourselves with pictures, we are introduced to the friendship of a Person whose nature is glorious, and whose smile assimilates all on whom it falls to His own character. None can enjoy the light of His countenance but those who are endowed with the finest sensibility to moral excellence. What is there selfish, mean or sordid in desiring a reward which consists in purity, holiness and peace—which exalts and adorns our nature with every grace, enriches it with every moral accomplishment?

If a desire to escape from every pollution and be rendered partakers of the Divine nature; the desire of communion and friendly intercourse with the Father of our spirits; the desire of all moral perfection—if this be mercenary, then indeed virtue is a mercenary matter; but if this be a noble and sublime desire, such as sordid spirits can never reach, then virtue is as glorious in the rewards she proposes as she is in her own nature; and none but a generous spirit, instinct with living fire, touched with a coal from off God's altar can ever rise to such a pitch of excellence as to desire that

“favour which is life, and that loving kindness which is better than life.”*

* “Whatever some philosophic declaimers may have advanced respecting the meanness and servility of looking to a ‘recompense of reward’ for our actions; it is unnatural and irrational *not* to act on such a principle, unless it can be proved that God, when He had created man, left him to follow his own imaginations, and to seek for other motives and obligations to virtue than those of *the fear and love of Him and of obedience to his command.*” Van Mildert. Boyle Lect. Serm. 15th, vol. 2, p. 89.

It is *not* the bare fact of being influenced by considerations of reward, that constitutes a mercenary spirit; it is the nature of the reward that is sought. He who places his happiness in promoting the well-being of others cannot justly be denominated selfish, and he who loves virtue or holiness because it is the image of God and the means of communion with Him, cannot be regarded as servile or mean. These motives neither spring from nor terminate on *self*; no more are they debased or grovelling in *their own nature*. They who insist upon the love of virtue for its beauty, and the hatred of vice for its turpitude, make the beauty of virtue and the turpitude of vice occupy the same place which the Scriptures attribute to the love and the fear of God. In the one case, instead of a *person*, we are presented with an abstraction: our affections are made to terminate on a *lifeless statue*, whose beauty is devoid of the attractions of intellectual animation. The view which has been taken in the text, does not separate virtue from God—it makes the Divine Perfections its measure—the nature of God its standard, and the will of God, as proceeding from His perfections, its rules. So that the charms of virtue are really the charms of the Almighty, and its highest enjoyments the mutual converse of mind with mind—the delights, in other words, of the purest friendship. Hence the rewards of virtue cannot be separated from itself, no more than the favor of God can be separated from communications of His goodness. We cannot love God without enjoying Him. The author regrets that he has not space to pursue this subject further, and expose the numerous fallacies which must arise from every effort to treat of virtue as having any other ultimate foundation than the Divine Perfections. This is the true basis of immutable morality. The error of Clarke and Cudworth consists in making the nature and fitness of things *independent of God*. This fallacy is ably exposed by Van Mildert, who, however, falls into an error just as preposterous in making all moral distinctions purely arbitrary. At least his reasonings may be so abused. The system of Paley is unmitigated selfishness. He has completely reversed the order of things—making virtue right because it is useful, instead of useful because it is right. In its abstract principles, Paley's system, though he was a Christian Minister, is not a particle better than the infamous schemes of Mandeville and Hume.

How desirable it is that some able hand should give us a system of morals which does not outrage Christianity nor deny the Supremacy of God!

It may be objected, however, that the threatenings of God's law are calculated to engender a weak and servile spirit. This may be freely acknowledged. He is not a virtuous man who is restrained from transgression only by the fear of punishment. He has not the first principle of true obedience—respect for the law, as the will of God. But these threatenings were never intended to make men virtuous, but only to keep them so. They show God's awful abhorrence of sin, and reveal to good men, in a strong and commanding light, the enormous turpitude of disobedience and rebellion. They strengthen their attachment to holiness by revealing, in a new aspect, the exceeding sinfulness of sin. In a fallen world like ours, these threatenings can only restrain, terrify and alarm. They have no power to change the heart and render him pure who was previously defiled. All that they can contribute towards our moral renovation is to drive us to Christ, the great physician of souls, from whom we can receive a new spirit and be created again "after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness." But a generous virtue never grew upon the soil of fear. Its native element is love, and where this exists in its purity and power, the blessing and the curse are both valuable in spurring it onward to exalted attainments. One holds out the promised good, and the other throws a brighter lustre around it from the terrible contrast which sin presents.

To divest a good man, if a good man, under such circumstances, could exist, of the assurance which the perfections of God impress upon his mind, that virtue shall ultimately triumph, and vice be suppressed, would

be to turn his attachment to virtue into an instrument of sorrow. His regard for the character of his Maker, for the interests of society, and the highest enjoyments of his own soul, would fill him with horror and amazement at the prospect of eternal confusion in that moral government which conscience taught him to expect would one day be perfect. If, in this life only, the virtuous had hope, they would of all men be most miserable. Completely disappointed in all their prospects, led on by gross delusions which they took to be the voice of God, they have forfeited all the enjoyments of this world, which men, wiser in their generation, have secured, and they have gained nothing but darkness, confusion and despair. They have pursued phantoms; their whole life has been spent in beating the air; in chasing an ignis-fatuus through swamps and quags and bogs, and the fatigue of abortive labours is the highest reward of their zeal. Virtue derives its glory and blessedness from its connection with God—from the prospects it discloses of enjoying His favour, sharing His friendship and receiving unspeakable effusions of bliss from the light of His countenance. It shines with a borrowed radiance, and if it conduct us not to the throne of the Eternal, those rivers of pleasure which are at His right hand, it has only mocked, cheated and betrayed us. Chain it down to this life, and like the eagle, clipped of its wings, its power of gazing on the sun while unable to soar to that region of light would be a source of vexation. It would be better, like the owls and bats of the world, to have a spirit congenial with darkness, if darkness must be our portion, than to know a better state and a nobler des-

tiny which the stern decree of fate has rendered impossible to us. It would be better, infinitely better, if we can rise to no higher ends than the brutes, to be like them the creatures of instinct, devoid of foresight and thought. Reason is a curse, or if it be esteemed an ornament, it is only the garland which adorns the victim for sacrifice. The more we are exalted by noble endowments, the more conspicuous is our fall—the deeper our vanity and vexation of spirit.

Why, then, was such a being as man created at all? If knowledge and virtue, the most glorious objects of human contemplation and regard—the only things on earth at all congenial with his nature—are so far from being his adequate portion in this life, that they only increase his vexations and sorrows, why was he ever made and adorned with these goodly perfections? Why has he been rendered capable of immortality, prone to “ponder the future with anxious rumination,” if he is yet the insect of a day, hardly permitted to open his eyes upon this beautiful world, before he must close them in eternal night? Why his burning curiosity, if in his highest attainments of knowledge, he just reaches the point from which the great ocean of truth lies undiscovered before him, and is then swept away by the tide of oblivion, and buried in darkness forever? Why has he been endowed with a power to hear the voice, to sanction the law of God, and to long for communion with his Maker, if, before he can send an aspiration to Heaven, he is turned to corruption and made a companion of worms? Why has he been placed in so fair and splendid a palace, garnished by the finger of God, and adorned with goodly and enchanting prospects, if he has

hardly time to survey its glories and recount its wonders before they fade forever from his view? Who shall solve this amazing riddle, reduce to harmony these gross inconsistencies and shew us an end for which man was made that shall redeem his condition from the charge of vanity?

I call upon the Atheist; but to him the “mighty volumes of visible nature and the everlasting tables of right reason” are sealed books; he sees nothing in the magnificent canopy of heaven but the jumbling motions of chance, and though every star declares the glory, and every revolving world proclaims the power of God, their voice can never reach his dark and cheerless soul. How can he, who has not blushed to be a traitor to his God; whose native element is darkness; who rejoices in the prospect of a “fatherless world;” how can he be inflamed with a generous zeal for the honor of his race, or be ashamed to answer that man was made in vain?

I call upon the mortal Deist,—upon him who admits the perfections of Jehovah, but denies the immortality of the soul,—I charge him to tell me for what end, consistent with the character of God and the dignity of man, such a creature was made? Where are the marks of infinite wisdom and infinite goodness? Alas, all is confusion and mystery; a cloud of darkness rests upon the world; a charge of folly and deceit upon our Maker, and eternal despair upon the race of man. The mortal Deist cannot avoid the monstrous conclusion that we are only animals, exalted above the rest to be pre-eminent in misery. We can rise no higher than to like live swine without the possibility of relishing their

husks, and die like dogs without the comfort of unreflecting stupidity. Oh, this creed is cruel; and as its miserable victim reluctantly mutters—for his pretended regard for God, prevents him from openly declaring—that man was made in vain, Heaven above should denounce him for his slanders on its wisdom and love, and the whole family of man, moved with a just indignation at the foul reproach cast upon their dignity and worth, should rise up against him and pronounce him cursed.

I call upon the immortal Deist, upon him who admits that man's birthright is immortality; but while his bosom endeavours to swell with some just conceptions of the value of the soul, he knows not what shall be its ultimate state. The unknown future may present a scene of moral administration so perfect and complete that no allowance shall be made for sin—no hope permitted to the sinner. It may realize all that conscience has dreaded of awful justice clothed with invincible power. What then shall become of man? "Where-with shall he appear before the Lord, and bow himself before the most high God? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousands of rivers of oil; shall he give his first-born for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul?" Can there be any hope for the guilty, or must he pass from the miseries of life to the deeper sufferings of an unknown world? What is his prospect? Alas, to those who have no other light but reason, the issues of death are involved in tremendous uncertainty—the invisible world casts a portentous frown upon the hopes of mankind, and the Deist, with all his boasted philosophy, is yet compelled, from the ominous presages of conscience, to ac-

knowledge his fear that man, so far as his own happiness is concerned, has been worse than made in vain.

But, my hearers, shall we, for a moment, entertain the dark and comfortless conclusion that man was made in vain? Shall we thus insult the wisdom of God, and betray the dignity of our own nature? Can we believe that reason, conscience and will, the capacity of immortal life, and earnest longings for a perfect good have all been imparted for no valuable end? No, my friends, so fair a fabric, as man presents, was never constructed only to be destroyed. The lord of this lower world was never called into being just to "fret and strut an hour upon the stage, and then be seen no more." The perfections of God and the capacities of man combine to declare that the dark cloud of mortality which now overhangs the whole human race conceals a destiny which it is not unworthy of God to bestow, and which it is man's highest interest to understand. He must be immortal: "there is a stage within the veil" which shall never be taken down, on which he can act a nobler part and accomplish far higher purposes than flesh and blood can attain. But the hand of reason is unable to draw aside the curtain which conceals futurity from view. To apprehend distinctly the end of our being, our prospects hereafter, and our chief business here, as possessors of immortality, we must appeal to that "eternal word which subsists from generation to generation, in undecaying vigour, to console our wretchedness," and which, in revealing things, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive," completely dissipates the vanity of our

mortal condition, vindicates the ways of God to man, and impresses a dignity, a moral grandeur upon the human race at which reason is amazed and faith rejoices with awful veneration.

It is the distinguishing glory of the Gospel, not merely to bring immortality to light, which it does in a striking manner, rendering it almost palpable to sense by the mysterious doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, but to make it a real blessing when it might be our greatest calamity, by connecting with it the prospect of life. Perpetual existence, without corresponding sources of enjoyment, would be a boon which few are so attached to their "intellectual being" as not to be willing to abandon. If we were created unsusceptible of a good which eternity is unable to exhaust, continued existence is only continued vanity, and immortality, so far from solving the mystery of our state, plunges it in deeper obscurity. But the life of the Scriptures removes all difficulties. Consisting in assimilation to the character of God, the contemplation of His glory and the immediate vision of His face, it has justly been compared to rivers of pleasure which flow with eternal freshness, and is certainly an end for which it was worthy of infinite wisdom to form us, and which it becomes infinite goodness to bestow. Here, instead of the beggarly elements of this world, are all the ingredients which our necessities require, to render us perfectly and permanently happy. Whatever is beautiful or attractive in the creature; whatever can adorn, dignify or please; the embellishments of life, and the charms of friendship, are but feeble emanations from Him who concentrates in Himself all these scattered

perfections, and to whom they essentially belong in unchanging and infinite proportions. As He combines, in the fulness of His own being, all the sources of enjoyment which men vainly seek to acquire from a distracting variety of objects, and is possessed of a power to communicate delight, which the most enlarged capacities of man shall never be able to transcend, the consciousness of His favour must be distinguished by the rare felicity of imparting stability and peace to the restless desires of the mind. He is a good suited to the nature of man; and while He reigns supreme in the affections every other object will sink down to its proper position of subordinate importance. The sense of His love, like a magic wand, diffuses life, joy and liberty through all the powers of the soul. "Those thoughts which wander through eternity," in contemplating His perfections, require none of those "delightful intermissions" by which, in this world, the severity of effort is relieved. There it is activity without labor—"it is but opening the eye, and the scene enters."* In our sublunary state we perceive only, as

* The following description which South gives of man's understanding in infancy may apply to the future condition of the blessed:

"It was then sublime, clear and aspiring, and, as it were, the soul's upper region, lofty and serene, free from the vapours and disturbances of the inferior affections. Discourse was then almost as quick as intuition; it was nimble in proposing; firm in concluding; it could sooner determine than now it can dispute. Like the sun, it had both light and agility; it knew no rest but in motion—no quiet but in activity. It did not so properly apprehend as irradiate the object; not so much find as make things intelligible. In sum, it was vegete, quick and lively; open as the day, untainted as the morning, full of the innocence and sprightliness of youth; it gave the soul a bright and a full view into all things; and was not only a window, but itself the prospect. *** Study was not then a duty; night-watchings were needless—the light of reason wanted not the assistance of a candle. This is

the Prophet expresses it, "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." He hides himself for the most part behind His visible creation, and even in the sanctuary, where His spirit dwells, we approach Him in symbols and ordinances, and our richest enjoyments are only an earnest of what we may expect. But in the eternal world, where the portion of the just is treasured, He sits unveiled before His saints in ineffable splendour; they are permitted to see Him as He is; to know as they are known; to behold His glory, and being transformed into the same image, they are satisfied with His likeness. The renewed spirit, naturally tending towards God, finds its culminating point only in His presence. There is its rest. The imperfect foretastes which, in their pilgrimage through life, good men have experienced of the light of His countenance, have impressed a longing for the vision of His face, which renders them dead to the charms of earth, and urges them forward, despite persecution, scorn and contempt, to the mark of the prize of their high calling. "Whom have I"—is the language of their hearts—"whom have I in Heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." He is their foun-

the doom of fallen man, to labour in the fire, to seek truth *in profundo*, to exhaust his time and impair his health, and perhaps to spin out his days and himself into one pitiful, controverted conclusion. There was then no poring, no struggling with memory, no straining for invention; his faculties were quick and expedite; they answered without knocking, they were ready upon the first summons, there was freedom and firmness in all their operations. Works, vol. 1. pp. 35, 37. Ser. Gen. 1. 27.

tain of life, joy and blessedness—He is all their salvation and all their desire; and to deprive them of their hopes of beholding His face in peace would be to cover the sun with sack-cloth and the moon with darkness; to shroud the earth and the sky in mourning; to hang the pall of death upon the fabric of nature and involve the universe itself in starless night.

The contemplation, vision and fruition of God! What end comparable to this can skeptics, in their purest systems, suggest to man? Accustomed to contemplate God at an awful and immeasurable distance from His creatures, they can present us with nothing but those shadows of felicity found in objects as finite as ourselves. Their dismal creed, excluding that amazing condescension of goodness by which the Deity becomes conversable with man, can never rise to the sublime conception of an eternal and intimate alliance with the Father of Spirits. They dare not undertake to pierce the clouds which surround His throne and unveil the great Creator as a God of love. Their eternity, since there is nothing in death to change the nature of the soul, must be a round of the same abortive efforts, the same fruitless employments, the same empty speculations which impress upon time its vanity and vexation; and if a few years devoted to these pursuits have induced the wisest men, who knew not God or who could approach no nearer to His seat than His works conduct them, to sigh in bitterness for the moment of departure, what must be the intolerable burden of an endless duration! However varied the objects of immortal pursuit may be, they are still finite, unsuited to immortal capacities, and contain the elements of dissatis-

faction and disgust. It is not the possession of eternity, but the fruition of the God of eternity, that constitutes happiness, and stamps true glory upon man. Deserts, however vast and boundless, add nothing to the wealth of kingdoms, or the grandeur of empire. The most gorgeous scenes which imagination can picture,—thrones, principalities and powers, the possession of the entire universe itself, without corresponding fellowship with God, would leave the soul lonely and desolate; it would turn away from them all in chagrin, disappointment and disgust, and complain, in the bitterness of its anguish: these are but dust and ashes, show me the Father or let me die.

We were made, my brethren, for the enjoyment of God; it is our unspeakable felicity that the great and everlasting Jehovah, whom the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain, should stoop to converse familiarly with man. Settle it in your minds, write it on your hearts, engrave it on your lives, that the friendship and love of this august and venerable Being is the true portion of the soul.

It is a mournful fact, however, that man, unlike all other creatures, has no natural tendency to achieve the perfection of his nature. So glaring indeed is the incongruity between his affections and desires, and the chief end of his being, that no course will more certainly be succeeded by disappointment, calamity and sorrow, than to pursue the inclinations of his mind. This gross inconsistency cannot justly be attributed to God. The soul, as it came from Him, must have pointed to its proper destiny as the needle points to the pole; and if He originally made men upright and they

have perverted their ways, His wisdom would be untarnished though all the tribes of earth should perish beneath His frown. The Scriptures distinctly teach us, in accordance with these suggestions, that man has existed in another state—a condition of purity and peace, when the candle of the Lord shone brightly upon him, and all his powers were adjusted in unison with the will of God. By the curse, however, of a memorable transgression—the one disobedience of the one man, who stood as the federal representative of the human race—his primitive relations were changed; his nature was involved in ruins; the light of heaven was withdrawn, and death, with all our woe, took possession of the world.

The incompetency of man, as a sinner, to pursue the end of his being, arises from the justice of God, which has inseparably connected punishment with guilt, and from his own moral incapacity to enjoy the communications of Divine love. He has lost both the right and the power of communion with God. Separated from the fountain of life and blessedness, disqualified by sin to accomplish the purposes for which he was made; dark, stupid and senseless in relation to spiritual good, he is, in the solemn language of Scripture, dead; but through the amazing mercy of God, though dead, he is not irretrievably lost. His relations to a scheme of grace, devised in the councils of eternity, and accomplished in the fulness of time, render him, though a prisoner, “a prisoner of hope.” The sentence of death, it is true, is upon him; the chains of sin and the fetters of hell hold him in bondage—but still there is hope; there is a glorious prospect of

escape; "the prey may be taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive be delivered." The provisions of the Gospel, contemplating the restoration of man to more than the glory that his rebellion had forfeited, are precisely adapted to his exigencies. By the incarnation, substitution, and obedience even unto death of the Eternal Son of God, the second Person of the adorable Trinity, the legal barrier has been removed; the claims of justice have been satisfied, and "God can be just, and yet the justifier of him that believes upon Jesus." By the mission of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, the ruins of the soul may be repaired; light may be poured into its darkened chambers; the fires again kindled upon its altars; it may be made "to move in charity, rest in providence and turn upon the poles of truth."—The unchangeable decree of God,—unchangeable, because it cannot be reversed without subjecting His government to imperfection, confusion and disorder,—that His favour shall be confined to the righteous and His malediction denounced upon the wicked; that obedience, in other words, shall be the condition of His blessing, and disobedience infallibly draw down His curse, has been fully accomplished in the Gospel. And yet through the principle of representation, which seems to be ultimate in the moral government of God, incapable of farther explanation, because it is ultimate and acknowledged as clearly in the civil institutions of society as in the higher economy of Heaven, the guilty may not only receive a complete exemption from the penalty due to their transgressions, but a valid title to everlasting life. This is a great mystery, but it is the mystery of grace. In

consequence of the representative relations of the Lord Jesus Christ, those who believe on His name are so effectually united to His Person, that His righteousness and death are regarded as their own—they become members of His mystical body, sharing in His honours, enjoying His protection and entitled to all the rewards which His obedience can secure. He is their Patron in the Court of Heaven; and the blessings which God bestows upon the faithful are proportioned not to their infirmity and nothingness, but to the dignity and worth of His Own dear Son. Thus through "the obedience of one," all legal obstructions to their happiness are removed, as through "the disobedience of one," they became involved in a state of sin and death. But as they are unfit by nature to appreciate the blessings to which the righteousness of the Saviour gives them a title, they are placed under the guidance and tuition of that Eternal Spirit whom they receive from Him, and whose office it is to sanctify the heart. In His hands the confusion, disorder and calamity which sin has introduced into the world, are divested of their sting, and become the elements of a secret discipline by which their affections are weaned from vanities and fixed on the solid riches of eternity. The whole earth is changed into a school of godliness, and a nursery for Heaven; through the powerful elixir of grace, blessings are extracted from the ills of life; death, no longer a terror, becomes a birth into glory; and, in the triumphant language of the Apostle, "all things, whether height or depth or any other creature," are made subservient to their good. Hence the provisions of the Gospel are complete, and all things are

ready for the salvation of the lost. The magnificent feast is spread; the "Spirit and the bride say come;" he that hears is commissioned to repeat the invitation, and all our dying race are freely invited to approach the table with confidence and hope.

Under these circumstances, the reception of the Gospel becomes the grand and paramount concern of men. It is indeed "glad tidings of great joy," and blessed are the eyes that perceive its glory, and the ears that welcome its joyful sound! It is the only object in our world which invests it with dignity and importance in the view of superior spirits; whatever interest they feel in man, or whatever solicitude attaches to his condition, is derived from the tremendous consequences which hang on the improvement or neglect of his day of merciful visitation. Those events which, in our eyes, are possessed of the greatest magnitude, are not the objects which attract their attention. In the extension of commerce, the progress of refinement and the splendour of the arts; in the rise of states, the prosperity of kingdoms and the triumphs of freedom, they see nothing apart from the wise and inscrutable purposes of God, but the shifting scenes of a stage which must soon be taken down, when every memorial of its existence shall perish. But in the repentance of a single sinner they discern an event clothed with every attribute of dignity and importance—an event whose results can be unfolded in no narrower a compass than eternal duration—whose consequences shall continue to expand in magnitude, when kingdoms and empires shall cease to be; when crowns and sceptres shall lie as neglected things, and "when the great globe itself, with

all that it inherits, shall dissolve" and perish. And; my brethren, if we could stand with these heavenly Spirits upon the mount of God, from which events are surveyed in their just proportions and real value; if we could comprehend with them the immeasurable blessedness of which the soul is susceptible, and the unutterable misery to which it may be doomed, the interests of time which now fill so large a space in our eyes would sink into comparative insignificance, and the business of salvation become the grand, commanding, absorbing pursuit of man. We should regard our mortal condition, evanescent as it is, with intenser anxiety on account of its shortness; it would even swell into grandeur, considered as the price of eternal blessedness, the stage on which we are acting a part that must fix the fate of immortality. In the short-compass of our earthly career, we must settle a question whose issues, lost in the unfathomable depths of eternity, defy the power of finite capacities to trace. In the days of our flesh, before the night of death has overtaken us, while the joyful sound is still permitted to salute our ears, the point must be settled, finally, irreversibly settled, whether we shall be numbered among the saved or lost. Every passing hour is big with the destiny of souls. To neglect the Gospel is not only to lose the favour of God, the communications of His goodness, the abiding conviction of His friendship and love; it is not merely to be excluded from the light, joy and blessedness of Heaven,—though this were an intolerable calamity; it is not a "bare privation of that bliss which man was originally designed to experience" and in which he finds the perfection

of his being—it is to be “shut up in outer darkness” where “hope that comes to all, shall never come; to be tormented with dolorous perceptions;” to drink the wrath of God; to feel the fire that is never quenched; the worm that never dies. Other losses can be repaired by prudence, industry and care, or the impressions which they make may soon be effaced by the hand of time; but the loss of the soul is irretrievable, eternal; no place shall be found for repentance, though it be sought bitterly and with tears. When the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us, all that will be left to us will be to gird ourselves with sack-cloth—to retire apart and make a grievous mourning, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.

Though the wickedness of slighting the claims of the Gospel is, under all circumstances, enormous and complicated, the folly would not be so great if, after this life, we could still be indulged with the privilege of retracing our steps and securing the salvation which we need. But when we are assured upon authority which cannot be mistaken, that in the grave, whither we are going, there is no work nor knowledge, no wisdom nor device; that the condition in which we are left at death must be the condition in which we enter on eternity: “he that is filthy, being filthy still;” that then our destiny shall be unalterably fixed, the voice of the preacher shall be silenced forever, and the accents of mercy no longer allowed to fall upon the ear; when we know from the records of infallible truth that the unchanging interests of immortality are compressed in our short career upon earth; that “now is the accepted time, now the day of salvation;” that now the

prize of life must be secured, or the soul sink down under the second death; which hanging like a dark cloud upon its prospects, no light can penetrate; which gathering blackness from its groans, forever mocks its despair; when we remember the overwhelming results that depend on the complexion of our present state, where shall we find the language that is fitted to describe the stupendous madness—the worse than maniac distraction which has seized upon those who neglect the great salvation? It is enough to put a tongue in inanimate nature around us; “to make the stone cry out of the wall and the beam out of the timber to answer it.”

The prodigious and almost incredible contrast between the littleness and meanness of man, without the hopes of the Gospel, and the moral grandeur which surrounds him when viewed in the light of revelation, should render Christianity an object of more than magnetic attraction. The union of his nature to the person of the Son; his peculiar relations to the Holy Spirit, exalt him to a familiarity of communion with God, a freedom of access to the throne of the Most High, which is, perhaps, unexampled in the annals of the universe. It would seem from some obscure intimations of the Sacred Writers that, in some way or other, the redeemed shall set with their Saviour at the great day in judgment upon angels. God, Himself, indulges such unwonted delight in the persons of His children, that He even describes them as His chosen portion—the lot of His own inheritance. It is certain that the plan of redemption, which has special, and in its immediate effects, exclusive reference to man, has developed fea-

tures in the Divine character to which the angels were previously strangers, and into which they earnestly desire to look. The existence of mercy, and its harmony with justice, could never have been known without some such economy as that of the Gospel. The glory of God consequently shines with a richer lustre in the cross of Christ, than in all the works of His hands. If it be lawful to indulge such a thought, we might naturally suppose that fresh accessions were made to the blessedness of Heaven when our Saviour rose triumphant from the grave. So astonishing was the display of God's manifold riches of wisdom, goodness and mercy; so transcendently glorious the manifestation of His character in the new and marvellous relation of a "Redeemer mighty to save," that the moral stature of the angels, in contemplating this august spectacle, must have been increased, and their joys proportionably enlarged. The fact that the salvation of man redounds so preeminently to the glory of God—laying the Divine wisdom under tribute to devise the means by which he might be rescued "from going down to the pit"—must give him a position, must throw a charm around him in every portion of the universe to which his own character could make no pretensions. So conspicuous indeed is the station, and so distinguished the privileges to which we are exalted by the economy of grace, that one may be pardoned for exulting in the honour of being a man. Our race, contemplated in the cross of Christ, shines with a borrowed lustre. The beams of His glory are reflected upon it and render it an object of trembling solicitude; while those who are wise and improve the day of their merciful visitation

are enchanting to angels and beautiful to God. The happiness which accrues from this unparalleled accession of dignity, must be proportionably great. The angels behold God's face as a benevolent Creator, and are blessed in the vision; we behold Him as a merciful Redeemer, and our feelings are rapture. They perceive the glory of the Son and admire its brightness; we feel the genial warmth of his rays. The Lamb in the midst of the throne is to them an object of profound veneration and adoring wonder; to us He is an elder brother, a kinsman-Redeemer, and is not ashamed to acknowledge the alliance. We must approach nearer to God's seat than they; we must come into closer contact with the beams of His face; our own nature is exalted on the throne; our head is there, and the immediate members must have a preference of all other objects. In addition to this, we have all the joy of an amazing contrast. Heaven is new to us; we were recently dead and are now alive; recently lost and are now found; recently on the borders of Hell and now before the throne of God.

It would seem that on all these accounts Heaven should be peculiarly attractive to men. Its richest treasures have been expended upon them—for them its mercy has been revealed—for them its wisdom has been tasked—for them its power has been employed—for them the mysteries of God have been disclosed—for them all the inhabitants of the upper world have been deeply concerned. The Father has loved them—the Son has redeemed them—the Spirit renewed them—the Angels rejoiced over them, and ministered to them in their manifold necessities. Oh, what is man as dis-

played in the Gospel! Every motive of generous ambition combines with a regard to our highest interest to press upon us the claims of religion. To stand as a monument of God's grace, when the heavens which declare His glory and the firmament which showeth His handiwork shall have passed away—to proclaim the unsearchable riches of His wisdom, when the wheels of time shall have ceased to move and all its events be buried in oblivion—to stand around His throne and receive communications of His love, to which more excellent spirits are strangers—to be His chosen portion and the lot of His inheritance—to draw the eyes of the universe to ourselves as the most stupendous workmanship of God—a work upon which He may rest the honour of His name; this is a distinction which may well stimulate our efforts and kindle our warmest aspirations. And yet this honour have all the saints! This is the privilege of all who obey the Gospel of God. What must be the deplorable blindness of men, when such prospects cannot charm; what the depths of their debasement, when such magnificent preferments can awaken no desire! “Be astonished, oh, ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be ye very desolate saith the Lord.”

That those who despise the provisions of the Gospel may expect an aggravated doom, is consistent alike with the teaching of revelation, the dictates of reason and the analogies of providence. The violence of the fall is always proportioned to the previous elevation; and darkness is increased in intensity by a sudden transition from a blaze of light. Peculiar privileges necessarily give rise to peculiar responsibilities. The curse

consequently which they shall experience who have enjoyed and neglected the glad tidings of salvation, must be awful beyond the power of language to describe, or finite capacities to conceive. Our Saviour declares that it should be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, yea, even for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than the cities in which his mighty works had been performed. “The men of Nineveh,” says he, “shall rise up against this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the South shall rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it, for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.” The severity of God in punishing sinners will be proportioned to the mercy of His previous dispensations, and accordingly the most awful maledictions are every where denounced against those who have been signally favoured with opportunities of knowledge and means of repentance. This history of the world does not furnish a parallel to the destruction of Jerusalem; the blood freezes and the flesh creeps at the recital of its horrors, and we are almost tempted to ask how a merciful God could permit such enormities to be perpetrated beneath the light of the sun. But when we turn to the Scriptures, and look at the true explanation, it was God's hand that poured out the vials of vengeance, and put the cup of trembling to the lips of this devoted people, because they had disregarded the day of their mercy. They had crucified the Lord of glory, and now they must reap their own folly and “be

filled with their own devices." In the history of that infatuated city we have only a type, a dim shadow of what every impenitent sinner must experience, when God shall rise in the majesty of justice, "whet His glittering sword and His hand take hold on judgment." Then, indeed, "He shall revenge and be furious. The mountains," we are told by the prophet, "shall quake, the hills melt, and the earth be burned at His presence yea, the world and all that dwell therein." Who can stand before His indignation? Who can abide in the fierceness of His anger? None, moreover, can deliver out of His hand. "There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. If they exalt themselves with the eagle and set their nest among the stars, thence will He bring them down; if they take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall His hand reach them, and His right hand shall hold them; if they flee to the darkness for protection, even the night shall be light about them." To heighten their calamity, to consummate their wretchedness, while they are tortured with penal visitations from without, there are fires within, kindled from the elements of the soul itself, which would make it a privilege to die. The recollections of the sinner, his wasted opportunities, his neglected mercies, his slighted warnings, his repulses of the Spirit, his distinguished privileges and solemn vows, will all rise up against him like the ghosts of the murdered, to make his conscience a hell. His maddened spirit shall perceive nothing in the Gospel itself, which was once the herald of salvation and an angel of mercy, but the prophet's roll

written within and without, full of lamentation, mourning and woe, as the apocalyptic vials poured out upon the earth, the waters, the air and the sun transmuted these elements of comfort and happiness, into instruments of death. "Righteous art thou, oh Lord, in thy judgments! They have shed blood," even the blood of their own souls, "and thou hast given them blood to drink."

As if there were no limits to the folly, presumption and wickedness of man, there are those who glory in their shame and treat as a childish weakness all serious apprehensions of the wrath to come. "Oh, my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." Not a single ingredient can be detected in the character of these sons of Belial to redeem it from disgrace, infamy and horror. It is a loathsome combination of diabolical atrocity and brutal stupidity. Their hardihood of front possesses no element of courage; it is not the firmness of moral daring; nor even the stern resolution of despair; it is based upon no principle of reason, philosophy or Scripture; it aims at no illustrious ends; it is the enormity of human guilt, obstinately bent on indulgence, rising up in rebellion against the authority of conscience and lifting its parricidal arm to heaven to extinguish the last light that witnesses its crimes. If there be a Being whose prerogative it is to lift His hand to heaven and say I live forever, it is surely the dictate of reason as well as of revelation to fear Him. Shall mortal man, a child of yesterday, whose father is corruption and whose mother is the worm; shall mortal man "set his mouth against the heavens and utter

great, swelling words of vanity" before Him whom eternal truth has described as the "great, the mighty and the terrible God, who sitteth on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; before whom the nations are counted as the small dust of the balance, and who taketh up the isles as a very little thing!" It is easy to assume the attitude of courage when danger is supposed to be distant. When the sky is serene above us, the earth smiles with tranquillity and plenty, and all things continue as they were when the fathers fell asleep, we may easily persuade ourselves that all is well; that "the Lord delayeth his coming," and that all his threatenings are but idle words. But when his sign shall be actually revealed in the heavens; when "the mighty angel shall stand upon the sea and the land, and swear by Him that liveth forever, that time shall be no longer, whose hearts shall then endure, whose hands shall then be strong? Who will speak loftily when the earth shall be torn with irresistible convulsions; when "the sun shall become black as sack-cloth of hair and the moon be turned into blood; the stars of heaven fall "to the ground and the heavens themselves depart away as a scroll?" Who will "boast themselves in wickedness when all the dead, both small and great," shall be summoned to the tribunal of eternal justice to receive their everlasting awards? In that day, my brethren, the knees of the strong shall bow, the sinews of brass shall be broken and the face that was harder than a rock shall gather mortal paleness. Those who have mocked at the terrors of the Lord, will then "call in vain upon the rocks and mountains to fall upon them and hide them from the

face of him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb forever." Now "their judgment lingereth not and their damnation slumbereth not;" now they feel that God is terrible, and as they depart into everlasting banishment from His presence, "hell from beneath rises to meet them at their coming." "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment? They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, Oh Lord, when thou awakest, thou shall despise their image."

If, my brethren, we have not been indulging in idle speculations, nor following a cunningly devised fable, but impressing upon you the true sayings of God, you must perceive that the Gospel is fraught with unspeakable interest to you. It sets before you life and death; it proposes to redeem you from the vanity of your mortal state; to break the bondage of corruption, and restore you to the light and liberty of the Sons of God. You can never attain the primitive dignity of your nature, much less that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which is reserved for the faithful, without the guidance of its principles, the strength of its promises and the consolations of its grace. With it, your condition is noble and illustrious; you are the friends of God, the companions of angels and the brethren of Christ; without it, you are mean and despicable; the enemies of heaven; the children of darkness, and the victims of despair. Why, then, do you not avail yourselves of its precious provisions to prepare for death, for judgment, and eternity? What po-

tent charm, what Circean bowl, what terrible enchantment of hell has maddened your souls, blinded your eyes, and stupified hearts, that you cannot break the spell and awake to righteousness and life everlasting? Is earth so dear that its fleeting vanities; its bubbles of honour; its gewgaws of pride; its empty pleasures and fading distinctions must yet be purchased at the price of peace, of happiness and Heaven? Shall the soul be bartered away for trifles that perish in the using? Is the aspect of religion so forbidding and repulsive that its promises cannot allure you, nor its terrors overcome your aversion? What is there, I beseech you, in the favour of God, the friendship of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit; what is there in knowledge, righteousness and holiness to excite your disgust? Are not these blessings which may demand a sacrifice; did they not cost a sacrifice, and shall we scruple to make it when we remember the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary? Let not the world deceive you with its charms—it may smile like the garden of God, but at last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder. It has no objects which are suited to be the portion of your souls; and in the hour of your greatest need, when you require a friend that can comfort, and an arm that can support you, it will be the staff of a bruised reed, breaking beneath your weight and leaving you poor, and wretched, and blind, and naked, and miserable. Remember our Saviour's solemn exhortation: "what is a man profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Perhaps, my friends, you are indulging expectations of a long life—perhaps, unconscious to yourselves, you are building on the hope of an earthly immortality. Multitudes who, in general terms, subscribe to the truth, that "we must all die, and are as water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up," yet go on adding days to days and months to months to their little span, at every step removing death still at a distance beyond them, so that they virtually deny their own individual mortality. The old man, tottering on the brink of the grave, expects every night to rise in the morning, and every morning to be spared until night; and though the pains and infirmities of age, his trembling limbs, his exhausted strength, his fading sight, and his withered frame, have been for months or years preaching his funeral sermon, death, when it comes at last, takes him by surprise. The young find it peculiarly difficult to feel the certainty of death. They can hardly believe that their sun shall go down at noon, or that the bright morning of their hopes shall be suddenly eclipsed with clouds. But, my brethren, no infatuation is more pointedly and solemnly rebuked by the dispensations of providence than these presumptuous expectations of a long life. We live in a world of graves; the tomb is peopled with all classes, ages, sexes and conditions. "None can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for his life." Death, sooner or later, must come to all; we cannot bid the sun stand still, nor drive back the shadow on the dial-plate of time; and when the decree which seals our fate is ripe for execution, whether it be morning, noon, or midnight, neither prayers, nor tears, nor

blood; neither the vigour of youth, the strength of manhood, nor the furrows of age; neither the charms of beauty, the splendours of wealth, nor the distinctions of honour, shall be able to arrest the execution; we must draw the curtains and lie down to our last repose.

Life does not depend upon the natural resources of the system to sustain it, but upon the decree of God. "The lamp may be extinguished by a sudden blast when there is plenty of oil to feed it." At the bidding of heaven every object around us may be made an angel of death: the air we breathe, the food we eat, the motion of our muscles and the changes of the body may all be subservient to the dissolution of our frames. If we escape the arrow that flieth by day, we may fall before the pestilence that walketh in darkness. The heavens may crush us by their lightning; the sun blast us by its heat, and the earth itself prove unfaithful to its children and swallow them up as it did Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Where then is any security for life? Where the wisdom of counting on many days, when the earth, the sky and air, are all "big with death"—when every thing around us proclaims that "life at best is but a vapour which appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away." The truth is, it is exposed to so many "chances and hostilities" that its preservation for a single hour is as great a miracle as its original creation. The present is all that we can call our own. "This day is mine and yours; but ye know not what will be on the morrow. Every morning creeps out of a dark cloud, leaving behind it an ignorance and silence deep as midnight and undiscerned

as are the phantasms that make a chrisome child to smile, so that we cannot discern what comes hereafter unless we had a light from heaven brighter than the vision of an angel, even the spirit of prophecy."

How emphatically should these truths be impressed on our minds by the sudden and mournful event which has occasioned this discourse! Who could read in the visage of your departed friend the symptoms of impending dissolution when he left these walls but a few months ago? Who could foresee that, in so short a time, his seat should be vacant and his youthful frame mouldering in the grave? His prospects of life were as good as yours, his hopes as bright, his elasticity of system as great. He too, was looking for many days, impatient for the time when dismissed from the halls of learning he should mingle in the theatre of busy life and achieve those honors for himself to which his talents, learning and industry might justly entitle him. But in a moment these delightful anticipations were eclipsed, and what do we behold in their stead but the funeral pall and shroud! The hopes of his friends are crushed; the mother that bare him, and the father that begat him could only weep for their child; "they may go to him, but he shall not return to them; he shall never awake till the heavens and the earth be no more." But does not his untimely fall proclaim in accents which ought not to be unheeded, the vanity of man, the deceitfulness of life, the certainty of death, and the instability of sublunary good? Does it not call upon you, young men, his companions and friends, to be always ready, since ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man shall come. Stand, therefore, with

your loins girt, your lamps trimmed, and your light shining, prepared, at any moment, for the midnight cry—"Behold the bridegroom cometh!" He shall come and that quickly; but woe to that servant who is taken by surprise!*

Within the last three months an unexampled number of all classes and conditions, but particularly of the young, has been called to their last account. It would almost seem that in certain portions of the State, God had opened in fury the fourth seal of the Apocalypse, and sent forth Death, with Hell following in its train, to desolate the land. On those parts of the country particularly, which have boasted a previous exemption from disease the cloud of mortality has been settled with an ominous blackness. A cry has been heard, like that in Egypt on the memorable night of Israel's deliverance, and hardly a family can be found in which "the joy of their heart has not ceased and their dance been turned into mourning." The shafts of death have been flying so thickly and creating such promiscuous slaughter, that the living have felt no assurance of their lives, but each has stood in trembling apprehension as he buried his bro-

* Since this sermon was preached, additional force has been given to these remarks by the melancholy death of an amiable and promising member of the Sophomore Class, W. P. BLACKBURN. He died within the College walls under circumstances suited to arrest the drowsiest attention, and impress the hardest heart. Can it be that such powerful appeals of Providence shall be suffered to pass without improvement; that such awful calls of God to immediate repentance shall only harden our hearts and stiffen our necks, and treasure up wrath against the day of wrath? God grant that we may hear His voice while it is called to-day, and secure the "one thing needful," before the things that belong to our peace are forever hid from our eyes!

ther, that the same melancholy task might next be performed for him.* It is a mercy, my friends, if your families have been spared, and a still greater mercy that you yourselves are alive. When the judgments of God are abroad in the land, let me beseech you, my brethren, to "learn righteousness. Learn wisdom in time. The night cometh; may be just at hand, when no man can work. Let the opening graves around you warn you to prepare for death, judgment and eternity. Banish forever from your minds all thoughts of folly, dissipation or levity. The realities of eternity are too near, too awful, too portentous for indulging in security and ease; time, as the price of immortal blessedness, unspeakably, too precious to be wasted upon toys; the undying soul transcendently too valuable to be lost for a bubble. Young men, is it a time for peace, when your companions are falling on the right and left; when the angel of death, like a brooding vulture, overshadows the land; when you yourselves are posting to the judgment bar with the proverbial rapidity of time, pressed with a load of unpardoned guilt that shall sink you to the lowest hell? Is it a time for peace? Merciful God! break the spell that blinds us! "So teach us to number our days that

* This is an allusion to the dreadful mortality with which the Districts of York, Lancaster and Chester were visited during the past summer. The reader will not suppose that the description of the text is exaggerated when he is informed that, for weeks together, in one of the most healthful neighbourhoods of York, not a day passed without at least one funeral, and frequently several. It is much to be hoped that these awful warnings will not be suffered to pass without improvement. The bitterest calamities on earth are unsanctified afflictions.

we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!" My dear young friends, is it to be the infatuated course of any of you to neglect "the day of your merciful visitation, until the things which make for your peace shall be forever hid from your eyes?" Can there be a deeper groan of agony; a more piercing cry of anguish than that which is wrung from a sinner when he first wakes up to the appalling truth, that mercy and hope are clean gone forever; that his soul is lost and eternity undone? How heart-rending will be the wail—"the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved!" Oh, my friends, be warned in time; "give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids," till you are reconciled to God; seize the angel of the Covenant with the grasp of faith, and say with the patriarch I will not let thee go except thou bless me. Look to that Eternal Spirit who sends forth His cherubim and seraphim to touch the lips of whom He pleases; look to Him to enlighten your minds, to renew your hearts, to plant your feet upon the rock of ages; where you may stand unmoved by the terrors of death; unshaken amid the wreck of dissolving worlds. This is wisdom and a sound understanding.