AN ESSAY

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSIDERING THE

SUBJECT OF RELIGION.

ADDRESSED PARTICULARLY TO MEN OF EDUCATION.

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ESSAY.

There are more ways to derive instruction from books, than the direct and chief one, of applying the attention to what they contain. Things connected with them, by natural or casual association, will sometimes suggest themselves to a reflective and imaginative reader, and divert him into secondary trains of ideas. In these the mind may, indeed, float along in perfect indolence, and acquire no good, but a serious disposition might regulate them to a profitable result.

Of these extraneous ideas, the most obviously occurring, as being the most directly associated with the book, may be some recollections or conjectures concerning the author. Perhaps the most remarkable circumstances of his life, and qualities of his character, are well known. Some of these may come on the reader's mind, suspend his attention to the written thoughts, and draw him away into meditation on the person, perhaps now no longer on earth, who once thought them, and deliberately put them in the words just seen on the page.

And the reminiscences, which thus bring what the author was into conjunction with what he has writ-

ten, display the relation between them, greatly varying in character in the different instances. The book, we will suppose, teaches genuine wisdom, and forcibly inculcates the best principles; and it may be that the author is remembered or recorded to have been worthy of his doctrine, an example of the virtues of which we are admiring him as the advocate, and one of the excellent of the earth. In this case, we have a pleasing reflection from his character shed on his pages. It is the whole man, faithfully affirming to us, with his heart and life, all that his language expresses in testimony to truth and goodness. The living spirit and practice of the man have left an evidence and a power to animate these sentences of the now silent instructer. If, at his happy departure, his "works followed him," they still also follow his words. And thus the reader feels the benefit of that principle of association, by which his thoughts, at some moments, pass from the writing to the author.

But a very different case is too possible, in which a dark haunting of the author's memory shall at times cast a shade over sentences bright with intelligence, strong in the assertion, perhaps in the vindication, of important principles of truth and virtue, and expressed with all the appearance of sincere respect for them. The idea of him may intervene with the effect of a counteracting malignant genius, to blast the fairest, and enervate the strongest, forms of thought which he has presented to please and instruct us. They cannot speak to us without our

seeming to hear an under voice, as if mocking the attention and complacency which we were beginning to give to them. There may have been left such memorials of the author's character, as to force upon us a doubt whether he was honest in what he wrote; whether the principles which he displayed so much ability in maintaining were his own sincere convictions. Or, where there may not be cause for so grave a suspicion, it may be too probable or evident that his exertions were applied in a mere professional capacity, on a calculation of distinction and advancement, and without any cordial sense of the value of truth. Or, while we may be convinced that we are reading the honest dictates of his judgment, and that he did really feel, at the time of writing, a concern about their application to his own conduct, we may have the mortification to know that the tenor of his life, or many circumstances in it, were in melancholy contrariety to his book. It is even related of a man of genius, of dissipated habits, that he published a book of piety, written by him in perfect good faith, and for the very purpose of imposing a restraint on his own follies and vices, by this expedient of combining with the testimony of his conscience, a formal pledge to the public,—and that he did it in vain.

This dark obtrusion of the author's character may tend, in its *immediate* effect, to lessen the force of the sentiments and arguments by which he seemed to be training us to right judgment and practice. If a man who could think with such clear intelli-

gence, could reason so convincingly, could estimate the quality of things, as it would appear to us, so impartially and justly, and could advise and inculcate with such gravity, and semblance of being in earnest,—if such a man might, nevertheless, be even sceptical respecting the very principles which he seems to prove, or might, while believing them, maintain them with no better intention than that of making a display of his ability, in order to advance himself in fame or lucre, or might feel a sincere esteem for the truths and precepts which he taught, and yet allow himself to act in flagrant violation of them,—*can* there be any real authority, any solid importance, in the instructions we are receiving from his book? But this inauspicious relation of the author to his writings may turn to the reader's benefit, if he will be quite serious. It will force on his view another exposure and exemplification of the sad disorder into which our nature has fallen; it will show him of how little avail is a mere intellectual exercise of the mind on important truth; and how much more is indispensable to the salutary effect of right principles, than a bare assent of the judgment, however decided. It will admonish him that the efficacy of truth depends on a habitual communication of the soul with the God of truth. He has the author revisiting him, as from the dead, to apprize him by example, that truths the most important may pass in the train of his thoughts, or may be retained in his judgment as his fixed opinions, all in vain, unless they be brought and kept in contact with his

conscience, and his conscience be kept habitually reverent to the Supreme Authority. And shall our Lord's declaration respecting a real intervention of one from the departed be verified in this case too; so that it shall be entirely unavailing for this gloomy apparition to the readers's mind, to warn him against trifling with the serious instructions in the book, as he that wrote them had trifled, and adding one more to the number of those who have deliberately gone the way to ruin, bearing a lamp lighted by heaven in their hand?

This representation of the secondary advantage derivable from books, supposes them to be read. But, even in the most cursory notice of them, when the attention is engaged by no one in particular, ideas may be started of a tendency not wholly foreign to instruction. A reflective person, in his library, in some hour of intermitted application, when the mind is surrendered to vagrant musing, may glance along the ranges of volumes, with a slight recognition of the authors, in long miscellaneous array of ancients and moderns. And that musing may become shaped into ideas like these: What a number of our busy race have deemed themselves capable of informing and directing the rest of mankind. How many who were powerful in thought, or laborious in research, have had their brief season under the sun, have attained their respective shares of influence and fame, and are now no longer on earth! What a vast amount is collected here of the results of the most strenuous and protracted exertions of so

many minds! What were, in each of these claimants that the world should think as they did, the most prevailing motives? How many of them sincerely loved truth, honestly sought it, and faithfully, to the best of their knowledge, declared it? What might be the circumstances and influences which determined, in the case of that one author, and the next, and the next again, their own modes of opinion? How many of them were aware, and acted on the conviction, of the importance of a devout intercourse with heaven, in order to their being truly wise themselves, and to their being the successful teachers of wisdom? How many of them were actuated by a genuine desire to benefit their fellow mortals? What may be conjectured as to the degree of complacency with which many of them have since, in a state where they better knew the truth of things, and better knew themselves, regarded the spirit in which they speculated, and the tendency of what they left to speak in their name after they were gone?

And how much have they actually done for truth and righteousness in the world? Do not the contents of these accumulated volumes constitute a chaos of all discordant and contradictory principles, theories, representations of fact, and figurings of imagination? Could I not instantly place beside each other the works of two noted authors, who maintain for truth directly opposite doctrines, or systems of doctrines; and then add a third book, which explodes them both? I can take some one book, in which the prime spirits of the world, through

all time, are brought together, announcing the speculations which they, respectively, proclaimed to be the essence of all wisdom, protesting with solemn censure, or sneering contempt, against the dogmas and theories of one another, and conflicting in a huge Babel of all imaginable opinions and vagaries.* Within these assembled volumes, how many errors in doctrine may there not be maintained; how many bad practical principles palliated, justified, or displayed in seductive exemplification; how many good ones endeavoured to be supplanted; how many absurdities and vain fancies set forth in plausible colours! Is it not as if the intellect of man had been surrendered to be the sport of some malicious and powerful spiritual agent, who could delight in playing it through all traverses, freaks, and mazes of fantastic movement, mocking at its self-importance, diverted at its follies, gratified most of all when it is perverted to the greatest mischief; and malignantly providing for the perpetuation of the effect of all this, through subsequent time, by instigating the ablest of the minds thus sported with, to keep their own perversions in operation on posterity through the instrumentality of their books? If such a thing might be as the intervention of the agency of a better and more potent intelligence, to cause, by one instantaneous action on all those books, the obliteration of all that is fallacious, pernicious, or

* For example, the work of Brucker.

useless in them, what millions of pages would be blanched in our crowded libraries!

The man who is supposed to be thoughtfully passing his eye over a large array of books may make such reflections, without being guilty of arrogance. It is not supposed that he can be intimately acquainted with the contents of the majority of them, or that he is assuming to be the infallible judge how much might justly be doomed to oblivion in those which he has examined. But being apprized, in a general way, of the qualities of a large proportion of them; having learned something of the characters of many of the authors: and to what class, or party, or school, to what faith, or in some instances *no* faith, to what prevailing system of an age or nation, or to what singularities of opinion they were severally addicted, he necessarily knows that the multifarious collection contains innumerable things at variance with intellectual and moral rectitude. He knows, that if each author had one living disciple wholly obsequious to him, and if all these disciples could be brought together, there would be a company in which almost every error of the human understanding, and every wrong disposition and practice, would have an advocate.

Such ideas, arising in the exterior survey of the works of so many intellects, may yield some instruction to a reflective man. While the swarm of notions and conceits of fancy comes upon his mental sight thick and tumultuous, and as lawlessly capricious in their shapes as the imps figured as throng-

ing about the magician, he may reflect what the reason of man, which should have been the light and glory of such a creature of God, has become, and become capable of producing, through some disastrous lapse into disorder. He may consider what the rational faculty has been, and would ever be, in the absence of divine revelation; and also what necessity there is for a corrective and regulating influence from above on the mind, if, *notwithstanding* that revelation, it can have wantoned into so many aberrations. It will be shown him under what ill omens he will apply himself to the study of the most important subjects without simplicity in his motives, and a concientious care of the procedure of his judgment. He may think, and deplore to think, what mischief may have sprung from the intellectual obliquity, the pride, the turpitude, the irreligion, or even the carelessness, of one mind of great powers of seduction. He may be mortified to see how folly can link itself to intelligence, as if to expose it to scorn, while he reflects how many men of superior intellect, who therefore ought not to have been the dupes of a phantasm, have been impelled to the most intense exertion by the passion to be renowned in this world, where they were to stay so short a time—to be renowned in it, even after they should have passed away beyond the possible enjoyment of their fame: and a sentiment of mingled contempt and pity will arise at the failure of these anticipations in the case of some of them, whose earnest, in-

defatigable labours have barely preserved their names from oblivion. While his look is arrested by the works of some of those of highest distinction, splendid in literary achievement and lasting fame, it may be suggested to his thoughts, with respect to one of them, and another, whether, on a Christian estimate of things, he would be deliberately willing, were it possible, to shine in all that splendour in his own and a succeeding age, on the condition of being just of the same spirit toward God and the best interests of mankind, as those celebrated men. While pronouncing their names, and looking at these volumes, in which they have left a representative existence on earth, left the form and action of their minds embodied in a more durable vehicle than their once animated clay, how striking to think, that somewhere, and in some certain condition, they themselves are existing still; existing as really and personally as when they were revolving the thoughts and writing the sentences which fill these books! From the character of these images of their minds, these enshrined statues, created to receive homage for them after they are gone, what may be deemed of their present condition elsewhere? The musing of our contemplatist may at times be led to solemn conjectures at the award which these great intellectual performers have found in another state; and he follows some of them with a very dark surmise.

His eye may rest on a book inscribed with a name far less "proudly eminent" in the honours of genius and talent; but a work which has unquestionably

done very great, and almost unmixed good. And he may be reminded of that sovereignty of the Governor of the world in his selection and appointment, by which, minds greatly below the highest order of natural ability may be rendered preeminent in usefulness. It may also occur to him, diverting for an instant from all the ranks and varieties of those who have aspired to be teachers of mankind, to reflect how many humble spirits, that never attempted any of the thousand speculations, nor revelled in the literary luxuries, contained in these books, have nevertheless passed worthily and happily through the world, into a region where it *may* be the appointed result and reward of fervent piety, in inferior faculties, to overtake, by one mighty bound, the intellectual magnitude of those who had previously been much more powerful minds. And finally, when he has such evidence that this world has been always a tenebrious and illusory scene, for the search after truth by a spiritual nature itself weak, perverted, and obscured, he may surely feel some aspirations awakened toward that other world, where the objects of intelligence will be unveiled, to faculties rectified and nobly enlarged for their contemplation.

Thus far, the instructive reflections which even the mere exterior of an accumulation of books may suggest, are supposed to occur in the way of thinking of the *authors*. But the same books may also excite some interesting ideas, through their less obvious, but not altogether fanciful, association with

the persons who may have been their *readers* or *possessors*. The mind of a thoughtful looker over a range of volumes, of many dates, and a considerable proportion of them old, will sometimes be led into a train of conjectural questions:—Who were they that, in various times and places, have had these in their possession? Perhaps many hands have turned over the leaves, many eyes have passed along the lines. With what measure of intelligence, and of approval or dissent, did those persons respectively follow the train of thoughts? How many of them were honestly intent on becoming wise by what they read? How many sincere prayers were addressed by them to the Eternal Wisdom during the perusal? How many have been determined, in their judgment or their actions, by these books? What emotions, temptations, or painful occurrences, may have interrupted the reading of this book, or of that? In how many instances may a reader have shut one of them, to indulge in a folly or a vice, of which that very book had warned him to beware? Some of these volumes are histories of the life and death of good men; how many readers may have proceeded along the narrative, approving and admiring; and, envying the happy termination of the course, have said, "Let me die the death of the righteous," and nevertheless have pursued a contrary course, and come to a melancholy end? May not some one of these books be the last that some one person lived to read? Many that have perused them are dead; each made an exit in a manner and

with circumstances of its own; what were the manner and circumstances in each instance? It was a most solemn event to that person; but how ignorant concerning it am I, who now perhaps have my eye on the book which he read the last! What a power of association, what an element of intense significance, would invest some of these volumes, if I could have a momentary vision of the last scene of a number of the most remarkable of their former readers! Of that the books can tell me nothing; but let me endeavour to bring the fact, that persons have read them and died, to bear with a salutary influence on my own mind while I am reading any of them. Let me cherish that temper of spirit which is sensible of intimations of what is departed, remaining and mingling with what is present, and can thus percieve some monitory glimpses of even the unknown dead. What multiplied traces of them, on some of these books, are perceptible to the imagination, which beholds successive countenances long since "changed and sent away," bent in attention over the pages! And the minds which looked from within through those countenances, conversing with the thoughts of other minds perhaps long withdrawn, even at that time, from among men—what and where are they now? Among the representations of the objects of faith, contained in any of these works, what passages may they be which approach the nearest to a description of that condition of existence to which those readers were transferred, after

closing the book for the last time? If I could have a sign, when I happen to fall on some page dark with portentous images of the evil which awaits the impious and wicked, that a certain former reader carelessly and presumptuously dared the experiment, and has found a reality corresponding to those menaces, but more tremendous; or a sign, when I am reading sentences animated with noble and delightful ideas of the felicity which awaits the faithful, that a certain preceeding reader, (and suppose him signified by name,) is now in the experience of a fact, true in principle to these anticipations, but far transcending in degree, how powerfully should I be arrested at those passages, as if I were come to an opening from the invisible world, through which I could hear "sounds of lementation and woe," or songs of triumph, from the identical beings who, at a certain hour in the past, looked on these lines! There is actually a person telling me, that he looked once on these very descriptions, these emblems, which are at this moment before my sight, and that he, the same person, is, at this time that I am looking at them, overwhelmed or enraptured by the reality. But I, that am come after him, to read these representations now, do I solemnly consider that I am myself making my election of the yet unseen good or evil, and that very soon I shall leave the books in my turn, and arrive at the consequence?

Sometimes the conjectural reference to the former possessors and readers of books, seems to be rendered a little less vague, by our finding at the be-

ginning of an old volume, one or more names written, in such characters, and perhaps accompanied with such dates, that we are assured those persons must long since have done with all books. The name is generally all we can know of him who inserted it; but we can thus fix on an individual as actually having possessed this volume; and perhaps there are here and there certain marks which should indicate an attentive perusal. What manner of person was he? What did he think of the sentiments, the passages, which I see that he particularly noticed? If there be opinions here which I cannot admit, did he believe them? If there be counsels here which I deem most just and important, did they affectually persuade him? Was his conscience, at some of these passages, disturbed or calm? In what manner did he converse on these subjects with his associates? What were the most marked features of his character, what the most considerable circumstances of his life, in what spirit and expectations did he approach and reach its close? The book is perhaps such a one as he could not read, without being cogently admonished that he was going to his great account; he went to that account, how did he meet and pass through it? This is no vain reverie. He, the man who bore and wrote this name, *did* go, at a particular time, though unrecorded, to surrender himself to his Judge. But I, who handle the book that was his, and observe his name, and am thus directing my thoughts into the dark after the *man*, I also am in progress toward the same

tribunal, when it will be proved, to my joy or sorrow, whether I have learned true wisdom from my books, and from my reflections on those who have possessed and read them before.

But it may be, that the observer's eye fixes on a volume which instantly recalls to his mind a person whom he well knew; a revered parent perhaps, or a valued friend, who is recollected to have approved and inculcated the principles of the book, or perhaps to have given it to the person who is now looking at it, as a token of regard, or an inoffensive expedient for drawing attention to an important subject. He may have the image of that relative or friend, as in the employment of reading that volume, or in the act of presenting it to him. This may awaken a train of remembrances leading away from any relation to the book, and possibly of salutary tendency; but also, such an association with the book may have an effect, whenever he shall consult it, as if it were the departed friend, still more than the author, that uttered the sentiments. The author spoke to any one indiffrently, to no one in particular; but the sentiments seem to be specially applied to *me*, when they come in this connexion with the memory of one who was my friend. Thus he would have spoken to me, thus, in effect, he does speak to me, while I think of him as having read the book, and regarded it as particularly adapted to me; or seem to behold him, as when reading it in my hearing, and sometimes looking off from the page to make a gentle enforcement of the instruction. He would have

been happy to anticipate that, whenever I might look into it, my remembrance of him would infuse a more touching significance, a more applying principal, into its important sentiments; thus retaining him, though invisibly, and without his actual presence, in the exercise of a beneficent influence. But indeed I can, at some moments, indulge my mind to imagine something more than this mere ideal intervention to reinforce the impression of truth upon me; insomuch that, supposing it were permitted to receive intimations from those who have left the world, it will seem to me possible that I might, when looking into some parts of that book, in a solitary hour of night, percieve myself to be once more the object of his attention, signified by a mysterious whisper from no visible form; or by a momentary preternatural luminousness pervading the lines, to intimate that a friendly intelligence, that does not forget me, would still and again enforce on my conscience the dictates of piety and wisdom which I am reading. And shall it be as nothing to me, for effectual impression, that both my memory recalls the friend as when living, in aid of these instructions, and that my imagination, without any discord with my reason, apprehends him, when now under a mightier manifestation of truth, as still animated with a spirit which would, if that were consistent with the laws of the higher economy, convey to me yet again the same testimony and injunctions? Is all influential relation dissolved by the withdrawment from mortal intercourse; so that let my friends die, and I am as

loose from their hold upon me as if they had ceased to exist, or even never had existed ?

In this slight exemplification of the manner in which the sight of an assemblage of books may awaken serious reflection, by recalling to our view the persons who are imagined or known to have possessed or read them, we are supposing the association confined to the particular volumes on the spot. Any attempt at widening the scope of reflection, toward the whole extent of all the editions and copies of each book, would confuse and dissipate the meditation in a multiplicity inconceivable and endless. Think of any one book that has been long and extensively circulated ;—suppose Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul. The immense number of impressions have engaged the attention, less or more, of hundreds of thousands of persons. Each of those copies has had its own particular destination, and many of them have, doubtless, been attended with remarkable circumstances, though to us unknown. If some of the most memorable could be brought to our knowledge, in connexion with the individual and still existing copies which they befell, what an interest would be attached to those books, bearing such memorials of the past ! Imagine by what a strange diversity of persons, as to disposition, mental endowment, conduct, age ; in what a variety of situations, under how many peculiar conjunctures of occurrence ; and with what dissimilar impressions and results, the book

has been perused or noticed! It is striking, to a degree even awful, to reflect what such a book must have done; to how many it may have imparted thoughts new and affecting, and which nothing could expel; how many it may have been made the mean of leading into a happy life, and to a happy end; how many it has arrested, disturbed, and warned, whom it could not persuade; of how many it has aggravated the responsibility, more than influenced the conduct. So great a number and diversity of accountable beings, unknown, for the most part, to one another, scattered here and there, over more than one country, and over a space of time approaching to a century, have come into some certain relation to this one book! Among them, many a single instance might, if the case could be fully brought to our knowledge, exhibit a remarkable history of a train of thought and emotion, of determination and practical result; possibly including singular incidents, opportune and auspicious, or of disastrous influence. And who shall presume to cast any thought toward an assignable duration of the effect resulting to so many persons, from their attention having fallen on this work, when that effect is gone, or is to go, into the interests of eternity? Let the idea of its unknown prolongation be combined with that of the number of beings experiencing it, and it would be no extravagant fantasy, to believe, that the pious author may find it one of the amazements of his future enlarging knowledge, to have a manifestation in some way unfolding itself to him, of even

a minor part of the consequences of what he wrote.

It is but a diminutive portion of what must have happened to the book, in relation to its former readers, and transient inspectors, that we can bring within the view of our mind, with any distinctness of apprehension. But it is easy to represent to ourselves a few instances of so general a description, that it must be certain there have been many such. And we may perhaps be indulged in the hope of inducing somewhat of a serious and favourable predisposition, in some one or other, whose attention may hereafter be drawn to the work, by employing the remainder of this Essay in specifying a few exemplifications of the manner of reception and attention, which the book may be imagined to have found, with persons of several supposed characters of mind; and suggesting, in each case, some of the appropriate considerations. We would wish to fall on such questions, persuasives, or expostulations, as might have been pertinently addressed, and possibly in some instances were addressed to the persons so described, by a sensible religious friend; whose character we may be allowed to personate, in representing how his office might be performed.

It would be of little use to expatiate on the supposition, (not an improbable one,) that such a book may casually, at one time or another, have fallen under the transient notice of a decided unbeliever in revealed religion; an unbeliever, therefore, in

effect, in religion altogether. We can easily conceive the supercilious air, and the note of scorn, at the sight of what cost the excellent author so much earnest labour, with the most pure and benevolent intention, and has occupied so many thousand hours of the grave attention of readers; what has been the mean of awakening many thoughtless spirits to seriousness; what has, in not a few instances, opportunely occurred to decide a mind wavering in the most momentous of all practical questions; and what has by many been gratefully recollected, near the close of life, as having greatly contributed to the cause of its closing well. He could not be unapprized of such things belonging to its history, unless we suppose him more ignorant of the extension and effect of what may be called our religious literature, than is quite consistent with the character of a well-informed man, which we may be sure he claimed. But we may believe, that the knowledge of this did not at all modify the tone of contempt, in which he repeated the title of the book, to give it a new turn: "Rise and Progress of—delusion, superstition, nonsense! Rise of an *ignis fatuus*, from fermenting ignorance, to glimmer and ramble in a progress to extinction and nothing!" And he was elated in the self-complacency of being so much more wise and fortunate than all such writers, and all their believing readers.

But *was* it a self-complacency quite entire and unmingled, or which could be maintained in steady

uniform tenor, through the diversity of circumstances, and the varying moods of the mind? Let us suppose that, soon after his indulging this contempt of the book and its subject, some grevious occurrence, or even the mere unexplained fluctuation of feeling, reduced him for a while to a somewhat reflective or gloomy temper; and that just then one of his own fraternity turned in to see him, and happened to catch sight of the same book,—if indeed it be an admissible supposition, that it could have been suffered to remain any where near him. We may imagine the visitant to regard the book with the same disposition as his friend; and let it be supposed, that he went into a strain of congratulation something like the following: What a noble privilege of elevation we enjoy over those silly dupes of imposture and superstition, the authors of these works, (such of them as really think as they write,) and their disciples, who gravely and honestly believe what they read. To think what a mighty concern these simple people are always making of their *souls*, talking of their spiritual nature, their immortal principle, their infinite value! Whereas we, by virtue of reason disenchanted and illuminated, could tell them that this soul, so fondly idolized, so ludicrously extolled, is nothing more than an accident of corporeal organization, and necessarily perishes with the material frame—with the body, as they call it in contradistinction, and speak of it in terms of comparative contempt, as if they possessed something incomparably more noble. They are for ever, too,

referring to a Supreme Being, with whom they fancy they are standing in some mysterious and sublime relation. They talk of his favour, his providence, his grace; and actually imagine they can hold a direct communication with him, indulging a fantastic notion of some special good to be obtained from him by importunate solicitation. What an inflation of vanity! to fancy that such a being (if there *be* such a one) must be continually thinking of *them;* that he should care about their dispositions and deportment toward him; and that they can attract his special attention, and constrain him to give peculiar tokens of his favour. And what a wretched bondage of superstition, to be, at every step, in every practical question, with respect to every inclination and emotion, and with the sacrifice of whatever their own immediate interest may plead, under the constraint of an imaginary obligation to consult the will of some invisible and unknown authority! *Our* privilege of sounder reason reduces and restores us to ourselves, from all such visionary amplitude of relations; and exempts us from all the vain solicitudes and distractions of an unremitting endeavour to live in consistency with them. It is enough that we hold our transient being under certain laws of nature, fixed in the system of the world, to which it is more easy to submit, than to the will and continual interference of a formal and foreign authority. Our subjection to these laws we cannot help, but are happy to take our destiny under it, with the free allowance to follow our own inclinations as far as we

can. If there be an Almighty Power, we may well believe he has other affairs to mind, than that of interfering with us while we are minding our own.

It is true, these deluded people are persuaded that he has made an express communication to men, declaring the relations in which they stand, and announcing his will. And indeed it must be confessed to be quite miraculous, that so many things concur to make a semblance of evidence that there has been such a communication. But let us not trouble ourselves about the matter : it is absurd to imagine there can have been any such anomaly in the course of things, any such arbitrary substitution for the dictates of our reason : our license of acting as we desire, would be surrendered in believing it ; and we will *not* believe it.

To crown the whole set of delusions which these people call their faith, they are actually persuaded that there remains for men a conscious existence after death ; a perpetual existence, they say, in a state bearing a retributive relation to what they shall have been in this life. And they are elated with the hope, and vehemently stimulated to exertions for the attainment, of an eternal felicity. A magnificient dream, certainly, for those who can lay their sober senses aside, to admit the illusion. Nor can we deny, that, through the medium of such a notion, these enthusiasts have a view of death vastly different from ours, and feel an augmented interest in their existence, as they approach near the end of what they are calling its introductory stage. To

hear them talk, one would think they had received messengers or visions from another world, to inform them of a splendid allotment and reception already prepared for them there, and of friends impatient for their arrival. And it is a notorious fact, that, on the strength of such a presumption, great numbers of the devotees to this faith have resigned their life with exultation, not a few of them under tortures inflicted for their fidelity to this their superstition. Well, the delusion and the existence broke up together. And for the present race of pious fools, let them expend their cares, their passions, their life, their very souls, upon their adored fallacy; while we, on a higher ground, can be amused to see them led on by a phantom, which ere long will mock at their sudden fall, one after another, into nothing. We envy them not the ambitious aspirings which cheat them out of the enjoyment of this world, never, assuredly, to repay them in another. If we lose any thing worth calling pleasure, in being destitute of that hope which flatters them with images of a happy futurity, we have an ample compensation in the riddance of that fear which visits even some of them, in their gloomy moments, with alarms of a miserable one. Besides, a happiness of such a nature as they dream of, would be little congenial with the inclinations which actuate us, and which we have neither power nor desire to alter. Our wisdom is, to make the most that we can, in the indulgence of these inclinations, of the world that we are

in. We hope in a good fortune, that our life may be long and prosperous; and if any thing of a sombre hue should threaten to come over its latter stages, through infirmities and the evident approach of its termination, we shall have the resource of philosophy and fate; and may find some remaining amusements that will please and divert us to the last. And when, at length, we are forced out of the world and existence, we shall have no consciousness of our loss. How insensible, happily for us, we, or rather the dust that once composed us, will be, while thousands of deluded creatures will be occupied with such books as the Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul, and with the gravest earnestness afflicting themselves with a superstitious discipline for the attainment of an imaginary heaven, with the frequent intrusion of the dread of an equally fictitious hell.

Now, could the supposed speaker, without plainly belying the matter, have made out the case for congratulation in terms much more gratifying than these? But we may reasonably doubt whether a strain like this, expressed in a confident tone of superior wisdom, but so palpably betraying, with inadvertent honesty, the sordid and disconsolate character and adjuncts of the vaunted privilege, would be listened to with complacency, during the depressed mood of the scorner of the religious book, religious persons, and religion itself. We can imagine him saying, Pray suspend your song of triumph and disdain; it has to me a raven sound. Are we, then, in the very elation of our pride, in plain fact thus

prostrate on the earth? Must we confess, that we hold our advantage of reason disabused, of stronger and freer intelligence, at the cost of admitting so humiliating an estimate of our being and destiny? Really, we are in danger of giving these people that we dispise, occasion to indulge contempt or pity in their turn. I could almost whish that I were under the same delusion.

It would have contributed little to recover him from this recoil of feeling, if, just about the same time, an intelligent religious man had fallen into his company, had happened to learn in what manner the serious book and its subject had been disposed of, and had thrown in a few of *his* suggestions, to re-inspirit the shrinking arrogance of irreligion.—I am rather sorry, (we may suppose him to say,) that a book like that, written with the most simple and benevolent desire to do good, by a man who had deeply studied his subject, should have been the object of a contempt which I should have thought full as justly bestowed on some of those productions, of frivolous quality, or dishonest intention, which I believe are the objects of your favour. However, a work which has engaged the most serious attention, and powerfully operated on the character, of multitudes, and will do so of multitudes more, can afford to incur your passing glance and expressions of disdain. And the *subject* of the book, religion, can afford it too—that religion, which has sustained the severest examination, and secured the conviction, and animated the virtues in life, and hopes in death,

of many of the strongest, noblest minds, who have bequeathed to its glory all that was illustrious in humanity. So honoured, what can it lose, think you, of its dignity and venerableness, by the refusal of your homage? It can, I repeat, afford that you should be its rejecters and contemners, and should lend all the credit of wisdom and virtues such as yours, to the cause which is so fierce to explode it. With perfect impunity to its honours, religion can have you going about proclaiming, that you have received a light by which it is exposed as a delusion and imposture,—a light of the same kind, (if so grave a topic would allow so ludicrous an illusion) as that which was obtained where the satirist reports to have seen the wise men at work to extract sunbeams from cucumbers. But when, in this self-assurance of rectified understanding, you are indulging your contempt of religion, does the thought never strike you, what a very curious chance it was that this brighter illumination, under which the old imposture vanishes, should fall exactly on *you*? For, was your mind of an order, or in a disposition, the most *likely* to attract the latent element of truth to combine with it, and disperse the fog? Was yours the spirit to contemplate, with comprehensive survey, in purer serenity of temper, the theory of religion? If from moral causes you *needed* and *wished* that religion should not be true, was *that* the security for impartial inquiry, and undeceptive conclusions? If you experienced what you thought injustice, (or I will suppose it really such) from persons of religious

profession, and your resentment against them grew into re-action against religion itself, was that the proper mood for examining its authority? If you had yourself made pretensions to piety, but, forfeiting your christian character by misconduct, were censured or disowned by a religious community with which you had been connected, and then called on infidelity to assist your revenge, was that a benign conjunction under which to commence your new intellectual enterprize? And if, to decide your hesitation, expel your yet lingering fears, and promote your progress, you betook yourself to the companionship, through the attraction of their irreligion, of men whom you knew to be unprincipled and profligate, and perhaps ignorant too, was that the school in which you can feel pride to have been learners? Such things recollected, however, may be quite compatible with self-complacency, in persons of your principles; but you may believe that religion will suffer no default of its honours, by not having such as you for adherents.

I allow that you have your advantages in its rejection. Indeed, why should I deny this very thing to be one—that you can think of such a mode of deliverance from it, and not be stifled with shame? You have the still greater privilege of being set loose from the constraint of many obligations and prohibitions. You "are a chartered (*self*-chartered) libertine," and can give yourself freely away to pleasures, amusements, or ambition. And you boast that you have the high advantage of being in-

tent on *realities*, while the captives of religion, you say, dragged or threatened off from a thousand attractive objects and opportunities, are consuming their spirits and life on mere *ideas*, on the imaginations of some intangible, unseen, and reversionary good. But suspend, for a moment, your boast about this reality of the materials of your happiness. Say, whether it be not a fact that *you* are in no other possession of your favourite objects, than merely in idea, during the far greater proportion of your time. Your thinking of them, wishing for them, imagining how delightful would be the possession of them; contriving how to attain them, feeling how wretched and impatient you are in not having them yet, fretting at the obstacles, raging at your disappointments; again eagerly anticipating them, as now nearly within your reach, being mortified at a new delay, thrown in this chilling moment on the reflection what the pursuit has already cost you, and what it may cost you still; alarmed, perhaps, at what the very success may cost you, in its possible or certain consequences—what kind of reality is all this? Nearly the same as that of a fair garden of fruit to a man looking at it or attempting it across a treacherous moat, a steep slippery bank, and an almost impenetrable fence of thorns. Is this the reality which will bear you out in your exultation over those who are wasting, you say, their energy on objects which exist to them only in idea?

But you do sometimes obtain your objects, and can say you now possess the thing itself; which the

devotees to religion, you say, never can, since that which they are peculiarly to aspire after, is confessedly something not belonging to this world. And you account it the spcial advantage which you have over them, that it is through the rejection of the truth and authority of religion that you are empowered to make a large appropriation of what the real world contains and offers. Had I remained servile to that domination, you will exclaim, what an interdict should I have met, whichever way I turned! This object I must not have put forth my hand toward at all; this other I must beware of following beyond a certain length. If, thus enclosed round with a restriction from so many desirable things, I could soar aloft, that were well. I had leave to mount up through the sky, to walk ideally in a paradise, holding converse with angels, and fixing, by anticipation, on a mansion in new Jerusalem. But I was for no such ethereal altitudes, and impalpable superfine felicities. I wanted the substantial good of this earth; wanted some things of a kind, others in a measure, and many on terms, which religion forbade. I have disowned the usurped authority, have burst through the restricting circle; and now, see me here in possession or command of things which need no faith to give them substance, and which are not the less agreeable for being a litte seasoned with what your spiritual people call sin.

But these realities, when actually possessed, do they never let in upon you a mortifying conviction, that you have been nevertheless the dupe of illusion?

As a purveyor to your senses, or as a gay spirit, or as a pertinacious aspirer to some pitch of pre-eminence above your fellow mortals in wealth, or display, or power, you may, in some instance and measure, have succeeded in converting the mere images into the very substance; exulting, I may suppose, to think how much you owed in this achievement to your emancipation from all religious belief; but recollect, how long did the possession preclude all painful sense of deficiency? Did no invading dissatisfaction turn your mind to bitterness of reflection on the previous enchantment of imagination, which had so long prompted you on with assurances of complete delight? Might you never have been overheard to murmur, "What inanity in all these things!" and to curse your destiny, as secretly but an accomplice of religion, to punish and plague you for its rejection?

Thus, then, if you bring to account the entire quantity of the busy occupation of your faculties about that which you pursue as your supreme good, and observe that the proportion of perhaps nineteen parts in twenty of all this is *not* the interest of actual possession, and then make the deduction for the feelings of disappointment and chagrin incident to the possession obtained, (and which throw you back again into reflection and imagination, that is, into mere ideas, and those of a most irksome kind,) it will appear that you have an extremely narrow ground for your boast of being a man for the *realities* of good, in contrast with the believer in religion,

who, you say, subsists on mere images, gleams, and shadows Would your experience thus far warrant you to compute, that all the moments of full satisfaction added together would amount to as much as one year in a long life? A splendid triumph, for a man who is blessing his superior reason and good fortune, that he is not cheated out of what is real and substantial, to waste his being on the phantasms of christian faith! So much it is that you can gain by availing yourself, to the utmost extent that you dare under the limitations imposed by the constitution of nature and society, of the license conferred by your infidelity. And so high is your advantage over those who, while indulging the hope of an immortal happiness, can make more than you can of this world itself, under the sanction of christian principles in their selection and pursuit.

But, while forced to admit so humiliating a representation, you will, perhaps, in the re-action of pride, say, that your being in possession of *truth*, is itself alone a noble eminence that you have attained above the subjects of an imposture, the deluded believers in a revelation. Your spirit has risen up in its strength, and defied the antiquated superstition to lay you under its spell; it has gone forth in its might, and exterminated from your field of view the crowd of spectres and chimeras. But you must allow me to doubt, whether you really feel in this matter all the confident assurance which you pretend. I

suspect there are times when you dare not look out over that field, for fear of seeing the portentous shapes there again; and even that they sometimes come close to present a ghastly visage to you through the very windows of your strong hold. I have observed in men of your class, that they often appear to regard the arrayed evidences of revealed religion, not with the simple aversion which may be felt for error and deception, but with that kind of repugnance which betrays a recognition of adverse *power*. Say what penance you would not rather undergo, or of which of your most favourite pleasures, (even of those in which you verify your privilege of exemption from the authority of religion) you would not rather deny yourself, for a considerable time, than be obliged to study deliberately, in sober retirement, a few of the works most distinguished for strength of argument in defence of Christianity; though this, it might be presumed, should be a fair expedient for confirming your satisfaction? I know that some of your class, (and perhaps your conscience testifies as to one,) have no resource for escaping from their disquietude, but in diverting their attention completely from the subject, by throwing themselves into the whirl of amusement, into business, conviviality or intemperance. But it is not the hero's part to affect to be occupied with necessary employments, or to hide himself in a throng of masks and revellers, when he descries the antagonist approaching to challenge him.

But it may happen, that the subject, in its menacing aspect, will present itself to you under circumstances which preclude this escape. And you can not be unapprized what a striking difference, in spirit and deportment, we have sometimes had an occasion of observing, between one of your tribe, and a man whose moral strength was in the belief and power of revealed religion, when overtaken by some calamity, or attacked by a dangerous distemper. Nor can you have failed to hear of examples in which that difference has become quite prodigious, when the parties have sensibly approached their last hour. You cannot have forgotten instances among those now lost to your fraternity, of some whose closing life presented a direful scene; who could maintain no longer either their disbelief or their courage; who poured forth execrations on their principles, and on those from whom they had learned them; called out on pious relatives, absent or even dead; implored the intercession of christian friends, as if, ridiculed so often before for their faith, they were now believed to have power to propitiate insulted heaven; adjured and dismayed their associates in irreligion, if any of them had friendship or hardihood enough to stay by them, in impotence to console them; were agonized with horror indescribable; and expired, as it were, in an explosion of the last feeble life by the energy of despair. What security can you have that yours shall not be such an exit? For some that have ended so, were exceeded by none in the previous ostentation of confidence in both their prin-

ciples and their bravery. It would betray a contemptibly reckless temper of mind, if you can answer, in a tone of indifference, that if such is to be the event, it will only be the addition of one hideous circumstance more, to the sufferings naturally incident to death; the concurrence of a disorder of the mind with that which may be destroying the body; the ultimate working out, perhaps, of a little superstition, which may have lain latent from the infection of early false instruction. Allow the case to be put so, looking no further; and even then, if you were a thoughtful man, and apt, as comports with that character, to look forward, the anticipation of so frightful a scene as possible, would be enough to quench many a lively sparkle, to imbitter many an unhallowed gratification, to repress many an irreligious daring, to dispirit many an ambitious project, to mortify many a proud sentiment. But there is another thing not to be overlooked, which may warn you to take care how you dispose of the matter so lightly. In most of these fearful death-scenes of infidelity, the unhappy mortal has been racked to a confession, that he had never dealt *honestly* with the subject and with his soul; that he had never fairly examined the question; that he had not been sincerely intent on knowing the truth; that he had repelled intrusive lights, and suppressed remonstrant emotions; that he had suffered his pride, his vanity, or his sensuality, to determine his rejection of the authority of revelation. So that conviction rushed upon them not in the simple character of truth, but also in that

of vengeance. It had retreated before their defiance of both its more imperative and more gentle attempts during their progress, only to await them in retributive power at the end. See that you do not forget *that* circumstance of their experience, when you are disposed to make so light of the acknowledged possibility that your end may be like theirs.

But I am unwilling, while looking on your countenance, to foresee you as exhibiting, one day, another such spectacle; and will limit my imagination to represent you as in a situation less appalling, but very mournful. Let it be supposed that you live on, constant to your present system, and considerably successful in your endeavour to make the best of the world on your own plan, till you attain an advanced age, a period when accumulating signs, and even the mere reckoning of time, must warn you, that you have nearly had your day. Let it be supposed, that you then happen to be in company with a man of equal age, who has been governed from his youth by a firm and cordial faith in that which you have rejected. Imagine that you hear him, induced, perhaps, by the hope of conveying an influence to the minds of some youthful friends, adverting briefly and unostentatiously to his past life, as a religious course; recalling what he regards as the most sensible commencement of the decisive operation of religion on his mind, when the conviction of its truth and necessity became his reigning principle;

then, noting some of the effects which have evinced, in their succession, the progress of its efficacy, both in the power of its dominion, and in the creation of happiness; and, finally, expressing with emphasis his delight and gratitude, that now, in the cold evening shade of life, this heavenly light shines still brighter, as intermingling with those rays which are coming fast from a nobler state of existence, confidently expected to be attained through death. Imagine yourself silently hearing all this, expressed in perfect collectedness of mind, in language clear of all wildness and inflation, and observing the aspect of the speaker, uniformly dignified, whether grave or animated; and imagine, too, your own feelings at being placed in such a comparison. Can you conceive it possible for you to maintain the sense of a privileged condition, or not to sink in the profoundest mortification? What will you not be compelled to think of a system, which throws an aggravation of gloom on a period which the order of nature deprives of pleasures, and besets with multiplying grievances, thus brought in contrast with that other system which warms, and invigorates, and enriches, the close of a worn-out being, with something far better than all the vivacity and prospects of youth? What will you think of a system, which forbids thoughtfulness to old age, and throws it, for relief, under the pressure of its infirmities, upon the resources of business, which it has no longer strength to transact, or of amusements incongruous with the character of that season, and in which the antiquat-

ed performer appears like a man dancing and jesting to the place of execution. You shrink at the idea of being placed in such a contrast. I do not say to you, Embrace, then, without delay, the faith which would place you, in that last stage, on the superior ground; for you will tell me, that your belief is not in your own power; meaning, when you say so, (*is* not this the plain truth?) that you have no disposition to a serious, diligent, and really impartial re-examination of the subject; but, at least, I am authorized to advise you to be henceforth a little reserved in your ridicule of books describing the rise and progress of religion in the soul. If tempted at any time to its unrestrained indulgence, just look forward to the predicament in which you may one day feel that you stand, in compaison with a man who has experienced that process, (whether the operating cause be a beguilement or a truth,) and is joyfully awaiting its consummation. And I venture to predict to you, that, in such a case, your utmost efforts to re-assure yourself that the man so constrasted with you is but a deluded fool, will do little to disperse the gloom settling and thickening on your spirit.

But now let us turn our thoughts to conjecture the kind of reception which this good book may have found with persons of several classes greatly different from the example we have been supposing. We may assume, as a certainty, that it has caught the notice of very many persons indisposed to reli-

gion, but entertaining no doubt that we have a revelation to declare its nature, and to command our solemn attention to it. The circumstance did actually happen, that the words of the title were taken in by the eyes, and that some thoughts were involuntarily raised in the mind. Persons now living may recollect this having occurred to them as an incident which did not please them. We can imagine it to have happened to more than a few gay young persons, of minds not uncultivated, not left entirely uninstructed respecting the highest concern of their existence, but quite averse to think of so serious a subject. A pious relative might have placed the book, by a delicate device, in the way to seize the eye; or it might be taken up when casually lying on the table of an acquaintance. And we are to sure we are but picturing an example of many that there have been of the same kind, when we imagine we see the young person hastily laying down the volume, with a look of disappointment and distaste, expressive of the sentiment, That is no book for me. To glance over the title-page was quite disgust enough for so frivolous a spirit to endure. In another instance, we seem to see the young person inspecting the book for a few moments, in an unfixed, heedless manner, plainly indicating it would soon be closed; presently throwing it aside, as worth no further attention; then fortunately detecting, where it had slidden in among better books, some very silly romance; seizing it as a discovered treasure, and unable to lay it down till a whole volume was run

through. Another case may be conceived, in which our book, of the Rise and Progress of Religion, has chanced to be within sight, in the interval of animated, restless expectation of meeting some gay associates, or of going to some amusement; when it detained the youthful thought no longer than to suggest a pleasurable idea of the difference, between the dull and funeral business of religion, and such exhilaration as that in prospect. It might be no excess of fancy to suppose another case; that this same book obtruded itself on the sight of a young person in an hour of disgust and fallen spirits, after suffering some disappointment and mortification amidst those gay delights which had been so exultingly anticipated; and that it excited no better feeling than this, Let me not have another odious thing just now to plague me; I am vexed and out of patience enough. For one more instance: a young person of this light spirit might be on terms of acquaintance with one of a more thoughtful character, and might happen to find the latter reading, or apparently having just read, the book, in question; and might betray some marks of sincere wonder at so strange a taste; internally saying, If *I* were ever to have been caught employed with such a book, I would have hastily put it out of sight, at the entrance of a pleasant visitor.—No one will doubt, that there may have been facts answering to these conjectural descriptions; and we might, with equal probability, diversify the representation into many other prrticular forms. Where and what are the persons now,

who were the reality of what we thus are supposing? But will there not be yet many more human beings to be added to the account of such examples?

It may be that, in some of these instances, the young person did not escape receiving some hints of admonition, from a friend, whose benevolent vigilance had perceived this refusal to converse an hour, or a moment, with a book soliciting attention to the most important subject. Whatever might actually be the strain of such an admonition, we may think that friend,—not laying any stress on the bare circumstance of dislike to this particular book, but taking occassion from it, as indicating aversion to religion itself,—would have deserved to be listened to in using such terms as the following:—Will you be persuaded, *is* it possible to induce you, to make a short effort with your mind, to constrain it to serious reflection? Would you have me, or not, to regard you as capable of thinking and judging, as in possession of a share of good sense, and as admitting that there really may be a just call for its exercise, even at your age? You are not willing to be accounted the reverse of this. Well then, prove that you can think, and that you can perceive when there is a subject before you which has peculiar *claims* that you should think. And is there any thing which can urge a more peremptory claim than the questions, What manner of being it is that you possess, to what end you possess it, and how it should be occupied in order to the attainment of that end? Is your own nature a thing of such little account with

you, that you are quite satisfied with the mere fact of its being an existence; and that you have no doubt whether you may give away all its faculties, without care or accountableness, to whatever pleases them and invites them into action? Does every consciousness you feel of what there is in that nature, agree to your living as a gay bird of the spring; as a creature made for the play and revel of mere life and sensation; or at most, fitted for some little schemes of transient interests, confined to a span of existence, and liable to be broken up and given to the winds at any hour? Is this all you find in the endowments of your nature; is this the amount of its capabilities and dignity? No, you would say; you believe that you possess, for you have been taught that all of us do, a spirit, of noble quality and important destination. Do you indeed believe any such thing? what, while I see the whole vigour of your being, animal and mental, at some times dissipated in levity, spirited off in effusions of mirth; or at other times consumed in earnest protracted assiduity to accomplish some contrivance for personal display, some little feat of competition, or some scheme, (a grand one, you think,) of creating for yourself a happiness for a few years, from materials which every day must diminish, and any day may annihilate? Is it impossible to you, or do you not think it worth while, to reflect whether so living be consistent with so believing? Does it never strike you as a thing to wonder at, that there can be a creature so strangely formed as to admit these

things to coalesce, and that you happen to be that creature? Or do you escape all sense of inconsistency and shame through mere thoughtlessness, which prevents your being reminded of that truth which you say you believe?

Mere thoughtlessness! and how is *that* possible? How is it possible to believe what you affirm that you do, and not often feel a solemn influence coming over your mind, and banishing, for at least a little while, all trifling moods and interests? Assured that you are, as to the most essential property of your nature, a spiritual and immortal being, think, account to yourself, how it *can* be that such a conviction, fixed and abiding within you, should abide there alone, disconnected from all the activity of your ideas and feelings, having, so to speak, nothing to do there; while in all reason it ought to be combined there with many most inportant ideas with which it has an inseparable relation, and which it ought to keep there in active force.

For, consider what you are admitting, when you say you believe you are such a being. You are admitting that you stand in a solemn relation to the Almighty; that your present state of existence is but a brief introduction to another; that your body is but a frame accommodated to retain your superior and more essential being for a short period in this world; that its interests, therefore, and all interests which respect this world exclusively, are infinitely insignificant in comparison with those of the spirit; that you are every moment in progress

toward the experience of a happiness or misery of incalculable magnitude; and that this short and uncertain life is the season for maturing the dispositions and habits to a state which will consign you to the one or the other, if the declarations of God be true. Can you attempt to deny, or pretend to doubt, that all this is included in the fact of your possessing a rational spirit, destined to endless existence, and most justly required to obey the commands of your Creator? But if this be true, you cannot exercise your judgment, and listen to your conscience, for one hour, without plainly seeing what is your highest interest and most imperious duty. Nothing in the world, nothing in all truth, can press upon you with mightier evidence, than that your grand business in life is the care of the soul, that shall live for ever. Confess to your reason and conscience that the case is so, and that any assertion to the contrary would instantly strike you as false and foolish.

You do confess it. But what, then, should be thought of you, what should you think of yourself, if you will then act as if the very contrary were the truth. Suppose that, (in such a spontaneous escape of thoughts in words, as sometimes happens to a person musing in the security of solitude,) the prevailing disposition of your mind were to utter itself involuntarily and audibly, and in expressions like these:—"My supreme concern is as clear to my view as the sun; there is no denying it, there is no question about it; it is, to apply myself earnestly

to secure the welfare, here and hereafter, of my immortal spirit; but I feel no such care; I dislike and evade all admonitions which would enforce it on me; I yield myself to this disposition, without restraint, or remorse, or fear, for the present, and shall do so—I do not know, nor much care, how long." Supposing this uttered in an almost unconscious passing of your mind into your voice, would you not be awaked and startled into recollection at sounds of such import, and be almost surprised into the question—"Who was saying that? Was it I? How strangely it would have sounded if any one had been within hearing." If any one had been within hearing! And could you forget that there is One who perfectly knows that internal disposition, of which expressions like these might be the genuine utterance?

While you are intent on being happy, surely it should be one thing regarded as indispensable to your being truly so, that you can approve yourself; that, whatever imperfections there are for you to condemn and regret, you yet *can* feel a deliberate complacency, a complacency of reflection and conscience, in the prevailing habit and purpose of your mind. What is it worth, that a variety of outward things should please you, if you are haunted with a sense that your own internal condition, the condition of your very self, is something to grieve you? Now I wish it were possible to induce you to turn upon yourself one resolute, patient, impartial inspection. Look, with the intentness with which you would

gaze on an emblematical picture, in whose signs you could believe your destiny to be figured out, look on the being, formed for an endless futurity, but engrossed by the interests of a day; appointed, after a short term, to pass into another world, but repelling all thoughts and monitions of it; capable of an elevated and perpetual felicity, but sunk and expended in transient pleasures and precarious hopes; invited to communion with the Father of Spirits, but turning away, with indifference or aversion, to seek all that it wants, for affection and assistance, in the intercourse of associates who are equally careless of his favour; and summoned to adopt a wise and constant discipline, to make sure of its true welfare, in time and eternity, but surrendering the formation of it scharacter, and the direction of its course, to what ever may happen to obtain the ascendency, to casual impressions, ill chosen friends, or the prevailing spirit and habits of the world. Behold this spectacle as being yourself, your very self. Do you turn from the sight, and say you do not *like* to look at it? What, then, you confess that, amidst all the youthful vivacity in which you spring to catch the passing pleasures, and call them happiness, one primary requisite to true happiness is wanting. You cannot be happy while you dare not be sometimes still, and abstracted from the stir, lest you should hear a complaining and accusing voice from within, telling you there is something fatally wrong *there*.

You are reluctant to give any attention to religion, and to look into a book which describes its Rise and

Progress in the Soul. Why should you, you think, have the brightness of your early season overcast with the gloom of such a subject?—preferring, in effect, that this shade, if it *must* come sometime, should wait to bring additional darkness over a period when the sunshine of youth will be past, and life be declining into that season which you never think of but as of itself a dreary one. How cruel the gay youth can resolve to be to the aged person that he expects to become! I will repel, he practically says, all invasion of a grave subject from this my season of animation and delight, at the cost of having it to come, as a melancholy cloud over a time when I shall, by the course of nature, have outlived the best part of my life. So that my season of energy and enjoyment be kept clear, never mind what I may be accumulating to bring sadness on my spirit in that stage where I shall need every consolation. —Surely the consciousness of acting on such a plan, should itself be enough to damp the gayest of your vivacities.

Your are unwilling to yield to the claims of religion. But will you not take the trouble to consider what religion is, and in what manner it concerns you? It is not a thing which your Creator imposes on you by a mere arbitrary appointment; as if he would exact, simply in assertion of his supremacy, and in requirement of homage from his creature, something which is in itself foreign to the necessities of your nature. By its intrinsic quality it so corresponds to your nature, that the possession

of it is vital, and its rejection mortal, to your felicity, even independently of its being made obligatory by the positive injunction of the Almighty. From the spiritual principle of your soul, there is an absolute necessity that it be raised into complacent communication with its Divine Original; it is constituted to need this communication, now and for ever; and if it be not so exalted, it is degraded and prostrated to objects which cannot, by their very nature, adequately meet, and fill, and bless, its faculties: to be elevated to this communication, is religion. You do not, I presume, wish that your spirit were a being destined to final extinction a few years hence; but would you have it be immortal, and yet estranged from what must naturally concern it *as* immortal? If really immortal, it is under a plain necessity of its nature to give a devoted regard to its interests of hereafter, of eternity: to do so, is religion. Again, your soul is tainted with corruption; it is infected with sin; your are sometimes conscious that it is; and this is a malady which may cling to it, and inhere in it, after all bodily diseases have ceased in death. But then there is the plainest necessity that some grand operation be effected in it to remove this fatal disorder; that its condition be renovated and purified; that the action of its powers be determined to the right ends; that its guilt be pardoned; that, in one word, it be redeemed: now this great process in the soul is religion. Thus you may see that there can be no grosser misapprehension than that which has sometimes prompted the

impious wish, that God had not *made* religion necessary by enjoining it; for that, but for this extrinsic necessity, this necessity of mere obligation to his authority, religion might have been neglected, and the neglecter have fared never the worse.

But you plead that, whatever may be your conviction, and ought to be your feeling, you cannot help regarding religion as an austere and gloomy concern; that you have at times wished the case were otherwise; but so it is, that the subject still presents the same repulsive aspect, whenever it comes by unpleasant surprise, or in the returns of public or private religious instruction, on your attention. You will take every precaution to avoid being left alone with a person, however estimable and kind, from whom you are apprehensive of recieving any admonition respecting it. Perhaps even the sight of a book, familiarly known to be (as this of the Rise and Progress of Religion) an earnest pointed inculcation of it, is like glancing at the picture of a skeleton. The subject might become quite a grievance of your life,—even this subject, which represents to you how to be happy forever!—did not your health, your elastic spirits, your companions, your diversions, defend you so well against its frequent or prolonged annoyance. But sometimes, perhaps, an interval does occur, when it visits you in such a character of authority, that your resistance fails for a short time, you are taken at an advantage, and compelled to hear something of its declarations, claims, and remonstrances. And then you murmur,

and say, A cruel alternative! to yield such submission, or incur such consequences. Is it not hard that I should be required to surrender all the delights which are the privilege of my age, to repress my vivacity, to forsake my gay society, abandon my amusements, to inflict self-denial on my inclinations at every turn, to deplore all that I am, and all that I have been; to force my attention and affections away from this interesting world around me, toward another and unseen world of which I know nothing; to toil through severe and never-ceasing exercises, called discipline; to exhaust my spirits in solemn reflection; to live in terror lest every thing I do or enjoy should be sin; to renounce, and put myself in conflict with, the prevailing habits of society; to be marked as an over-righteous or melancholy mortal; to look through a darkened medium at every thing in life; and to go through the world thinking of every step as a progress toward the grave?

Now, even were it admitted that all this is a true representation of religion, that all this *is* its requirement, the friend who is urging it upon you might still maintain his argument. The question, he would say, what cost we should be willing to bear in a process, is to be determined, if wisdom be the judge, by an estimate of the result. The greatest temporary evil would be a mild condition of the attainment of an eternal good. If religion actually *did* require all this, but in return assured you of being safe and happy forever, what would your high endowment of reason be worth, in practical application, if you would

not resolve on the endurance of such an introduction, rather than lose such a sequel?

But you well know that such a representation, unqualified, is no just account of the demands of religion. And beware of allowing yourself in the disingenousness of exaggerating the hardship, in order to extenuate to your conscience, or to vindicate against your friendly admonisher, your neglect of the duty.

At the same time it is true, and must be unequivocally avowed, that religion, effectually prosecuted, does involve great labours, a discipline often severe, and therefore many painful experiences. It must include much that is mortifying to natural inclinations. How should it be otherwise with a being of a corrupt nature, who is to be trained and prepared, and that while under the incessant influences of a corrupt world, for a final state of holiness and felicity? If the natural condition of the mind be uncongenial what is divine and heavenly, its affections unattempered to live and delight in that element which is the vitality of the happiness of the beings whom, alone and exclusively, the revelation from God, and even your own reason, authorize you to conceive of as happy in a superior state,—if there be this alienation and unfitness, (and what is the aversion to religion but the proof of it? or rather, it *is* the thing itself,)—if the case be so, then the soul is in a condition so dreadfully wrong, that it is not strange the agency for transforming it should inflict pain in the salutary process. That it should work

with some expedients of bitterness, keenness, and fire, is quite in analogy with the operations necessary for subduing the extreme maladies of an inferior order. Perhaps you will say that, as the Divine Power, in the time and in the person of our Lord, annihilated the worst diseases of the body by a single act, making the subject perfectly well, in an instant, and without pain, so the Almighty could instantaneously set the moral nature right, causing the spirit to rise up suddenly in the delightful consciousness, that not a particle of evil remains, blessed with a triumph over the disastrous fall, and assuming a ground still higher than that which our first progenitor lost. No doubt he could; but since he has not willed such an economy, the question comes to you, whether you can deliberately judge it better to carry forward a corrupt nature uncorrected, untransformed, unreclaimed to God, into the future state where it must be miserable, than to undergo whatever severity is indispensable in the process of the religion which would prepare you for a happy eternity. Reflect, that you are every day practically answering the question. Can it be that you are answering it in the affirmative? Do I really see before me the rational being who in effect avows,—I cannot, will not, submit to such a discipline, though, in refusing it and resisting it, I renounce an infinite and eternal good, and consign myself to perdition?

Religion, it is acknowledged, brings its pains; just because it comes from heaven to maintain a deadly conflict in the soul, with principles and dis-

positions which are rebellious against heaven, and destructive to the soul itself. Nothing can be more thoughtless or unknowing than the strain in which some have indulged in the recommendation of it, as if it were all facility and enjoyment. You have possibly heard or read graceful periods of descant on the subject, representing to young people especially, that *their* unsophisticated principles, *their* lively perception of the good and the fair, *their* generous sentiments, *their* uncontaminated affections, are so much in unison with the spirit of piety, that it is a matter of the utmost ease for them, for such as you, to enter on the happiness of the religious life. Some little obstruction surmounted, one light spring made, and you regain the walks of Eden! Did you believe it? If you did, what unaccountable caprice, what pure wantonness of perversity, could it be that withheld you? Or, if you were induced to make some short attempt in the way of experiment, did you not wonder how it should happen, by a peculiar untowardness in your case, that these youthful qualities, so congenial with piety, and so easy to be resolved into it, did nevertheless prove obstinately repugnant to the union? Did you not think, Why, then, this aversion to read the Bible, or to retire for serious meditation and devotional exercise, or to any act of duty to be done simply in obedience to God? But, the declamation which you had heard was idle rhetoric, or wretched ignorance.

It must be acknowledged, also, that much worthier teachers have, from a better cause, sometimes com-

mitted an error in underrating, or keeping nearely out of view, the austerer characteristics of religion, when inculcating it on youth. In their benevolent zeal to persuade, they were desirous of presenting a picture wholly attractive. And perhaps religion was become so decidely their own chief happiness, that they could, for the time, forget the pains of the transformation through which it had become so. They have therefore made a representation illuminated nearely all over with delightful images. It is better that you should see the whole truth, and clearly understand that the agent which, in a capacity like that of a tutelary spirit, takes in charge a perverted, sinful, tempted being, to be humbled and reclaimed, taught many mortifying lessons, disciplined through a series of many corrections, reproved, restrained, and incited, and thus conducted onward, in advancing preparation for the happiness of another world, *must* be the inflicter of many pains during the progress of this beneficent guardianship. And it is not, as your aversion and murmurs would imply, the fault of religion that the case is so, but of that depraved nature which religion is designed and indispensable to redeem.

So much for the darker side. But now, on the other hand, you can surely conceive, as compatible with all this, a great preponderance of happiness in this life. And therefore you ought to take it on your conscience as a reproach for criminal want of thought, or of honesty, that you will admit no other notion of religion than that of a gloomy melancholy

thing. When you are turning away from it, as a grim and ghostly object, sent to encounter you for no more friendly purpose than to obstruct you, with threatening aspect, at every avenue to the scenes of delight, there ought to arise within your mind a sterner image, to condemn you for wilfully misjudging its character, and the service it has to offer you. For you *can* comprehend that there is attainable, through the efficacy of religion, something far better than all you can hope ever to enjoy under the unhallowed advantage of rejecting it. Try faithfully whether you cannot understand, that it would be a great felicity to feel that your spirit is changing into conformity to a nobler model, growing into the only right constitution and image to be retained forever; to feel that the evil which infests it is shrinking and subdued under a mightier power; to regard the best and greatest Being as no longer an appalling object, thought of with reluctance, and a wish that you could be forever out of his sight and reach; but now with emotions of love, and confidence, and hope, with an assurance of his mercy through Jesus Christ, with an experience of real communication with him concerning all your interests, and with a consciousness that you are in activity for a Master who will confer an infinite reward. Think whether it would not be happy to feel habitually a power, maintaining a sacred control over your passions and your will, and preserving the current of your life unmingled with the world's pollutions. Imagine yourself animated, at the close of each year or shorter period,

with a fervent gratitude to God, in the consideration what sins and follies he has saved you from thus much longer. Can you doubt whether that one emotion would really be worth more, to an accountable being, than all the pleasurable feelings which an irreligious person can have enjoyed during the whole interval?

Place before your mind a scheme of life, in which you shall see yourself committing to the care and disposal of a beneficent Providence, the course of your life from the beginning, with a constant assurance that Sovereign Wisdom and Goodness will watch over all its movements and events, will conduct you through its perplexities and perils, will give you just so much temporal good that more would not be for your welfare, and will constrain all things which you are to pass through to co-operate to your ultimate happiness. Think also of enjoying the consciousness that you are not throwing the inestimable spring season of your life away, but expending it so as to enrich every succeeding period, and to ensure a fine setting sun upon the last. Say honestly, whether all this be not something better than any scheme of life which you have indulged your imagination in shaping. Or, if you sometimes surrender yourself to the fascinations of romance and poetry, glowing over bright pictures of felicity in which religion has no place, make the experiment on your mind, in an hour of cooler feeling, whether you dare pronounce that it would be well to forego this hap-

piness of religion, by a preference of that exhibited in these highly coloured fictions, on the supposition that they could, for you, be turned into reality. Yes, *if* these images could be turned into facts; but let me hint to you, that the very exhibitors of these delectable fabrications out of air would scorn your folly in expecting any such realization. They would tell you, deriding your simplicity, that the shows which enchant you so much are the creation *of their genius*, exerted to a much finer purpose than that of representing an actual or even possible order of things; that they consciously and intentionally abandon the ground on which plain mortality must toil along through ordinary good and evil, to range among imaginary elements, obsequious to their will. Ludicrous and juvenile indeed, they would say, must be the credulity of any one sitting out to find somewhere, as a fact, what it requires the utmost of their inventive power but to figure out in fiction. And you may perceive, if you have any sober observation, that no such felicity, wrought out of the mere materials of this world, is actually in the possession of any of its inhabitants—its *youthful* inhabitants, I mean; for yourselves will readily allow, that those of them who are grown old, and are going to leave it, must have a hopeless task in striving to make it yield them happiness, when it is shaking themselves off; shaking them off who have expended their life in idolizing it, and are clinging to it in the forlorn condition of feeling no hope or attraction toward a better.

You do not deserve to know how to be happy, even in this life, if you will not be persuaded to make an honest effort of comparison between any scheme that would promise to make you so independently of religion, and the felicity which would attend a religious course, commencing in youth.

Do not think to defend yourself by saying, that the representation how happy a youthful spirit might be in a devotement to religion, is greatly exaggerated. Besides that in theory it is evidently *in the nature* of that great cause, and in the gracious design and promise of Him from whom it descended, that it should confer advantages surpassing all others, you should be willing to receive testimony as to the fact, from those who have gone effectually into the experiment. And you know, that they whom you verily believe to have made the most competent trial, are the most decided, though not boastful, in their declarations; and that the tenor of their deportment proves their sincerity. Observe some of those young persons, (I hope you are not so unfortunate as not to know such,) whom you yourself believe to be most fully under the power of religion; call them, if you will, its prisoners, its bondmen, its slaves; some of your gay companions attempt to ridicule them as its fools; but do you observe whether their piety conduces to their happiness. It is true, they are not happy after the manner in which your lighter friends account of happiness; not happy, if the true signs of that state be a volatile spirit, a continual glitter of mirth, a dissipation of mind and time among trifles,

a dread of reflection and solitude, an eager pursuit of amusements; in short, a prevailing thoughtlessness, the chief suspensions of which are for the study of matters of appearance and fashion, the servile care of faithfully imitating the habits and notions of a class, or perhaps the acquirement of accomplishments for show. It must be confessed, they have thoughts too grave, the sense of too weighty an interest, a conscience too solicitous, and purposes too high, to permit them any rivalry with the votaries of *such* felicity. Certainly they feel a dignity in their vocation, which denies them the pleasure of being frivolous. But you will see them often cheerful, and sometimes very animated. And their animation is of a deeper tone than that of your sportive creatures; it may have less of animal briskness, but there is more *soul* in it. It is the action and fire of the greater passions, directed to greater objects. Their emotions are more internal and cordial; they can be cherished and abide within the heart, with a prolonged, deep, vital glow; while those which spring in the youthful minds devoid of reflection and religion, seem to give no pleasure but in being thrown off in volatile spirits at the surface. Did you think that these disciples of religion must renounce the love of pleasure? Look, then, at their policy for securing it. The most unfortunate calculation for pleasure is to live *expressly for it; they* live primarily for duty, and pleasure comes as a certain consequence. If you have but a cold apprehension of the *degree* of such pleasure, if you

can but faintly conceive how it should be poignant, you can at least understand that it must be *genuine.* And there is in it what may be called a principal of accumulation; it does not vanish in the enjoyment, but, while passing as a sentiment, remains as a reflection, and grows into a store of complacent consciousness, which the mind retains as a possession left by what has been possessed. To have *had* such pleasure *is* pleasure, and is so still the more, the more of it is past. Whereas you are aware, if you have been at all observant of the feelings betrayed by the youthful children of folly, in the intervals of their delights, (and does nothing in your own experience obtrude the same testimony?) that those delights, when past, are wholly gone, leaving nothing to go into a calm *habitual* sense of being happy. The pleasure is a blaze which consumes entirely the meterial on which it is lighted. So that the uncalculating youth, who seized a transient pleasure last week, or yesterday, has no satisfaction from it today; but rather, perhaps, feels fretted with a sense of being cheated, and left in an irksome vacancy, from which he has no relief but in recovering his eagerness to pursue another, which is in the same manner to pass entirely away. And observe, this is the description of the unenviable kind of felicity of the less criminal class of the young persons destitute of religion; it represents the condition of those who surrender their spirits and life to vain and trifling interests, as distinguished from the grosser evil

which we denominate *vice.* To insist that religion is better than *that*, as productive of happiness in this life, would seem but an impertinent pleading in its favour.

Now be, for once, a thoughtful and serious being, willing to apprehend the contrast between all this and the state of a young person who feels a profound invariable conviction that he has made the right choice; who finds that his grand purpose will bear the severest exercise of his judgment, and pleases him the most when he judges the most rigorously; who feels an elation of spirit in vowing an eternal fidelity to his object; who beholds it undiminished in excellence, if there come a season of gloom over his other interests and prospects, when it proves to be not a thing of mere splendid colours, which vanish in a deepening shade, but of intrinsic lustre, a luminary which shines through, and shines the brighter for, the darkness. Not that this youth makes any pretension to be a stoic philosopher, serenely independent of the temporal good and evil attending or awaiting his progress into life, with no warm affections to the things in the scene around him, to be painfully mortified when adverse events and influences frustrate his hopes and projects. But his advantage over those of his coevals who have no better than such interests, is, that he has enshrined his best affections in that one thing which does not partake of mortality and this world's uncertainty, and therefore but evinces its worthiness the more under the failure of every thing else that *can* fail. It is, like

Him who is its author and guardian, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." The pious youth, then, is not abandoned, for his chief enjoyment, to an endless fluctuation, alternating between delight and disgust, eager to seize, and wondering that the possession turns so soon to nothing; all the while neglecting, or fearful to reflect, whether the whole plan be not essentially wrong; and thus fulfilling the decree, that "to him that trusteth in vanity, vanity shall be the recompense."

Be assured there are young persons who can testify that this is their own experience of the happiness of religion, in so considerable a degree as to inspire an earnest wish to become more completely possessed by its power, from the conviction that then they should be much happier still. And now do not let your mind evade the question, whether they would not be right in the feeling, that they would not for all the world be in the condition of those who never think of religion but as the enemy of youthful happiness. Some of them can well remember when they were themselves in that condition; and they would at any time prefer instant death to the calamity of relapsing into it. No wonder, then, if you perceive them holding extremely light the opinion of those, too many of their own age, who can look on them with a propensity to ridicule, or an affectation of pity.

And, tell me, what do *you* think of such judges? I conjecture you may have been under no small influence of the opinions of some rather like them, and

would have deemed it a sad misfortune to be discountenanced in their community, or excluded from it by their aversion. But at what rate do you really estimate their judgment? If they were to tell you, plainly, that it is needless and unseasonable in youth to consider deeply of the best use of life, with reference to both its continuance and conclusion; to begin the expending of your time with a careful estimate of its value; to feel the importance of your immortal nature, and be solicitous for its welfare; to seek, as the highest good, the favour of the Almighty; in short, to begin well, that you may go on well, and end well,—if they were expressly to tell you so, as their opinion, what would you think their opinion worth? And should you not be ashamed of whatever it was in your mind that could give that opinion any weight with you? Think how it should be possible for you to feel, for a moment, any thing but contempt or pity for their very understanding. But if they did not tell you so, and could not deny that the contrary is true, what should you account of their conscience, their practical principle? Or, if they never reflected enough to have any opinion at all of the matter, what should you deem of them altogether, as authorities and examples?

Perhaps your plea would be, that they are nevertheless, full of vivacity, pleasant and joyous; and that you must confess this captivates you so, that you have not thought of any such grave affair as that of thus taking account of them. But, while you plead so, you know how flimsy is the consistence of

this joyous mood of theirs, and by what means you could instantly break it up. It is like that thin slime of variegated hues which you sometimes see spread on the surface of polluted water, and which you can disperse into fragments by throwing in a twig or stone. When they are at the highest pitch of their spirits, and apparently "shut up in measureless content," you have but just to mention the doom we are all under to die; to name some young person of their acquaintance who lately died, perhaps in great distress and alarm for having been thoughtless like them; or to make an allusion to the final account,—"For all these things God will bring thee into judgment;"—you have but to do this, and you will quench, for the time, all their animation, and will see what awkward efforts they will have to make for its recovery. But, then, when you would plead, Why should you not be allowed to have, free and unalloyed, the pleasure of your youth with and like so many of your age, and be innocently happy though without religion—does not your conscience smite you at the reflection, that you are coveting the participation of a happinss which, in its liveliest hour, ten words, or five, would suffice to dash; and those words no other than such as every young person should often hear, and with a serious thought of their import?

There is but one topic more on which I will expostulate with you. Perhaps you will say that your neglect of religion is only *deferring* it; that you are sensible it is a concern which you *must* attend to

sometime, and that you are fully resolved to do so in maturer or advanced life. And are you saying this with the images before your mind of one, and another, and still another, within the circle of your knowledge, whom you have seen cut off in youth? Go, stand by their graves and repeat it there; for there is folly in it, if you could not on those spots repeat it with undisturbed assurance. Say, over those dead forms, now out of sight, but which you can so well, in memory, recall, such as you saw them, alert, and blooming, and smiling, say there deliberately, that *you* know not why you should not be quite at your ease in delaying to some future distant time your application to that, without which you believe it to be a fearful thing to pass out of life. It is possible that some one of them, in approaching the last hour, expressed or conveyed to you an earnest admotion on this subject, conjuring you, in the name of a friend dying in youth, to beware of the guilt and hazard of delay. If so, go to the grave of that one especially, and there pronounce, that an impertinence was uttered at a season when every sentence ought to be the voice of wisdom, Say, "I am wiser in this carelessness of my spirit, than thou wast in the very solemnity of death." Why should you shrink at the idea of doing this? And if you dare not do it, what verdict are you admitting, by implication, as the just one to be pronounced on your conduct?

But perhaps you are ready to reply, that this is pushing the argument beyond its real strength; for

that I seem to be assuming it as *probable* that your life will terminate in youth; whereas, judging from a collective account of the actual duration of lives, I must know this is *not* the probability. Just so, no doubt, in reference to themselves, thought they whom you have seen vanish in their early day. And a few examples, or even one, of the treacherousness of the calculation, should suffice to warn you not to hazard any thing of great moment on so menacing an uncertainty. For, in all reason, when an infinitely important interest is depending, a mere possibility that your allotment may prove to be like theirs, is to be held of far greater weight on the one side, than the alleged probability of the contrary is on the other. The posibility of dying unprepared, takes all the value from even the highest probability that there will be prolonged time to prepare: plainly because there is no proportion between the fearfulness of such a hazard and the precariousness of such a dependence. So that one day of the certain hazard may be safely asserted to be a greater thing *against* you, than whole imaginary years, promised you by the probability, ought to be accounted of value *for* you.

In minor concerns, there may be purposes not improperly formed by a healthy young person, which, though he could effect them now, he may defer upon a calculation of protracted life; because the degree of probability that this life will be protracted may be equal to any degree of importance or urgency that there is in the design; so that he may be content to

refer and trust it to that degree of probability, saying thus,—I reckon on accomplishing such a purpose, *if* my life be prolonged. Or in other words, it is such a design that, in the event of his life *not* being so prolonged, it will be no serious misfortune not to have accomplished it at all. He may be content to hold, as thus dependent on the contingency of lengthened life, a purpose, for example, of visiting some foreign country, of seeking a more agreeable locality to reside in, of acquiring some particular branch of not absolutely indispensable knowledge; and so of many other things. The object may be of as much less than the highest necessity to him, as he possesses less than a certainty of long surviving his youth. But when you acknowledge a concern to be all-important, and that a failure in it would be immeasurably disastrous, and avow a purpose *not* to fail in it, and yet can deliberately consign this purpose for its accomplishment to a contingent futurity, confidently reckoning on years which you confess may never be yours, as an adequate provision for it in reserve, this is, indeed my young friend it is, the worst insanity, because a criminal one. When the concern is so momentous, and any hazard from delay so formidable, this supposed probability of your life being prolonged should not be taken as more worth than it *may prove* to be worth. And what would it prove to be worth, in the event of your being, in this prime of your life, attacked suddenly by an illness threatening to be mortal?

Do not trifle with the matter so wretchedly and wickedly as to say, that, even in that event, perhaps you may have time allowed you for redeeming what you are now wilfully losing, and for securing the safety of the great interest. Perhaps may! why, this plainly means that you *may not.* But even if such an undeserved indulgence *should* be granted, and your perverse will be suddenly transformed to make the utmost use of it, are you not at this moment infallibly certain that it would be a cause of inexpressible grief to you to have made nothing of life, for its grand purpose, till on the point of breathing its last? Besides, that a consideration of what is the merely natural effect of the dread of death, might justly throw a painful uncertainty on the genuineness of the principle which excited your solicitudes and efforts. Besides, too, that you are perfectly aware severe illness is a situation to the last degree unadapted to hard exercise of mind.

If you can give your attention for a while to such representations, and still feel that you dare consign your most momentous interest to take the chance, if I may express it so, of your having time for it long after the season of youth, and can look undisturbed, undismayed, at the uncertainty where you shall be when the time so reckoned upon shall arrive, it seems almost in vain to reason with you any further; except entreating you to turn one reflection on the state of that mind with which it *is* in vain to reason to such a purpose. Nevertheless, there are con-

siderations which might be enforced upon you, even though you *could* have every degree of assurance, short of absolute certainty, that a time far off in prospect will be yours in this life.—I am supposing, all the while, that you really do intend, or think you intend, to apply yourself in earnest to the supreme concern at a more advanced period of your days.

It has been already enough insisted on, that religion would make you far happier than any thing you can enjoy in the neglect of it, during youth itself, considered as one distinct stage; but I would now speak of it as connected with the whole of life, allowing you to assume, if you will, that your life is to reach the full term of the age of man.

You say this protracted life must and shall eventually be religious, confessing that otherwise all would be wrong. What do you mean by its being religious? If you have any just conception of the nature of religion, while you are resolving that your life shall *sometime* assume that character, you are resolving it shall then be *service to God.* But, now, what claims can there be, that he will have on any later portion of your life, but has not on this earlier? Answer your conscience *why* it should be a duty to serve him then, if it be no duty now. What is to bring you under an obligation from which you are now exempt? Is it that you will then be more dependent on him, or subsist more entirely on his bounty, or be more immediately and constantly in his presence? Or is it that you will have more vigour and liberty for his service; that you will have

less to do with the cares and grievances of the world? Or is it that he has, in the communications of his will, less expressly required the services of youth, than of more advanced age; giving, by implication, a license to youthful spirits to forget him, and to take favours most largely at his hands, on an understanding that there is to be no present return? No; you readily say that all this is absurdity. You do not deny, that there extends over your whole life one grand obligation of service to God; only, you have your own purposes to serve, and he must wait! He has given you, for cultivation, a small tract of life, of time, on which you might raise precious things for offerings to him; when you have exhausted its best faculties of production to gratify yourself, you will resign to *him* what it may be made to yield when reduced to the condition of sterility and weeds. But supposing you *should* become truly religious in the latter part of life, you can even now understand, that the very emphasis and intensity of the convictions of that new state of mind will be to feel how absolute was the duty, and how sublime would have been the happiness, of devoting every stage of life to the service of God. What, then, will be the reflections with which conscience will sting you, for having expended the most animated part of it on the principle, that what would be gained to him, would be lost to you?

Again, when you are making to yourself these promises, that you certainly will sometime, in a yet distant part of life, apply yourself seriously to

religion, you must mean, that you will make it an earnest concern that your spirit, by that time advanced far toward the conclusion of its sojourn on earth, may attain a prepared state for removing to a superior and permanent scene of existence. This *is* what you mean, is it not? But then how can it be, that you are not struck with a sense of something flagrantly absurd, in a plan of excluding from all but the latter portion of life, an affair standing related to so mighty a consequence? Think of that existence during endless ages, an existence to commence in a condition, determined for happiness or misery, by the state of mind which shall have been formed in this introductory period. And is this the single case in which all rules of *proportion* may, without absurdity, and with impunity, be set aside? You intend, I will suppose, to apply as much as a few years, somewhere yonder in the decline of life, to this great business of preparation; that is to say, as much of the time within those years as will not be inevitably consumed by worldly cares and attention to your infirmities. That is the measure of time to be placed over against the immense futurity! Behold those two, presented in such a relation. Look at that ocean, and at the competence of the time to prepare a vessel for launching upon it. Set the poor fragments of weeks and months in the years so appropriated in your determination, set them in your view, against the ensuing millions of years or ages. Have you no perception of a frightful disproportion?

If you attempt an evasion by saying, but what would be the *whole* of this short life employed in preparation, as set against that futurity?—the answer is, that the whole term of life, diminutive as it is for a preparatory introduction to that stupendous sequel, is what our Creator has allotted to us, leaving to us no responsibility that it is not longer, and is therefore a space of time which his blessing can render competent to the great purpose; but you are presuming to take a different and exceedingly diminished measure, on your own responsibility; apportioning off, as an adequate space for the preparation, a small section only of what he has assigned for it. This is, in effect, telling him that a far shorter time than the short one which he has allotted for the purpose, will be quite enough for it; and demanding of him that his blessing shall be conferred on this arbitrary unsactioned adjustment of your own, so as to *make* a shorter time suffice for the object, than that which he has appointed and required to be devoted to its accomplishment. But turn your thoughts upon your conduct, to reflect what an act of reason you are performing when you say, The whole of the time which God has assigned for a preparation to enter happily on an eternal existence is very short, and *therefore* a much shorter is sufficient!

And reflect what an estimate you are entertaining of both the nature and importance of that preparation, while you can in ease or gaiety see one month

and year after another passing away, and anticipate that many more will pass, without contributing to it one particle. Whatever truth there may be to be learned, whatever discipline to be applied, whatever habits to be formed, whatever communications with heaven to be opened and maintained, and whatever may be lost, and whatever guilt may be incurred, by neglecting all this, still, this year, and many more yet to come, can well be spared from the concern, and surrendered wholly to any other demands. You can account with yourself that it is so much, and so much more, gained to your temporary interests, and lost *only* to the process for raising you to the eternal ones. At the end of one of these periods you have to reflect, a year of the prime and vigour of my life has passed in a lively career, and is gone to be mine no more; it might have effected for me, and left me possessing, something of inestimable value toward what I own to be the supremely important business of my life; but it has left me nothing. When I shall be constrained, at length, to apply myself to that business with all my might, I shall have to remember this year, with the consciousness that there is not with me one advantage derived from it in aid of my new and difficult undertaking; that, as relative to *that* concern, it was, by my own determination, flung with all its rich possibilities out of my existence; that I shall have no benefit from it to all eternity. You will have to reflect—I decided that the latter part of my life was all I would give to the great affair; I have accomplished my

determination by alienating from it the finest portion of my life; I advance to old age, to death, to judgment, to eternity, under the voluntary loss; and whether, with the impoverished resources of this late remainder of my time, I shall succeed or fail in the grand work, I shall for ever have to remember, that I have not thought it worth appropriating to it my most valuable years.

So you will have to reflect. But now is the time in which you are actually doing that on which you will have so to reflect; you are deliberately and daily adding something toward your being placed in that predicament. It is pressed upon you as the plainest truth in the world, that you ought to be, through the largest possible extent of your allotted time on earth, in a state adapted to an endless life; and you resolve, and act on your resolution, *not* to be in that state during many years of this introduction. You lay a resolute hand on this invaluable portion, to withhold and defend it against the claims of that sovereign interest, practically pronouncing it better, that the commencing and animated stage of your existence should be alienated from all advantageous connexion with the grand whole; that it should *not* conduce to final good; that it should be forever lost as to all that is to follow. Let it be enough, you seem to say, that the endless life to which I am appointed and advancing, shall have, as I do intend, a small part of this introductory one yielded to a conformity with the solemnity of its character, and applied to secure its happiness; and

if its importance would insist on more, I will resist the encroachment. No authority of its requirement shall wrest from me the liberty, of casting as much as I please of this precious part of my time into an abyss, never to emerge in wealth or pleasure to me in futurity. And whatever that futurity of existence may be the poorer or the worse for so much lost to it, I am content to stand in my lot. My choice is rather to feel how much has been lost to my welfare then, than to forego the pleasure of following my inclinations now.

And yet, at this very time, at any time, you will acknowledge that the interest of that futurity is the transcendent one, that it is vast and eternal, that it is critically depending, and that it is *your own*. O what trivial things are the most lofty and solemn words, or their import either, to a mind that will not reflect, or cannot feel!

If, nevertheless, you are still positive in the resolution that you will devote your attention to religion at a more advanced period, I would represent to you that what you are meanwhile losing, is not merely so much *time*. You deem there is a peculiar value and charm in this prime of your life, so that you rejoice you are not old nor middle-aged. You do so even independently of any direct thought of being so much further off from the latter end. And what is this so valued peculiarity of youth? Doubtless it is the plenitude of life, the vigour and elasticity of body and mind, the quickness of apprehension, the liveliness of emotion, the energy of impulse to ex-

periment and daring. Now, consider under what signal advantage, with respect to the subsequent progress, religion would commence its course in the strength of these animated forces. It would be like taking a steed of fire for some noble enterprize, instead of one already tamed with time and labour, or nearly worn down. You would thus be borne onward a great length before the vigour of nature begins to remit, and would have acquired a principle of impulsion to advance, after that peculiar vigour should have ceased. Your youth at leaving you would seem to send its spirit forward with you. The religious career thus commencing would have all the advantage which a stream, of vast length of course, acquires from rising, and running its first stage, on the slope of a lofty mountain, as compared with that which is put in motion on a tract little better than flat, and creeps heavily on for want of such an impulse from its origin. So important is it to the Progress of religion, that it should have the utmost benefit from its Rise.

Again, consider that a person prosecuting, in advanced life, a course which he deeply approves, has a peculiar pleasure in recollecting it as having been also the favourite interest of his youth; a pleasure additional to that of knowing that his early life was not thrown away. For, all the pleasing associations of that season adhere and impart their charm to that which continues the approved favourite still. There is the memory of departed friends, the coeval or elder associates and promoters of his youthful piety,

his allies in the best cause, whose images in some solitary hour seem to smile on him from the past, or from heaven. The remembered conscientious efforts and vows of self-dedication augment his satisfaction in that which he still feels deserved them so well. The animated emotions, which he may sometimes regret that he cannot now revive in their vernal freshness, are still *his*, as having been given to *that which is still his*, to that which has been continuously his grand object. Thus, what is now ripening into fruit he can delight to recollect in the beauty and fragrance of its blossom. What a difference between this and the feelings of a man who, becoming religious in later life, finds himself by that very cause dissevered, as it were, from his youth, except for painful, self-reproachful reflection; who feels that its associations, instead of conveying a genial warmth to him along an uninterrupted train of piety to the present time, are gone away in connexion with what he regards as the dishonour and calamity of his existence; like the gardens that once were on a tract which a man has lost from his estate by subsidence into the sea.

But still further: while you are resolving to adopt the right plan sometime, and flattering yourself that thus there will have been, on the whole, and in the conclusion of life's account, a safe preponderance in favour of religion, you are to be admonished that the absence of it in the earlier part of life is something more, and worse, than simply *so much lost* to that account. It is not only that you are not reli-

gious during the time that you shall postpone that concern; not only that you are rendering so much of life, with respect to that, a mere blank; you are all the while aggravating the difficulty, and lessening the probability, of your being religious at a later period, or ever. Are you so thoughtless or unknowing as to fancy that a long course of estrangement from this interest, of aversion to it, of resistance against its claims, of suppression of the remonstrances of conscience in its behalf, is to leave you in a kind of neutral state, impartial to admit at length the conviction that now it *is* high time, and easily convertible into a christian spirit? Consider that all this time you are forming the habits which, when inveterately established, will either be invincibly upon you through life, or require a mighty wrench to emancipate you. This refusal to think, this revolting from any attempt at self-examination, this averting of your attention from serious books, this declining to seek the divine favour and assistance by prayer, this projecting of schemes bearing no regard to that favour, and which are not to need that assistance, this eagerness to seize each transitory pleasure, this preference of companions who would like you the worse if they thought you feared God or cared for your eternal welfare—these dispositions, prolonged in a succession of your willing acquiescences in them, will grow into a settled constitution of your soul, which will thus become its own inexorable tyrant. The habit so forming will draw into it all the affections, the workings of imagination, and the trains of thought,

will so possess itself of them that in *it* alone they will live, and move, and have their being. It will have strong, unremitting propensity to grow *entire*, so as to leave nothing unpreoccupied in the mind, for any opposing agent to take hold on, in order to counteract it; as if it were instinctively apprehensive of the effect of protests from conscience, or visitings from the powers of heaven, or intimations from the realm of death; and therefore intent on forming the sentiments of the soul to such a consistence and coalition, as shall leave none of them free to desert at the voice of these summoners.

And if you would reflect, you would be sensible that, in effect, you *wish* the case to be just so. Do not practice any dissimulation with yourself on the subject. In making the resolution that *sometime* (and, now, honestly, is not that a time willingly regarded as far off?) that sometime you will apply yourself to religion, you plainly intend that you will *not* be religious, that you will be estranged from religion, till then. But, in resolving that it shall not command you, you necessarily must wish that neither shall it disturb you. You wish that, during all the time, no interfering, opposing, alarming principle may abide in your mind; because you desire to enjoy fully, and in peace, the kind of happiness which you are to exclude religion in order to enjoy. You are wishing, then, in effect, that your affections and tastes may be entirely in harmony with a system of life devoid of religion, that your judgment may accommodate itself not to condemn your proceeding,

and that your conscience should either be beguiled to acquiesce, or repose in a long deep sleep. That is to say, while you are resolving that at some advanced period you will be religious, you are also resolving that, during the long preceding time, you will yield yourself to a process for consolidating those very habits, which will fix your mind in a confirmed antipathy to religion. You are intending to enter at last on consecrated ground, and yet are surrendering yourself to a power, which will hold you back with the grasp of a fiend when you attempt to approach its border. You presume that the latter stage of your journey shall be an ascent to heaven, and yet, in this earlier one, you deliberately choose a track in which you can calculate how each downward step goes in aggravation of the arduousness of that ascent, if you shall indeed ever attempt it; as if a man who had to reach the summit of a vast mountain, and might do it on one side by a long, gradual, and comparatively gentle declivity, should prefer essaying it on that other side, where, descending first to a great depth to reach its base, he must then climb its precipices. Whatever I am now gaining, he might say to himself, in the way of pleasant indulgence, in this descent, is so much that I shall find to have been *gained against* me by the difficulty on yonder steep.

It may be easy for you to have credit with yourself in denying, in a light inconsiderate way, that

you are actually adopting a plan of such monstrous absurdity. You will say, that you are far from being conscious of any wish to aggravate the future difficulty of applying your mind in good earnest to religion. But this is an evasion, of the thoughtlessness or disingenuousness of which you ought to be more than ashamed. You are bound to consider, that in adopting a plan, you are accountable for every thing which is *necessarily* involved in it. And when your plan is that of spending an indefinite but large portion of your life exempt from religion, you necessarily wish to have the unalloyed benefit of your privilege. (But what terms I am using!) That clear advantage you cannot have if invaded by convictions, if harrassed by conscience, if kept in awe of the invisible Observer, if lightened upon by intimations of a judgment to come. You necessarily wish an immunity from all this, in the prosecution of your scheme. But therefore, by implication, you wish for that which alone can so exempt you; and that is no other than such a hardened state of mind, such an oblivion habitually, and such a power of defiance occasoinally, as will constitute, when fully confirmed, a most fatal aversion and unadaptedness to that transfer of your thoughts and affections to religion, on which you are presuming as the ultimate resource.

And it is probable that, if you had self-observation enough, you might perceive this process toward a confirmed state is going on. Have you no consciousness that the last two or three years of your neglect of religion have rendered your disinclination

to it more positive? May there not be a more sensible reaction against its remonstances? If the earlier feeling was that of mere carelessness about the subject, has it in no degree changed to the stronger one of aversion? Perhaps a serious book, (like this of the Rise and Progress of Religion,) which would at a former time have been lightly put aside, as what no way concerned you, would now be regarded with a pointed sentiment of dislike, almost of hostility, as against an ungracious intruder, come, like the ancient prophet to the impious king, "to speak no good of you, but evil." Perhaps you find that you can more promptly set aside any scruples of conscience that rise to obstruct you in the way of your inclinations. And perhaps, as a reward—an advantage, do you deem it?—of this boldness, you are now seldomer incommoded by such scruples. So that, though your feelings clash more unequivocally with the dictates of religion when it does arrest your attention, you are stronger to resist, and more expert to elude, and suffer on the whole less of the trouble of its interference.

This is quite the natural course; but you ought to be *aware* of its progress. If you absolutely will proceed on this plan, of retaining a purpose in favour of religion, but deferring it to some future distant time, I wish you would be induced to keep yourself apprized of its effect in you, by making now and then an experiment, in the way of test, on the temper of your mind. Will you be advised to take occasionally some very serious and cogent book on

the subject of personal religion, the one just named, or any other, or some peculiarly solemn part of the Bible; to read it a little while, and watch in what manner your inmost feeling responds to it? Do this again after an interval, and observe whether the displacency, the repugnance, of your heart, be less, —whether it be not sensibly more. In an hour when you are left alone, with a perfect freedom to remain for a while in this retirement, recollect the duty of approaching your heavenly Father, with thanks, confessions, and supplications: and observe the movement of your soul under this thought in this opportune hour. Do the same in subsequent opportunities, and see whether the indisposition be not increased rather than diminished. And if the fact be so, what a melancholy phenomenon; a little, dependent spirit voluntarily receding from its beneficent Creator; directing its progress away from the eternal source of light, and life, and joy; and that on a vain presumption of being under the comet's law of returning at last to the sun! In a similar manner, at successive intervals, try the effect, on the temperament of your mind, of some remembered example of eminent piety in youth, of the recollection of former youthful associates dead, or of the solemn idea of your own death, and your continual approximation toward it; and see whether, under these applications, there will not be betrayed, in the habit of your feelings, an increasing alienation from religion. And yet you are the person to indulge an easy confidence, that, after you shall have gone on

many years thus confirming the estrangement and aversion from it, you shall easily turn to it as your best friend!

Might it not be well to enforce it on yourself as a rule, That this your resolution to be religious sometime, shall be distinctly recalled to mind in each successive instance of your doing what tends to its frustration? When you find yourself making an effort to banish the shade of pensive feeling, or grave reflection, which any circumstance of the time may have had power to throw over you, say to yourself, It is I, nevertheless, that am to be religious, and therefore to cherish such thoughts and emotions, in a season yet to come. If you perceive yourself carefully avoiding "the house of mourning," even though it be your friends that are visited there with sickness or death, say, again, I am one day, however, to entertain and welcome that religion which would be there, at this time, enforced on me with such powerful admonition. When you are entering a gay thoughtless party, to mingle in such a hilarity as any visitings of religious reflection would quell, say to yourself, That very thing which would freeze this animation of theirs and mine, shall after a while be the grand solace of my heart; and this is the way I am taking to prepare myself for its being so! If you go so far as to endure voluntarily and without repugnance, society where serious subjects and pious men are turned to jest, and the most awful names taken in vain, say, I am training myself here, through

familiarity with irreligion, to give my utmost reverence and affection to that of which I am thus abetting the scorn and profanation. If you are projecting a scheme for the occupation and satisfaction of a considerable portion of your life, but cast upon a principle and plan evidently unfavourable to your spiritual welfare, reflect on it, and say again, There is *another* scheme to be afterwards undertaken, into which I shall pass with all the advantage of having wholly excluded the care of it from this prior one: when my lighter juvenile unconcern about religion shall have settled into an utter estrangement, as a part of the habit confirmed through my long and complete engrossment by a worldly project, then I shall need but one touch of conviction, but one recollection of my former vow, but one act of my will, to throw my spirit free, and become religious enough for death and for heaven.

I repeat to you, that by this course of procrastination, this scheme of reversionary piety, you are not simply losing so much, with regard to the greatest affair, but are also taking strong security against yourself that you shall not save the remainder. The worthless or noxious growth which you suffer to overspread the first large division of your allotted tract of time, is continually extending its roots far forward, and will scatter its seeds thickly over all the space beyond. Consider how well, even at your age, you are informed of it as a truth, that whatever entwines itself with the youthful feelings maintains a strange tenacity, and seems to insinuate

into the vitality of the being. How important to watch lest what is thus combining with its life, should contain a principle of moral death! Consider, that in this earlier period you are peculiarly disposed to entertain social partialities, are perhaps giving yourself to companionship and friendships, or contracting more intimate relations, which must have an important influence on the growing formation of your mind into its decided character, and on the consequent tenor of your life. Now when this social attraction combines several parties destitute of religion, they are in effect giving mutual pledges never to be religious; since they are giving and receiving the whole influence of their friendship to fix their minds in that state in which they are at present pleased with one another; that is to say, in a state of aversion to religion. And supposing that each of them were, nevertheless, like you, intending to be religious sometime, we cannot well conceive any fairer occasion for the scoff of a malignant spirit, than to see them thus all in a league to frustrate what each of them believes he intends.

This same intention, you have no reason to doubt, has been entertained in earlier years, by many whom you now see advanced to the middle or the decline of life, without having done any thing toward its accomplishment. Yet they were, in their time, as confident as you are now. Should not this alarm you? Some of them may have yielded up the design, not by any express act of renouncement, but insensibly, in the gradual hardening of their

consciences, their complete immersion in the world, and assimilation to its spirit; with the addition, in too many cases, of the practice of some more positive kind of sin. Many of them, however, are perhaps still retaining the purpose, inert and buried under an accumulation of repressive habits; like a seed artificially kept torpid in order that it may be quickened into germination at a preferable time. The consciousness that they are mortal, and must be forced at last out of all that now occupies and pleases them, is soothed to repose in this presumption, that they shall bring a reserved expedient into action, before the neglect of it be fatal. But answer honestly, do you think it probable that they will? Do you expect, if you should live to see them forward a few years further—do you *expect* to see them withdrawing their engrossed affections, breaking asunder their inveterate habits, and doing a great thing which they have systematically and wilfully prepared themselves not to do, that is, devoting themselves to God and the care of their salvation? Perhaps you have allowed yourselves to imagine that *you*, after having made a considerable progress in years, shall become, at every advance, proportionally more and more sensible of the shortening of life, and shall necessarily behold nearer the visage of death, presented through a clearer medium, and with enlarging and more defined features. How can it, you may have said, be otherwise, in the exercise of mere common sense, than that this approach toward the end should aggravate upon me the cogency of my

grand duty? Do then look again at the multitude of examples around you, and see what avails them this obvious arithmetic of time. You see persons with whose names you and your companions, with a tacit pleasure of contrast in your favour, couple the epithet "old," still as heedlessly and confidently as yourselves, reckoning on time enough yet, to continue deferring the grand business without peril of its being left undone. If their youthful "trust in their own heart," that they would ultimately apply themselves to the indispensable business, fixed that determination on about some given point or period in their future life, they can pass, or perhaps have passed that period, with the same facility of neglect as any former one, finding nothing to stop them there with the peremptory exaction to perform their vow. The lying spirit which had promised to meet them at the assigned spot, to conduct them thenceforward toward heaven, appears not on the ground when they arive there, unless to tell them that another stage, still further on, will be more advantageous for commencing the enterprise. You look at the marks of time on their countenances, recollect them perhaps as in mature or middle age when you were in infancy, and wonder they can yield themselves to such an imposition; and all this without a single reflection, that you are putting yourself in the train of the same delusion. How can they act so, you say, when I feel so certain of the justness of *my* determination to act otherwise, on the strength of my conviction of the ultimate necessity of religion? Be

you assured there is no more fatal betrayer than a right and excellent principle adopted, but consigned to future time and more favourable inclination for being carried into action. The consciousness that you are certainly keeping a good resolution, only deferred to await a "more convenient season," will help you to indulge a fallacious security, while every season for accomplishing it is passing away. Through one period of your time after another, it will appear to you infallibly efficacious for the next; and no period will come as that from which you cannot look forward to still another. And this your purpose, suspended as it were in advance over your course, as a malign imitation, by infernal art, of the star which the sages followed to find the Saviour of the world, will probably lead you on, still confiding that it must stand arrested at the spot where you shall accept the grace of that Redeemer, till you are drawn to a precipice, where your deluder will vanish and you will fall.

All the latter course of this pleading has proceeded on the supposition that you *may* have a protracted life. It has been an attempt to represent to you, that even if you *might* be allowed to assume a very strong probability, little short of certainty, of reaching the full term of human life—nay, that if you were certain you shall, your scheme of exempting its earlier portion from religion, on a promise to yourself and to God of taking that for your chief concern at a more advanced stage, would still be ab-

surd, and wicked, and most dangerous. But I warn you again, do not so criminally trifle with your own reason as to pretend on any such calculation, in sight and in contempt of the thousand instances of your fellow-mortals dying in youth, and in the immediately following stage.

Now, will you, my young friend, lay such considerations to heart; or will you rather have it to remember, perhaps when all to late, that they were pressed upon you in vain?

This expostulation, conceived as what might have been addressed to some one of the many young persons who may, in various times and places, have had their attention drawn for a moment to this treatise of the Rise and Progress of Religion, and averted by the seriousness of its purport, has been prolonged so exceedingly far beyond our intention, and its due proportion, that but little space is fairly left for exemplifying, in other forms, the trains of instructive reflection that might take rise from imagining what has happened in connexion with the book. We therefore leave it for an exercise of the reader's own thoughts, if he should deem there is any profit in such an employment of them, to imagine in what manner a variety of individuals, each a specimen of the character of a class, may be supposed to have noticed the book at one time or another; what feeling was excited at the sight, or transient inspection, or perusal of it; how they were affected toward its subject, so inculcated; what influence, if

any, it had on their determinations; and to conceive, in each case respectively, what would have been the appropriate admonitions, which it had been well if there had been any intelligent and persuasive friend opportunely to offer. What such a friend might pertinently have said in any of those instances, is of course the advice or remonstrance applicable in any similar cases, occurring now and hereafter, among the incalculably numerous persons whose attention must be attracted, more or less, to a work which is in still widening circulation.

Foregoing, then, the design of specifying several other discriminated examples, we will protract this discourse only a little further, by supposing one more instance; an example, however, of a character unhappily far too generally prevalent to be called that of a class. We may describe the person as a mere man of the world—yet not in the worst sense of that designation; for we do not suppose him an abandoned profligate, trampling and spurning the most obvious rules of social morality; nor a scoffer at religion; nor a scorner, in a virulent spirit, of pious men; but devoted to this world, idolizing it in his affections, exerting all his active energy in its pursuits, surrendering his whole being to mingle with its interests and be conformed to its temper; and therefore habitually forgetting the other world, and all the grand economy of truths, overtures, means, preparations, and cares relating to it. He might have been in youth just the same kind of person as the one expostulated with in the preceding

pages; we are supposing him past that age, and all that belongs peculiarly to its character; yet not necessarily as very far advanced in life.

It cannot have failed to happen that many such persons have been accosted, as it were, by the spirit of our pious and benevolent Author, in the vehicle of his book. If we may conjecture that fifty thousand copies have been diffused among all orders of society, and have obtained, through choice or accident, with approbation or under sufferance, a position in almost so many abodes, our fancy has a warrant to figure an indefinite variety of circumstances, under which these volumes have fallen in contact with such men of the world.

There may have been the case of such a man's unwittingly laying his hand on the book, as one of a number which had been left him by a religious parent, opening to see what it was, as not recognizing it by its exterior, and being smitten with something like an electric shock at the sudden reflection, that for ten, or twenty, or thirty years since that parent's death, he has been no better for this or any other religious book. Another such man, on happening to fix his eye on the volume, has been struck with the recollection, inflicting perhaps a twinge of mental pain, that there was a time, a transient one, long since, in his youth, when he felt some convictions and emotions of a religious tendency; and procured this identical book in aid of those salutary movements in his mind. Another may have chanc-

ed to notice it among books, which a better care than his had provided for the instruction of the young people of his own family; and has perhaps had the momentary thought—what, then, are these young men and women to be reminded of religion, while *I* forget it? Another may have retained from early instruction, accompanied by example, a certain impression, resting on his mind somewhat like a superstition, that the Sunday, ought to be in some degree unlike his other days, and a small portion of it given to serious reading; and in looking for a book of that character, he may have happened to take this, and to read enough of it to cause him a disquieted consciousness, or a suspicion that his spirit and habits are not quite in the right. The case may have occurred, that such a man has caught sight of this book in the recess of an apartment where he and others were waiting to follow a dead person to the grave; and that, under a passing gleam of right apprehension and kind feeling, he internally said, The Progress of Religion—I hope it was *that* road that the deceased took in his way to the world whither he is gone, for else it were ill with him now.

It may seem as if these suppositions do not quite agree with the general description of the character, as altogether estranged from religion. Such involuntary and transitory excitements of a recognition of that great interest, are not, however, incompatible with a prevailing decided neglect and alienation: but, in truth, the conjectures may justly fall into a less charitable train. We suppose the case of such

a man's observing that the book had been offered to the attenion of the younger branches of his family, and admitting a slight reflection of self-rebuke. But it is not less likely to have happened, that a man of this character, on perceiving such a circumstance, has signified displeasure at this expedient for rendering the happy young creature prematurely grave and melancholy, extinguishing, he said, their delightful vivacity, (which would soon enough be repressed by the cares and troubles of life,) by unseasonable apprehensions about the welfare of their souls. It is no improbale case, that the book may have come in the way of such a man just about the time when he has seen, or perhaps experienced to his injury, an instance of want of principle in some person making high pretensions to religion; and that he said, with irritation and a frown, I think I may as well let this affair of religion alone, till I see more integrity in those who profess to be so deep in it. The main matter of duty is, to be upright in our transactions; and, thank God, I am that without making any canting pretensions to saintship. Another man of this description may have accidentally looked into the book a little while, and then laid it aside, evading all personal application with the thoughtless sentiment, That is all very well for persons whose situation allows them to give themselves up to retirement and thinking; but men like me have far too much to do with the practical business of life to have leisure for attending to the subject. The book may have ob-

truded itself on the notice of a man deliberating whether to add a new worldly undertaking to those he was involved in already, an undertaking not necessary, but calculated to make a little more of the world his own. And might it not be supposed that such a monitory intervention might contribute to suspend the affirmative decision, by force of the question whether *this* concern of religion, did not demand to take precedence of every other new undertaking? No; the question struck but feebly on his mind; the suggestion was easily cleared away from interference with his debating thoughts; religion could be attended to at any time indifferently; whereas now or never was the time for the project which was warming his desires. The book was thrown by, and the subject vanished.

It is familar to observation that men of the world have an arrogant estimate of worldly wisdom, though the sphere of its objects be so limited, and the term of its employment and profit so short. Never did the adepts in abstract philosophy, or in science, indulge a prouder conciousness in virtue of living and reigning in the intellectual world, than these men do on the strength of being shrewd and efficient in the judgment and conduct of affairs. Suppose, then, one of them, on returning from a place of resort and competition, where he has excelled in the discussion or transaction of some of these affairs, to have been led by any chance to open such a book, and to have glanced over a few sentences or paragraphs. He probably did not waste even his con-

tempt in more than a few brief expressions to this effect :—These men, all for religion, talk of the insignificance of what they call earthly things, the vanity of the world, the Christian's vocation to live above it, the meanness of its concerns compared with their nobler pursuits; and all the while they know nothing about it. Too fantastic and feeble for the vigorous activities of our department, let them be indulged in their notion that they have vastly superior employments in their own. It were hard to deny them the pleasure of declaiming against that which they do not understand, and in which they would make a miserable figure in attempting to act a part. Another man of the worldly character, in a less supercilious temper, may be supposed to have looked a little into the book with a feeling like this: One does wish one could manage to have some commodious sort or share of religion, that would not cost much trouble, and would put one in safety as to future consequences. But religion as described *here*, meets me as an inquisitor and a tyrant. It would force a judicial investigation through my whole soul, and that only to expose, condemn, and affright me; insists on some strange revolution in my principles and feelings; demands an unconditional, unlimited submission, to a jurisdiction which will leave nothing within me, or without me, at my own free disposal; and, in short, insists on setting the main purposes of my life in a new direction. This is not to be endured. If I *must* at last, for safety's sake,

submit on such terms, let me enjoy my exemption as long as I can or dare.

But a man of the world may be a formalist; may think that no such religion can *ever* be necessary, and that he *has* a sufficient one in his regular performance of an order of mere external observances. Somewhere, no doubt, there is a copy of the book in question which such a man has inspected, with eyes now perhaps closed for ever; and we can figure the aspect, (though the pages do not reflect the image,) of alternate disdain and indignation at what he pronounced to be rank enthusiasm, with self-congratulation on knowing a far easier method of satisfying the requirements of his Creator.

We might go on indefinitely recounting, in probable conjecture, the modes in which the worldly spirit has been affected at coming in contact with this vehicle of serious admonition. And what a manifestation would be given of the nature of that spirit, if, from unknown times and places, on twentieth part would be recalled of the instances in which its quality has been the most remarkably betrayed under such a test. We will describe but one example more. It is not to be doubted that this production of pious zeal has at some time fallen in the way of a person who had continued faithfully devoted to the world quite to old age. Perhaps it met his notice at the time when he was just upon making the utmost exertion of his declining strength, and with an eagerness equal to any passion of his youth, to accomplish the concluding, the crowning part, of a long

wrought project for bringing within his grasp a material acquisition of emolument or distinction; in other words, for gaining more possessions against the day of losing them, and more decorations against the day of putting them off. And perhaps he did not plainly say, Religion, with all that depends on it, must take its chance; I never yet have been disposed to forego any thing for its sake, nor am I now. But we may confidently suppose him to have said in effect, I must at all events complete this affair in hand, whatever become of any thing else. And who knows but he was smitten with death before either the momentous something else obtained his attention, or the project, for the sake of which he refused it, was accomplished? Or we may imagine the occurrence happening to a man in a more prostrate state of feeling, when a long prosecuted scheme had failed, too late in his life for him to form a new one; or about the time that increasing infirmity had constrained him to the dreaded task of making his will; or when he had recently seen his most trusty co-operator, or his nearest relation, of his own age, or even the last of his children, sink into the grave. And would it be too hard upon human nature, or an uncharitable judgment of the temper of a mind grown old in devotedness to the world, to suppose that, even in circumstances like these, the man still could not resolve on so serious a thing as attention to religion? No, we can believe that he revolted from the urgent enforcement of the subject, felt as if any other way of disposing of it were preferable to

that of thinking of it, and threw aside the book. He had recourse to some expedients of change and amusement, to relieve his drooping spirits and darkening days; or, perhaps, he made a strife to force his decaying powers to some farther and superfluous exertions in the world's business. It may even be conceived, that the very terms "Rise and Progress," suggesting the idea of long and laborious continuance, excited a gloomy sense of the want of commensurateness between such a lengthened process, and his now shortened life; and that, through a lamentable perversity, the sadness of this consideration, instead of alarming him to an instant application to the grand concern, made him the more recoil from it, and but added to the infatuation of his consuming the short remainder of his life, as he had consumed all before.

Now, in each of all these instances, an intelligent christian friend might have remonstrated in terms specially adapted to the individual's state of mind, modifying the general argument for religion to meet the cast of irreligious feeling in the particular case. And a discerning and skilful pleader in this good cause may sometimes seize upon the peculiar mode of feeling, in such a manner as to turn it to account, availing himself of it to give his remonstrance something of the point and appropriation of the *argumentum ad hominem.* But we shall content ourselves with a short address of the nature of a plain general expostulation, applicable to the general qualities of the worldly character.

It is true, that the spirit required in any effort so directed, is not a little repressed by a sentiment partaking of despondency. There is no evading the thought, Why should words, and arguments, and images of unseen things, and adjurations, be expended on that man, on those men? They will continue the same. Why should Religion, like Cassandra, waste her dictates and premonitions on a hopeless determination to the wrong? How can it be worth while to be trying, as if it had so much as even the uncertainty of an experiment, how many missiles will rebound from a rock, or disappear in a swamp; or how many times the taper may burn out in the vain attempt to kindle a fire in materials which contain no fuel?

But we would wish to turn this very fact itself, of the dispirited sentiment which damps the christian pleader's efforts to press religion on the attention of devoted men of the world, into a topic of admonition to them. How comes it to pass, we might say to them, that a person, whose own mind is possessed with the most absolute and mighty conviction of the importance of religion, cannot help feeling it nearly a forlorn attempt to awaken any sense of that importance in you? Has he good cause for this despondence? Is it his experience, his just estimate, of the character of your minds and habits, that makes him feel so; and does your self-knowledge tell you it would be too sanguine for him to feel otherwise? Is it, then, a fact, that you are hardened into a settled insensibility to the things which

most vitally and profoundly concern you? Have you really a power, and that power so complete that it is effectual almost without an effort, and through the inert force of habit, to meet with indifference or defiance the aspects of whatever is the most sublime, most amiable, or most tremendous, in existence? When mercy, in a celestial form, approaches to apply to your soul the redeeming principle without which it will perish, can you turn it away, coolly saying, Another time, perhaps,—or perhaps never? And in refusing it access, do you feel the satisfaction of a person who has promptly and easily dismissed an unreasonable applicant; regarding it as an arrogant requirer, rather than as a benefactor offering you inestimable good? Do you feel, in thus being out of the power of religion, a gratifying sense of immunity from one of the evils which are infesting mankind; that there is one malady against which your mental constitution is fortified, while some of your fellow-mortals, attacked by it, are objects almost of your pity? And do you account this exemption, and carry it upon you through the commerce of life, as a *privilege* of your class, which you as rightfully maintain as any other advantage, and with which it were little better than impertinence for any one to interfere, by representations in favour of that from which you thus walk at liberty? If this be the established condition of your minds, it is what *ought* to alarm you, like that deadly calm which, in some climates, would be an omen to you of the subterranean thunder, and of the ground

heaving and rending under your feet. But at the same time, it is what may well cause a christian friend to be despondent of the efficacy of expostulation.

He is so, because he is aware that there is nothing within your minds adequately, or in any tolerable degree, corresponding to the important and solemn terms which he must employ. He must speak of the soul, redemption, faith, holiness, conformity to the divine image; of heaven and hell, of judgment and eternity. But these are insignificant sounds, unless, when pronounced, they strike upon conceptions already in the mind, which answer to their import, conceptions which contain in them, so to speak, the ideal substance of what is meant by these signs. And he can perceive too well that this whole order of ideas has but a crude, undefined, obscure, and feeble formation in your understanding. The most solemn call of these great words, is replied to with but a faint and equivocal recognition from within. It is as if the names were called of a company of persons asleep, who answer without the distinctness of consciousness, and some of them not at all. Nay, might not men of the world be found in such a condition of the intellect, that these words, addressed to raise the corresponding ideas in it, would be nearly like calling aloud, in a field of the dead, the names which are inscribed on their tombs? Change the subject, and see the difference. There are many terms which have their appropriate ideas most perfectly formed in your understanding; distinct, palpa-

ble, and, in full dimension. Let the denominations be pronounced of diverse kinds and values of worldly property, of methods and rules of transacting business, of the different stations in society, with their respective relations and circumstances, or of the materials and accommodations for gratifying the senses; let some of these be named, and instantly the corresponding ideas arise in the mind, substantial and distinct; so that the utterer of the designations knows he can do with the auditor whatever depends simply on his having a right notion of the *things*. But when you hear some of these terms expressive of the most important meanings that could ever enter into human intelligence, how confused, uncouth, and inane, how spiritless and powerless, are the forms of thought which glimmer on your apprehension! It is as if words pronounced to evoke mighty spirits, were answered only by the coming of the owls, bats, and insects, of the twilight.

The religious monitor is tempted to despond, again, because he sees that your devotion to the world is established into system, almost into mechanism. A very young person may be frivolous and thoughtless to the last degree; but he is variable; his present impressions may quickly give place to new ones; he may abandon one fine favourite pursuit for a different one; and should religion attempt to seize him at an interval of these versatile movements, it will indeed have to contend with his levity, and the radical aversion in his nature to sacred subjects, but not with a set of habits grown to a firm consistence,

in a shape, we might say an organization, adapted to keep his whole soul in one steady mode of adhesion to the world. This latter is a description of the condition of many of you, its devotess. There is no longer any question whether, or in what way, you shall be wholly surrendered to it. The habitual fact has taken the matter out of the province of volition. That you faithfully adhere, in spirit to the world, that you live for it, to-day, and to-morrow, and each ensuing day, and wherever you may be, seems as much of course as that bodily you walk on its surface. And not only are you under this principle of determination to it as your general object, but you have a settled adjustment of feeling and estimate to its diversities respectively. You have your maxims, associations, and affections, in an orderly state to meet and coalesce with them all and each. And your general worldly spirit preserves a consistency of its special action throughout all the detail of its objects; the manner in which the predominant law operates with respect to each, agreeing with its mood of operation in all the others. Thus, you are men of the world not only by one general sentiment of devotedness to it, but in a systematic appropriation of that sentiment to various and numberless particulars. While you cleave to the world generally, we may be allowed the figure of saying, that each fibre, each nerve, of your moral nature, has its own particular point of application to this your sovereign good; and all pervaded and

kept in uniformity of action by the ascendant principle; that principle by which you "serve the creature more than the Creator."

While you are beheld in this firm conjunction with the world, by a general attachment, and by a distributive application of that attachment, like the Indian fig-tree connecting itself vitally, at a hundred spots, with the soil over which it spreads, it is no wonder that a person desirous of warning you not to make light of infinitely higher interests, should attempt it with very faint hope, or be discouraged from making the attempt at all. That which he has to present to you will be repelled by a principle which acts in a combination of resisting impulses, working with uniformity and constancy; some of them proceeding, perhaps, from the temper of mind acquired in commercial pursuits; some of them from the habits of feeling which have grown from "friendship with the world," from contented and preferred association with men devoid of religion; some of them from the disposition produced by the study and strife to make your way upward in society; some of them from the practice of relieving the cares of business only by the indulgences of pleasure; and some of them, perhaps, from a taste for appearing as men of fashion. All this is a systematic fortification against the access of religion, to instruct, persuade, or remonstrate. And the fatal completion of the evil may be, that you are insensible of any great evil or danger in all this. For you have fully adopted the world's standard of charac-

ter, according to which you may be, all this while, what are called honourable men. You may even come to take credit for considerable liberality of opinion in allowing, that it is right enough there should be in the world a class of earnest devoted religionists, as well as other varieties of character; that they do very right to follow up their own convictions; their only offence being the fanaticism of insisting, that all ought to be such—that you ought to be such; whereas yours, you say, is a character much better adapted to the world we are to live in than theirs.

So you are, on the whole, in high favour with yourselves. You may not, indeed, be entirely secure against occaisional disturbances to your self-satisfaction; there may be moments when a suspicion arises from the dark depth within that all is not right; when conscience, generally still, gives some intimations, like the sighs of a person beginning to recover from a suspended animation; when some glimpses of a greater economy are admitted through narrow rents and openings in the little system within which you are immured. But you suffer no habitual annoyance of an impression that you must alter your plan. This your general satisfaction with the part you are acting, depresses the spirit of the pleader for religion. He wants to persuade you to reflect; but how and when can he bring an adequate force of such persuasion to act on such a state of the mind? You are so possessd, he says, with your own good opinion, that any serious examination,

whether it be not a delusive one, will appear to you a superfluous trouble, and the exhortation to it, officious and impertinent.

But will you absolutely refuse such an exercise of your reason? How can you have lived so long without feeling that so much, at least, is what a rational, accountable being ought to do? Do it now! What should prevent you? You have in that spirit the power to think at this very time. Yon *can* fix it intently on the subject that you shall choose. Now is an interval which can be exempted from the indispensable demands of business, and, if you will it so, from the allurements to dissipation. You may, you can, this hour, recollect whether there be a subject of transcendent importance, which you have never duly considered yet; and you may choose it, instead of another subject, for present consideration. You cannot help seeing what that subject is. It is Religion that stands before you, with oracles, lights, and an exhibition of the most grand and awful images. It is that which represents to you, the real truth of the state of your soul toward God, the concern of your eternal interests, the relation you stand in to another world, the peremptory requirement of what you must do to be saved. What can ever, through endless duration, be worth your considering, if this be not? You know that religion, unless it be a fable, *has* all this importance, that it has this importance to *you*, and that it has it to you *now*, while this day, this hour, is passing. In a matter of incomparably less magnitude, (say it were a

most critical hazard, threatening you at the point where your temporal prosperity mainly depended, and might he ruined for life,) you would feel that the concern pressed importunately and justly on the thoughts and cares of the present instant. If any one advised you to take no trouble of vigilance or exertion about it, to occupy yourself entirly with other matters, and indifferently await the event, you would spurn the suggestion as equally unfeeling and absurd. What! you would say, when the whole question of safety or utter ruin may be depending on the judgment and activity which I may exercise this day? But here is the supreme interest of your existence. It cannot be safe, you will confess it cannot, if you will give it no serious attention. But then you are confessing that you have left it till now in peril, and that it is so at this very hour—nay, in greater peril than ever before, as aggravated by the guilt of such wilful neglect, and by the diminution of the term allotted for the attainment of a happy security. And can you repel from you, can you resolutely set yourself to force off, its urgent application for your immediate attention? Look at the action of your mind. Is it really, even now, in the very effort of an impulse to drive this subject away, and are you giving your whole will to make this impulse successful? And do you feel that you are prevailing? And is it impossible for you to reflect, at this moment, *what it is* that you are successfully doing? Cannot you perceive, have you no suspi-

cion, what dreadful principle it is that is giving you this power and this success? Can you let it perform such a work, and not resolve to inspect its nature? Look at it, observe its fatal operation just now going on; and then say, honestly, whether any thing can be of a quality more execrable? Do not say this is extravagant language; do not stay to mind the language at all; but fix your attention on the thing itself. Words are wind; but there is a reality there in operation at this moment in your mind. It *is* actually there—the fearful principle, which is actuating your feelings and your will to force away from your spirit the thoughts, and all the benefit of thinking, of your highest duty and interest, of your eternal salvation. If it could be suddenly revealed to you in full light, what an operation this is which you are even now suffering there in your heart, no awful catastrophe in nature, no tempest nor shock of an earthquake, would affright you so much.

After an interval, we would ask you, And is it now done? Has the repelling principle, after so many former successes, prevailed once now; so that the great subject which approached you, appealed to you, solicited you, displayed smiles of divine benignity, alternating with just menaces and frowns on your obstinacy, has been driven off, and is vanishing like the images of a disturbing dream when one awakes! Are you now quite at your ease again, to go free into your business, conviviality, or amusements? Then, what have you accomplished,—but to send an angel of mercy away, and to vanquish

any last power that remained in an almost expiring conscience? What have you gained, but to have your soul still more securely grasped by that which withholds it from God, and a confirmed power and facility of rejecting that which speaks in his name, if it should obtrude on you again? In what new principle do you walk forth, but that of having less remaining time, and augmented disinclination, for that one thing of which the failure is perdition?

Such a view of the disposition of your minds, and of the manner in which you submit and betray them to be acted upon, chills the animation of a person who would plead with you to apply them to religion. But still we would hope better things, and that it may yet not be in vain to conjure you to reflect on this great subject as involving your welfare. Tell us whether it be utterly an idle hope, which a more perfect knowledge of you would show it foolish to entertain, that you may be induced to employ, in the exercise of such reflection, this day and hour to better purpose than any former one of your life. Why should not this be the day for a determined seriousness of thought? Think enough, at least, to give a reason why it should not; and think whether it would not be worse than a shame to refuse such an employment *without* a reason. And if the only reason be, that you are reluctant, consider whether that reason, that reluctance, will ever spontaneously cease. But consider, too, whether that reluctance, be not itself, in truth, a mighty reason on the opposite side, as implying, in the conscious discordancy

between your spirit and the subject, a disorder so formidable, that madness alone would be content to leave it unexamined and unreformed. Would that a super-human power might stand in your way just here, stop you at this point in your course, and constrain you to reflect *now!* The hours, the day, which you are just now entering on, are as yet vacant, but will soon be filled, and gone. They are coming as a space of time which might be, may be, filled with a mental exercise of immense value. Here is a subject claiming to occupy them as they come on. If admitted to do so, it will indeed inflict remorse for your having sent away into the past, a long succession of the portions of your time charged with no such precious contents; thus avenging itself on you for your prolonged rejection. But will that be an indication that you would have done well to reject it still, and excite your grief that it has for once effectually arrested you? Would you, under this arrest, struggle as to escape from an enemy; when the subject will bring with it the evidence and the conviction that, though with an austere and accusatory aspect, it is certainly come as a friend? Admit it into your mind and time this once, with all its solemnities, and even its reproaches. And if, as a condition of doing so, you will insist on retaining some precautionary resource against being absolutely and irrecoverably surrendered to it, you may be assured, (if you can accept so melacholy a fact for consolation,) that in the strength of your corrupt nature you will not easily lose all power of re-action

for debarring its entrance, when, at another time, it shall present itself to you again.

There possibly are special circumstances of the present time of a nature to enforce this exhortation. It may be, that one of you, worshippers of the world, has just experienced an ill reward of his faithful devotion. Some grievous dissapointment, perhaps, some failure of a project, some fall of your fortunes, some blast on your hopes, has reduced you to a temporary disgust with what you have so unreservedly loved. Just now the world stands before you with faded attractions, and you feel as if you could forswear your dedication and attachment to it. Now, though this be a turn of feeling not the purest in principle, it might be made beneficial in effect. Instead of allowing your spirit to remain stagnant in a sullen and resentful mortification, waiting till the world, which, however cruelly it may sport with its votaries, does not easily let any of them go, shall again assume an aspect of blandishment, and renew its promises, how wise would it be to take advantage of this reflux of your affections to turn your thoughts toward religion, and see, and try, whether there may not be something better for you there. It would be a worthy revenge on a world that has disappointed, cheated, and wronged you, to avail yourself of the recoil of your heart from it, in reinforcement of the conviction that it is time to "seek a better country;" thus turning it into an impulse to a new formed aim at "the prize of the high-calling." But at any rate, and at the least, do not let this disturbance of your

friendship with the world be lost, as a circumstance to coincide with the remonstrance which would awaken you to serious reflection. Do not, at once, fall out with the world, and disregard or resent that which would tell you how just is your quarrel, how long since it ought to have taken place, and how incomparably better you may do than make up the breach.

Perhaps some of you have just witnessed, with indignant vexation, one of the iniquitous partialities of fortune, as you call it. A man whom you know to be of worthless or detestable character, has obtained, through apparent casualty, or by means of craft or corrupt interest, or even by the most undisguised violation of right, some remarkable advantage of enrichment or precedence; such a thing as you had coveted but not presumed to hope for; or, possibly, as you had hoped and indefatigably laboured for, many years, but never could grasp the prize. And in the pride of this acquisition he insulted the more deserving men, at the cost of whose disappointment and injury he had made it. You exclaimed, What a world this is, where the good things go to the worst men; and merit may pine and die! But is this the identical world to which you, nevertheless, are so infatuated that you will not so much as think of another? What, are you resolved that a glaring manifestation to you of the quality of the object you have idolized, shall rather serve to any effect, even that of corroding your heart to no avail, than to that of lending force to the persuasions o

religion; of religion, which has uniformly testified to you that your object is—what you are now practically finding it? Would you rather be retained, resentful but still servile, for this tyrant to exhibit you in scorn as a slave, fretting indeed, but impotent, even in will, to revolt, than adopt the hero's language, exalted into a christian sense and spirit, "Then, thus I turn my back; there is a world elsewhere?"

It may be, again, that one of you has lately seen a rival and coeval worshipper of the world leave it. Perhaps the manner of his departing answered to the description, "driven away." You observed the long, lingering look cast after all that was receding, and the fearful glance toward what was approaching. You saw what was the result of that choice which had been made by you both, and to which he had remained constant nearly to the moment when an irresistible power interposed to rend him off. You have the images of this sad spectacle fresh now in your mind; and those images—are they atheists there?

Or you may have beheld a less tragical exemplification of what the world will do for its friends, in the case of one whom you had long known as a believer in its promises, a zealot to its principles, and a staunch pursuer of its objects; but who, in the closing scene, relented into shame and penitential sorrow, faintly mingled with hope in the divine mercy which he emplored. He declared to you his overwhelming conviction of the folly of his course, and yours; and entreated you no longer to leave

your whole soul immersed in that which must, in such an hour, break away from around you, and abandon you to a desolation like his. Now recollect; at the time of receiving such an admonition, did you really think there was nothing rational in it? While, for decorum's sake at least, you put on a grave and assenting manner, did you, nevertheless, coolly say within yourself, or was there a consciousness equivalent to saying, I need not take any further thought of this? I do not wonder that this person, in such circumstances, should talk so; but what he says or feels has no appropriateness in its application to me. I must not let any such gloomy ideas take possession of my mind; no, not even though it be possible enough, I may ultimately come into a situation in which I shall think and feel in the same manner.

We may confidently assume, that you did not, on the spot, maintain such composure, and pledge yourself to these conclusions. A certain indistinct dismay, at the least, invaded you, to the effect of subduing you, with some general kind of conviction to the formation of some general kind of purpose. Or possibly the impression was exceedingly powerful, the conviction a distinct act of judgment, and the resolution very determinate. And what then? Have you since deliberately judged all this to have been a vain agitation of your spirit, a brief delirium, occasioned by a sympathetic infection from the sight of sickness, distress, and death? If not, have the intervention of a certain number of hours and days

a short succession of risings and settings of the sun, and the return of the accustomed thoughts and employments, essentially altered the merits of the case? Have these caused what *was* truth, and obligation, and danger, to be such no longer? Has the mere passing of time reduced importance to inanity? Or has it detached from you, and brought to appear as no longer your own, that grand interest which can have no reality *but* as a personal one, *but* as your own?—just as if you were to consider the things affecting your natural life (for instance, your state of health or disease, your exposure to a peril or security against it,) as something existing in the abstract; a reality indeed, but something quiet separable from *yourself*. The circumstance, too, that by the passing of the intervening time, you are carried a little nearer to the final result of your plan of life,—has this actually lessened the importance which you saw in such magnitude by that solemn light, which flashed upon you in the gloomy chamber where a rival lover of the world was penitentially preparing to leave it? Think of a rational being so easily passing free from the hold of the strongest forms of admonition; and spending his time to the very purpose, in effect, of reducing his apprehension of the awful magnificence of eternity, progressively to a more and more diminutive impression against the moment when he is to plunge into it!

Should no circumstances nearly resembling these have occurred within your recent experience, it

would be a rather unusual lot if you have not met with *some* incident, some turn of events, some aspect of life or death, adapted to enforce serious reflection. Look a little way back in memory, and see if no image will arise to remind you that then, and there, by such an event, such a spectacle, such a voice, you were specially admonished to consider your course. And answer it to yourself what effect that appeal to your conscience ought to have had. But do not narrowly limit such a review, as if afraid to retun to those spots in past time, where the hand of a dreaded power touched you as you passed, where truth spoke to you in severe accents, or a more gentle, pursuasive voice entreated you not to go thoughtlessly on. If you *be* afraid to go back thither, what is it that this apprehension tells you? Do not limit the retrospect as if you had no concern with the occasions and causes that once, long since, challenged your consideration to the most important subject. Do not yield to the deluded feeling, that all those, being gone so far away, have perished from all connexion with you; like the portion of air which you then breathed, or the grass or flowers on which you happened to tread. For be assured they inseparably belong to your present and ultimate responsibility. They are all coming after you, however silently and unthought-of, and will be with you in the great account. And if you could be induced to make an effort, in any thoughtful hour, to imagine with what a vividness of recognition, and intensity of reproach, the monitory occurrences of your past life will at

last present themselves to strike upon your conscience, if they shall have been disregarded in their time, and suffered to go useless into oblivion as you have proceeded on, it might have the effect of recalling them now, to combine in operation with all the other things which summon you to reflection.

When a religious observer sometimes has his thoughts directed upon you, he is struck with the idea, what a mighty assemblage of considerations, that should irresistibly compel you to thoughtfulness, you are insensible of. As, when we extend our contemplations conjecturally into the economy of existence which surrounds us, it is suggested to thought what unembodied intelligences, what communications, what agencies, what elements perhaps, what processes, there are on all sides, and many of them relating to us, but of which the senses admit no perception; so in the spiritual economy, that is, the system of relations in which the immortal mind stands involved, there are realities, there are truths, of highest import, there are arguments, warning circumstances, alternatives of good and evil, most vitally relating to your welfare, but non-existent to your apprehension. The very emanations of heaven, radiating downward to where you dwell, are intercepted, and do not touch you. It is the frequent reflection of a thoughtful mind, in observing you—what ideas, what truths, what mighty appeals, belong to the condition of this one man; and of that, devoted and enslaved to the world—O, why is it impossible to bring them into application! A few

words are sufficient to express such things, as, if they were to fall with their proper weight, and no more, on their spirits, enclosed, as it were, in the consolidated habits of the world, mixed and hardened in its clay, would excite a commotion through their whole insensate being, and alarm them to a sense of a new world of thoughts and interests. A few minutes of time would be enough for the enunciation of what, if it could be received by them in its simple, unexaggerated importance, would stop that one man's gay career, as if a great serpent had raised its head in his path; would confound that other's calculation for emolument; would bring a sudden dark eclipse on that third man's visions of fame; would tear them all from their inveterate and almost desperate combination with what is to perish, and, amidst their surprise and terror, would excite an emotion of joy that they had been dissevered, before it was too late, from an object that was carrying them down a rapid declination towards destruction.—And the chief of these things, so potent if applied, are not withheld as if secreted and silent in some dark cloud, from which we had to invoke them to break forth in lightning; they are actually exhibited in the divine revelation.

This so strange a condition,—that there are mighty truths, requisitions, overtures, promises, portents, and menaces, as it were close to you, suspended just over you, of a nature to demolish the present state of your mind if brought in contact with it, and that, nevertheless, it remains undisturbed,—is

sometimes a matter of gloomy, indigant, and almost misanthropic speculation. But in the season of better feeling, the religious beholder is excited to a benevolent impatience, a restless wish that things so near and important to you should take hold upon you. Why cannot, he says, that which comes between and renders those things, intrinsically of such awful force, actually powerless, be destroyed or removed? If there be a principle of repulsion, if there be a veil, if there be a shield invisibly held by a demon's hand, let it be annihilated, that the appropriate truth may rush in with all its power. Let the thought of the Almighty fulminate on the mind of that mortal who is living "without God in the world." Let the idea of eternity overwhelm that spirit, whose whole scheme of existence embraces but a diminutive portion of time. Let the worth and danger of the soul be instantly revealed to that person, whose chief cares are engrossed with the accommodation or adornment of the body. Let the value of treasures in another world be brought into sudden contrast with earthly wealth, in the view of that worshipper of Mammon. Let the scene of the last judgment present itself, in a glare, to him whose conscience is in repose on the delusive principles of the world's morality and religion. Let an austere apparition, as from the dead, accost him who is living as if life were never to have an end. To him who is indifferent to the whole concern of salvation, let there be an affecting display

of what an extraordinary appointment, of mingled justice and mercy, was required to render it possible, and of what it cost the Saviour of the world. Let these things strike into the souls of men of the world, and they would awake in amazement at their previous condition, and continue long in sorrow for its criminality and absurdity. And are these still to be exactly the things for which they have no sensibility or perception? And is it in the immediate presence of these objects, constantly pressing for their attention, but unacknowledged and unseen, that they are to occupy themselves with every business, or entertain every trifle and vanity, satisfied that nothing is greatly wrong, assured that all is safe, or not even caring so much as to think whether they be safe or not?

But, men of the world, it is possible you may be provoked to assume the defensive, and deny the justice of so strong a charge of irrationality and guilt as we make, in applying to you this denomination with these comments. But it is not safe for you to do this with a thoughtless confidence, without an exercise of reflection to ascertain the real state of your mind and character. Be persuaded to make an effort to take a true account of that state, as a simple matter of fact. Of what, in all the world, *should* you be concerned to know the truth, if not of that internal condition which is forming your destiny for hereafter?

Now, then, is it not *true*, is it not a fact, that almost the whole system of the feelings and activity

of your mind is limited exclusively to this world, so as to be practically much the same as if you were unaware that your being has an ampler sphere of interests? Observe what is the extent of the range which your spirit takes. Question it how far it goes forth, habitually, or at any time. See, and acknowledge to yourself, what it is that is in sole possession of you, as if you were made for nothing more.

Take a view of your *thoughts*. They are in number incalculable, and they *can* go in all directions, to a boundless extent; they might "wander through eternity." Whither *do* they go, the countless thousands of them, and on what do they fix? You may perceive that nearly all of them stop within the circle of this world's concerns. They start, and move, and traverse, incessantly, but still within this contracted scope; seeming to know of nothing that is revealed, or important, or possible to you beyond it. How many of them ever go, in the impulse of faith, into the spiritual region, or bring you intimations of having seen into a superior world? But there is no need of thus adding question to question; you plainly know, that the continual activity of your thoughts is centred upon an order of temporal interests; that there, and there almost exclusively, they are busy and never tired, morning and evening, and throughout all your times and seasons.

Observe, also, your affections and passions, those feelings of the heart which often accompany the acts of thought. See what it is that most certainly

awakes them at the slightest call; that attracts, attaches, and absorbs them. Suppose that, at very many times, fallen upon indifferently and without any selection of occasions, the question were to be suddenly put, and ingenuously answered from consciousness at the instant, What is, just now, the most an object of complacency, desire, or solicitude? how often do you think it would happen, in a thousand repetitions of the question, that the answer would name any object of higher order than this world's affairs? Would it be twenty times; would it be ten?

And your schemes of active pursuit,—what is that which would be their *success*? Is there one of them, or any part of one of them, of which no possible turn of worldly events would be the disappointment? Would any thing, that should be the most disastrous to your spiritual welfare, be a frustration of any one of those schemes?

We say, is it not *true*, that this is your state of mind? But, then, reflect, that you practically disown the grand relations of your nature. You endeavour not to belong, if we may express it so, to a spiritual world, but to the merely material and animal order of existence. In plainer terms, you acknowledge no good in being spirits, but to serve the earthly purposes of this short life. You do what you can to withdraw, by a resolute subsidence and degradation, from that economy which holds the spirit's sojourning on earth connected with every thing higher in existence. From the system con-

stituted, (as a part of that economy,) for renovating, training, and finally exalting them, you practically make yourselves aliens and outcasts, rejecting its benefits, and wishing you could be forgotten in its jurrisdiction. You are content that any other fallen beings, rather than you, should be included in the dispensation of mercy, through a Mediator. And, to complete this abdication of your most solemn relations, you assume to be only in some very relaxed and undefined manner subjects of responsibility and retribution. All this, in effect, you are doing, in devoting yourselves, with soul and life, exclusively to the interests of this world. For what less *can* you be doing, while you refuse all practical acknowledgment of these grand relations, maintain a state of mind unconformed to them, employ no cares or affections upon them, and will not allow even your thoughts to be directed to them? But is it not an enormous and fearful absurdity, that while thus you are actually involved in relations which no power but that which could annihilate your being can dissolve, with a grand system, comprehending whatever belongs to the existence and interests of spirits, comprehending a method of redemption through a Mediator, an invisible state, heaven, hell, and eternity, you should form your life on a plan, as if this relative condition of your spirit were abolished, or were nothing but a fantastic theory, and contract all the interests of your spiritual and immortal being to a span of time and earth? Think what the predicament will be, when these disowned but indissoluble rela-

tions shall vindictively verify their reality and authority, and wrest you away from that object to which you have reduced and confined yourself, so as to be almost growing into one substance with it.

Again, is it not true, that, in this devotedness to the world you are living estranged from God? Though this was implied in the preceding representation, you would do well to make it a distinct matter to be brought to the proof. Try it by any mode of questioning that would the most prominently expose the truth. For example: suppose that such a thing were at any time to take place, as that you should feel a mighty impression of the divine presence, a consciousness of being pervaded, in your every faculty, quality, and thought, by the sunbeams, as it were, of his irresistible intelligence, an affecting sense of your entire dependence, a horror for having sinned against him, an ardent aspiration to enjoy his eternal favour, and a determination, with the utmost impulse of your affections and will, to serve him thenceforward,—say whether this would not be the most amazing phenomenon that had ever happened to you. Would you not wonder, beyond all power of expression, what new moral element could have been shed around you, for your spirit to see and breathe in? But then the fact must be, that the present state of your mind is the reverse of all this; that the Almighty God, your creator, preserver, and governor, the supreme benefactor, and the sole possible giver of ultimate felicity, has hitherto been in your regard a comparatively insignificant object.

The universe of his works, the revelations of his word, the directing interference of his dominion, the wonders and mysteries involved within your own existence, have but feebly and seldom brought the apprehension of him to your minds. The good which you have enjoyed, and which could not have come to you but through an inconceivably multifarious agency of an intelligent Power, you have received as if resulting from some mechanism of nature, or imparted by the pagan unthinking soul of the world; but indeed, without reflecting on it so much as to acknowledge even *that* for its source. The schemes, which have been the chief business and interest of your life, were formed with no express consideration whether God would approve them, and prosecuted in utter forgetfulness of dependence on him for aid and success. If the thought had spontaneously arisen, What is God to me, in sensible importance? the reply might have been, Nothing; or less, at most, than that person, my friend, or that other, my foe; than that ability of my coadjutors, that application of art, that machinery, that sum of emolument. As to piety, aspiring so high as the experience of communion with God, and the influential operation of his Spirit, if such ideas, conveyed in such terms, incidentally met your notice, they appeared either unintelligible or fanatical. Recollect and question the habitual temper of your mind, whether it has not been an unwelcome thing to be reminded of God at all. If it might have been conceded to you that you should obtain what would

please you most, with respect to a lasting condition of your existence, would not the wish have been something like this: that God, contenting himself with carrying on the general system of the world, only rendered a little more commodious, would allow you to live in it indefinitely onward—and *let you alone*?

Now, if there should be an interval when you are inclined, (for some of you profess to be capable of abstracted mental employments,) to indulge your imagination in contemplating awful and portentous spectacles, in ideal or actual existence, you need not range in quest of such into the visionary world. Nor need you go to far-off tracts of the creation, seeking what mighty forms of evil may there have their abode. The guardians of the fearful secrets of any dark coast might justly remand you back, to behold here, in your own place, a visitation of the most direful prodigy which can have blasted any region with its presence. For here, in the condition of your spirits, the sovereign and most sacred principle of order in the creation is abjured and exterminated. To be most intimately in the presence, to be surrounded continually by the glory, of a Being omnipotent and infinitely intelligent, existent from eternity to eternity, the originator, supporter, and disposer of all other existence; and to feel no powerful impression on your mind, no reverential fear, no frequent intimations even of the very fact,—is not this an astonishing violation of all rectitude, a most melancholy dereliction of all reason? This is to

have your best faculties shrunk and stupified to a strange conformity with brutal nature, without its innocence and impunity. This is in effect to tell that Being, that his infinite supremacy is a vain circumstance in this province of his dominion; that his is an unnecessary and undesirable presence, tolerable only while leaving you unreminded of it, or consenting to be regarded with indifference. It is as if, with an inversion of piety, you would thank him only for being invisible and silent, and pray only that he would be more entirely and be always so. You tell him that the most inconsiderable of the things he has made, or even the things which men have made, are of more importance in your view than all the magnificence of his glory. Under the heaven and effulgence of that glory, you deliberately involve your spirits, as it were, within little opaque spheres of matter, pleased to be secluded from the light of the universe.

How can we help it, if you will regard this as a mere rhetorical and perhaps pompous display of an evil really of no formidable magnitude, and cooly pass it by with the remark, that we might as well employ sober language? We will only say, beware that, in calling for sober language, you do not mean, a language conveying a faint and unawakening expression of the truth. Beware, also, that you do not, on such a subject, mistake for soberness, any thing less than deep and most serious thought. And if you will but have the conscience to exercise such

thought, it may be left to your own judgment to estimate the evil involved in the undenied fact, that, being continually and inevitably in the presence and power of the Almighty, you yet are careless of this infinitely the most important circumstance of your situation. The character of that fact would be exposed to you in alarming manifestation, if your reflection should cast a faithful light upon it in the instances in which you may have the evidence that it *is* a fact. Fix your attention on some of those circumstances which will *prove* to you that you are "without God in the world," and honestly endeavour to see, in those exemplifications, whether it be possible to overrate the irrationality, the guilt, and the danger. Thus, for instance, when you feel yourself vigilantly, and even intensely solicitous about your reputation among your fellow mortals, as if the essence of your happiness depended on their opinion of you, and are gratified or wounded as that opinion honours or depreciates you, reflect, that you feel no such concern, and perhaps never have felt a thousandth part of the measure of concern, how you stand in the account of the Governor and Judge of the world; and then, dwell on this fact with judicial consideration, and answer to yourself whether there be not a profound depravity in such a state of mind. When you have been spending many hours in society, with a lively interchange of sentiments, with your attention directed to various persons, and with a variously modified interest in being in their company, reflect, (for may not this be often the truth?)

that you hardly once, all the while, recollected the presence of the greatest Being in the universe; and then soberly consider what a grossness of spirit is proved by such an oblivion. A show of human coun tenances and figures, a circulation of ordinary converse, with some intermingling excitement of vanity and competition, were enough to preclude, during the race of so many thousands of your moments, all recognition of Him, who was then preserving your life, inspecting your heart, witnessing your procedure; and who was adored by whatever nobler spirits might have their offices to perform in this part of the terrestrial scene. Think of this, and confess that such a complete and prolonged absence of the recollection betrays a condition of mind most refractory to the training for that other society, where his presence is continually felt as the one most impressive fact, and most animating cause of delight.

It may be allowed to descend to still more special illustrations. We may suppose one of you to direct his look, or his walk over a piece of ground, in which he has the rights of a proprietor—till his successor shall take them. He might reflect, that this space of earth has more occupied his thoughts and affections, has been beyond comparison a more interesting reality to him, than the author and sustain er of the whole creation. Then let him look again on the soil, exert one solemn act of thought toward him by whom, and in whom, all things exist, and judge whether this be not a horrid impiety. Another of you has gazed upon, and leaned over, the ma-

terial which represents wealth, and confers the power of it; he has stood by his god, delighted and absorbed, without thought or care respecting any other, in earth or heaven. It should be possible, when he shall find himself in this situation again, to constrain himself to one effort of serious reflection; and when he has done so, let him tell whether he did not seem to hear a voice say, "Thy money perish with thee." Some of you may be men of a more refined taste, and may have drawn into your possession a rich collection of the works of genius, in literature and art. Let them confess to themselves whether they have not contemplated the splendid and growing accumulation with a delight, a care, and a pride, of incomparably stronger prevalence in the mind, than any sentiment regarding the Divinity. To be thus environed with the productions, (even though they little, in truth, consulted them,) of the most vigorous and cultivated minds of many regions and ages, constituted, perhaps, a kind of heathen elysium, in which they were insensible of any necessity of converse with the perfect Intelligence, the Source of all mental light, of all beauty and grandeur. But, shall their dwelling amidst the collected results of thinking, be itself a cause to disable them for reflection? If not, let them consider what is the true quality of that passion by which they are rendering this abode the scene of a voluntary exile from "the Father of lights," raising as it were a wall, constructed of the works and monuments of human intellect, to shut themselves up from his communications. And let

them reflect how melancholy it must be, to go away from amidst the pomp of literary treasures, poor, (and the more so for the very passion for possessing them, and the idolatry of them as possessed,) in all the attainmets and dispositions preparatory to an entrance on that scene where no truth, no intellectual glory, no ideas or realities of sublimity or beauty, can be apprehended separately from their Divine Original. Let the gratified possessor look again at the imposing array of the vehicles of all that has been the most powerful, admirable, and enchanting in human thought and fancy, but with a reflection with which he may never before have surveyed the spectacle. Here is the intellectual world concentrated, as it were, and embodied before me. It is but a small portion of it which the brevity of life, with its many employments and grievances, will permit to be of any avail to me for a valuable use; but I find there is a principle operating, which can turn the whole collectively to a pernicious effect. For, the more I delight myself in being surrounded with this affluence of the productions of mind, the less am I disposed to communication with Him whose living influences on my spirit can alone make me wise and happy. But can I be content to think that I shall, after a little while, retire from this proud temple to the honour of human intellect, actually doomed to take with me an unfitness acquired in it for the life of intelligence and felicity in the immediate presence of God?

Again, some of you might be addressed as persons raised high above the level of the community, in wealth, rank, or power, or all these together. You, of this order, sometimes look down to see how far the multitude are below. And proud indeed would your position be, if, in looking down from your eminence, you did not descry certain things which, if we may express it so, dare to look up, and dare, though the multitude do not, to ascend. Against such things as vexation, pain, sickness, old age, and death, your lofty station is not embattled; and their commission to ravage the plain below, contains no restriction that they respect your elevated ground. Still, notwithstanding you are highly pleased with the situation which exhibits you in such splendour, affords such variety of gratifications, and gives so commanding an ascendency over inferior mankind. You indulge sometimes in the luxury of verifying to yourselves, by an act of reflection, what a fortunate lot it is that you possess; and the images you raise to augment this luxury, by contrast with what you can the most forcibly represent to yourselves as infelicity, are those of a condition in life insignificant, obscure, and indigent. This proud complacency would perhaps be heightened, if you could have a disclosure fully made to you of the mortification and envy felt, by many tens of thousands, in comparing their situation with yours. Indeed you sometimes do, some of you, gratify yourselves by imagining this. But, amidst all the satisfaction or exultation, have you no perception of a

shade stealing over the tract of brightness where you are walking in pride; an ominous gloom, charged with deep meaning, "instinct itself with spirit," and giving intimation of a Being who knows no envy or admiration, and is "no respecter of persons?" True, there is very much in your situation to prevent all such perceptions. It is striking to consider, what resources it affords for escaping or expelling the invasion of all serious thought that should make any reference to heaven. The means you possess for change of place, and every other stimulant variety; the pomp and show of life; the routine of ceremony; the amusements offering in rapid and endless succession; the epicurean gratifications; and, in the case of some of you, the extensive concerns of business and enterprize, or the management of important public affairs;—all these are of mighty efficacy, as long as you enjoy tolerable health, for averting the admonitions of a more solemn interest. On every side to which you turn, the "god of this world" has disposed his enchantments, that you should not see the objects which are making signs to you by authority of heaven, nor hear their call. And you are pleased to have it so; as the people of former ages, when that spectacle of rare appearance in their hemisphere, which they denominated the blazing star, was regarded as of direful presage, were glad that an unbroken array of clouds should veil the sky, to yield them a temporary but thoughtless alleviation of their alarm, by concealing the dreaded phenomenon. If you could resolve on an exercise

of reflection, to ascertain the causes of the gratification you feel in these pomps, diversities, luxuries, and occupations, you would find a very material one to be, that they save you from any serious and prolonged recognition of the Almighty, and of those great subjects inseparable from the idea of him. You would instantly be sensible that you *are* so estranged from him; and would discover that you have been thanking these beguilers for assisting you to be so.

But is not this a most perverted and perilous condition? With the full consent of your will, you suffer this worldly grandeur, this prosperity, these quickly successive and variegated gratifications, to have the effect, that whatever is to be dreaded from the justice and disapprobation of a God neglected and despised, approaches still more and more near, and hovers imminently over you, without being seen or apprehended; as the monarch of Babylon's sumptuous revelry was the very cause that the destroyer of all that triumph could come so close without being perceived. Think also of the circumstance that, while you are placed, by the possession of the high advantages (that is, what may and ought to be advantages) of your situation, under a most cogent responsibility to God for their use, you suffer this very possession to render you thoughtless of this responsibility. What will prove to be the guilt and the consequence of such conduct towards him? To complete the estimate of such a condition, consider how certainly all this pageant of your pride, pomp, and luxury, will break up, and be gone, when the

angel of death alights by you, to send your spirits, divested, disenchanted, but unprepared, to their great account. A funeral parade over your dust will seem as if expressly designed in mockery of your past grandeur, by celebrating your ejection from it; and will serve your equally thoughtless successors for a variety in the exhibition of *their* pride and state.

In all the ranks of society, (below the highest,) there are very many actuated by a restless ambition to obtain the notice and conceded acquaintance of those above them. In turning our observations, for a moment, to persons of this description, we might appeal to their own consciousness of what it is that they allow to take precedence of all thoughts and solicitudes relating to God. There is sometimes stealing upon you a sentiment of mortification that your lot had not been cast in a higher rank, and that it is in vain to think of attaining the envied station. Fortunately for your self-complacency, you can turn this chagrin into an active spirit for gaining the next best object in your esteem, that is, to be on such terms with those above you as shall gratify both your pride and your vanity. You aspire eagerly to be acknowledged by them, and to be *seen* to be acknowledged, as persons of some account in their estimation. You work assiduously, by manners expressive of deference, by adulation, when you can venture to offer it, by officious and voluntary services, and some of you by gross servility, to purchase their favourable attention. And when a degree of it is conferred on you, in a manner not too palpably that

of condescension, (though you are not, perhaps, very fastidious on this point,) you are elated as if you had acquired some great accession of intrinsic worth. You solicitously watch for still more unequivocal tokens of the gracious disposition, and for occasions of putting yourselves in the way to receive them. And the progress of your success is probably marked by a more stately or a more condescending manner, assumed toward *your* inferiors. Some of you, of prouder temperament, and vigorous talent, disdaining all the servile expedients, aspire to *commend* the estimation and respectful attention of the higher favourites of fortune. And when you have in a measure done so, you exult as if it were some grand victory. It appears to you a splendid achievement to have conquered possession, by means of solely personal qualifications, of a ground where you stand on nearly an equality, in effect, with persons whose honours and importance in the world may consist alone in the splendour of their external circumstances. You may affect to depreciate this extrinsic importance of theirs; but you are vastly gratified by that kind of community with them to which your abilities and exertions have mounted you.—Thus, "man worships man," as a method instinctively adopted in aid of each man's worship of *himself*.

Now this habitual passion and labour to realize some imaginary element of well-being in the good graces of your superior fellow-mortals, may have so debased the temper of your spirit, that any admoni-

tion suggested to withdraw and raise your thoughts toward him who is supreme to judge, to bless, and to confer honour, may be like calling the attention of an uncultivated rustic to the sublimities of astronomy. The infinite greatness of God above all things, the obligation of a constant reference to him, the honour that comes from him, the duty of aspiring to be acknowledged by him with approbation, and the glory of possessing it,—all these are but feeble glimpses on your apprehension. But this is a degraded and guilty perdicament. Endeavour to think what it must be to be valuing yourselves just so much the more, in proportion as you succeed in prevailing on these earthen demi-gods of your prostrate superstition to accept, and sparingly reward, the homage which you refuse to the Almighty. Think what it is to watch and wait with anxiety, with manœuvres of insinuation, with patience resolutely maintained, or impatience unavailingly indulged, and even with sacrifices and self-denial, for looks and expressions of complaisance, acknowledging you as not unknown or despised, from creatures of your own kind, possibly of little worth, and insignificant but for their appendages of fortune, so soon to be resigned; while you are totally regardless of that sovereign Power who is inviting you to the honour of being acquainted with *Him*. And when your vanity is gratified, in thinking how you stand exhibited in the view of other men as enjoying a measure of the dearly bought privilege, one serious reflection might expose to you what ignominy inexpressible it is, to

be elated at appearing before a portion of society with the distinction of some flattering attention from your superiors, and to be perfectly indifferent in what account you shall be seen to be held by the Judge of the world, when men and angels will be the witnesses of the estimation.

Men of the world might be addressed on one other very general characteristic of their spirit and proceeding. Many of you are zealously intent on the advancement and amply endowed establishment of your families; ambitiously compassing for them, at whatever moral cost or hazard, the utmost quantity of the materials of prosperity. Under the consciousness, though little and reluctantly brought into any distinctness of thought, that your own tenure is but for a very limited term, the mind instinctively seeks to escape into any factitious mode of extending the interest of mortal existence, and yields to some undefined sort of deception, as if in your surviving descendants you were to retain some kind of sympathetic life yourselves. In this enigmatical feeling, for yourselves and them, you study, and scheme, and toil, to place them on the most advantageous ground, or in the way to attain it. And this being effected, the great business for them is accomplished! How often we have been struck with wonder in observing some of you, dwelling with delight and pride on the prosperous introduction into life, and the fine prospects, of one and another branch of your family, and evidently with an entire inadvertence to any greater concern affecting their welfare.

Secure the primary object, of their passing through life in a handsome style, in fair repute, and with plenty of the world's accommodations at their command, and that other affair, of their being accountable to God, of its being their chief business in life to be his servants, may be left as an insignificant matter, about which you do not, and they need not, take any trouble. You are thus willing to be destitute of religion virtually beyond your individual capacity, and to take on you the weight of responsibility for its exclusion from your relative sphere. You are consenting, as it were, to be irreligious both in yourselves and in those who are to survive you; saying, Let us form a family compact for the prolongation of impiety; a patriarch and a posterity estranged from the Father in heaven. But, thus to render yourselves expressly their authorities for living without God, is it not a most sinister and fearful office that you perform for them? When they shall find that all you have wished and schemed for them, and incited them to attain, has left their main interest abandoned to ruin; that paternal care has operated systematically to betray them out of all recollection and all favour of the mightiest Patron, what will be the language of the thanks they will return you? And think what it will be to be associated with them in the natural *result* of this present estrangement from him, in a sad exile, at last, from his presence. And see, in this condition, and in that prospect, how alienation from God destroys the value

of that one affection which is always represented as the most genuine and faithful of human charities.

These exemplifications, with the questions and censures on them, have been attempted in a form to lead you, men of the world, into such reflection as would verify to your own minds, that your prevailing spirit actually *does* disown your relations to God, that it *is* irreligion; and to expose to you that such a condition is fatally wrong. They have represented that irreligion chiefly as it is apparent in reference to the more commanding and awful characters in which the Divine Being is to be acknowledged, as supremely great and powerful, as present with perfect intelligence through all existence, as the observer and judge of all moral agents. We should have more distinctly admonished you to take account how you are affected toward him in his character of sovereign goodness, in which you might have access to find infinite resources for felicity. Reflect what it is that you do, in declining all communication with him in this relation. In a certain possible state of your spirit toward him, you would have the sense of his attention resting on you, directly and individually, as a favoured creature, with emanations of benignity which would breathe a deep emphatic vitality into your soul. And from all the objects and interests which would diversely engage your thoughts and affections, you would return, at intervals, to be sensibly in the presence of a Divine Friend, and realize it still again as both the delight and the energy of your existence. Think, then, what it is to

be so compacted and consubstantial, as it were, with the world, as in effect to say, Nothing of all this is mine, and for nothing of all this do I care. I have no adaptation nor desire to reciprocate sentiments with any being of higher order than myself. If God do really offer himself for such communication with men, I must forego the privilege, of which I could have no possession without I know not what vast change in my spirit and habits. But indeed I have no conception of such a mystical source of delight. How should any one receive tokens of special favour, responsive to his own emotions and aspirations, from a Being who never appears nor speaks to the world, and whose concern is with the wide creation as a whole? However it may be, such a spiritual sympathy is not for my experience; and I must content myself with such good as I can draw from intercourse with the objects in the scene around me. With these is my soul in communion; they are my happiness; and do not disturb me with warnings of what it will be to go into the presence of God as a stranger when I must leave them. I hope that, in some way or other, I shall have sufficiently made peace with him, against the time when I am to find myself present with him, and no longer with them.

If your devotedness to the world be thus a fatal alienation from God, it is comparatively but little to add, that it places you out of fraternity of feeling and character with the best and noblest of mankind. This may generally not cause you much mortifica-

tion; and, lest it should do so, you have recourse to the expedient of depreciating the religious character, as exemplified in those who professedly bear it. But your attention must have been sometimes arrested by such examples, on record or in the living world, as defied your self-defensive malice. You have beheld a real, unquestionable devotion to God, to truth, to holiness, and to another world. You have observed men living in habitual acknowledgment of the divine presence and authority; preserving a faithful conscience and obeying it, in scenes of temptation; maintaining fidelity to their high principle through all changes of season and condition; amidst the troubles of their lot deriving consolation from above and from hereafter; throughout their mortal course still looking forward to the end; and terminating it in the assurance that they were "dying in the Lord." There was left you no cause or power to doubt that this was all genuine, and you felt self-convicted of baseness, if you affected to question it. You were also constrained to admit, that these are the true exemplifications of religion; and that, therefore, all cavils raised against it from the unworthy character of many of its ostensible adherents, are wickedly dishonest. To say that but few professed religionists exhibit this combination of qualities in such high excellence, is saying nothing, unless you could assert that such excellence, when it does exist, is something more, or something else, than religion.

It is a matter of great difficulty to decide, what degree of deficiency of such a character may not be incompatible with the essential of personal religion. But at all events, here are placed in your view those whom religion has rendered the very best of the human race. Nor can you evade the point for which we cite them by saying, they were recluses and ascetics, and therefore inappropriate examples for any use of condemnatory comparison with you, who are necessarily occupied with the business of the world. For many of them were much and variously employed in that business; and showed how religion may be mingled with secular interests and transactions, so as to retain its own brightness and throw lustre on them.

Now, we are confident you cannot deny that there are moments of transient light on your mind, when the conviction comes upon you, that this is the worthiest, noblest, most admirable order of human character; however indistinctly you may apprehend some of the most refined principles on which it is formed, and however disposed you may be to the imputation of mysticism and excess. On any question arising in your reflections, *who* are the most truly estimable and dignified, the most wise and the most safe, your thoughts involuntarily glance toward this class of men, and you cannot make them fix on any other. They *are* the honourable and select of mankind, the "people favoured of the Lord," and Balaam cannot blast or degrade them for you.

And shall it be your only regret that you cannot reduce them to your own level? Would you deem it a desirable thing that they could be re-converted (such as are living) to that worldly character which now separates you so far from their community; so that there should be none to shine in contrast with you, as exemplifying the possible glory of that nature which you degrade? Reflect soberly whether, if you *did* see, and feel, and act, like the best of those men, it would not be a most happy change from your present condition. Would it not be happy that the state of your mind corresponded to *one* inspiring sentiment of these men,—that they have a Master in heaven whom it is delightful to serve; to *another*, that no faithful effort or sacrifice will, as to its reward, be lost; to *another*, that every victory over sin surpasses the value of all worldly successes or triumphs; to *another*, that their guilt is pardoned through the divine mercy; to *another*, that they, and all their concerns, are under a sovereign guardianship which can never err or fail, and that, therefore, in every juncture they have the mightiest power in the universe at hand for their assistance; and to still another, that one sensible interest in transacting the successive affairs assigned them in this world, is in the circumstance, that each one accomplished has carried them so much farther toward quitting the whole, for something better? Comprehend in the account whatever other things form a part of the difference which religion makes between them and you; allow this difference to verify itself to you as a

reality; and then say whether you can be fully content and self-complacent in standing thus dissociated. Estimate impartially any favourite worldly object, pursued or possessed, and think whether that would not be well surrendered to place you in a community of situation with these christian spirits. In a lucid hour, you cannot but perceive that, by being associated with them in congeniality of feeling and action, you would be in harmony with those grand laws and relations of your existence with which you are now at variance, and often at war. Those bonds of connexion with the highest objects, adamantine bonds, which with all your striving you cannot break, but which you now feel, when recognized at all, as fatal chains to what you cannot love, and to a doom which you dread and cannot escape, would then be vital conductors through which you would communicate with heaven. United to that assembly, you would stand on a ground where beams descend from the eternal sun, where angels visit, where afflictions are turned to blessings, where death is divested of his terrors. You would be able to say, with cordial emphasis, Wherever their souls shall be, there let mine be forever.

On the other hand, look at the men with whom you are now conjoined and assimilated. As your own men of the world, the models to which you conform yourselves, the class with whose destiny you are committing your own, it might be presumed they should have your approbation, your confidence, your sincere affection. But is it so? Take an honest

account of what you think of them, in moments when you are drawn a little aside from the bustle in which you are mingled with them, and when, for a short time, you feel your league with them somewhat relaxed. At such times, you will have found yourself looking at them with a cold, keen, judicial inspection; recalling to mind their conduct, toward one another or yourself; observing their motives, and admitting an estimate of these men of your preference and fraternity. The narrowness of their purposes, their selfishness, the world-hardened cast of their feelings, and their unsound principles, stood palpably exposed in your view. Confess how often you have been thrown into a very different train of thinking of them from that of considering them as your *friends*, your own chosen favourite class. Confess that you do not, and cannot, feel a genuine esteem for them, not to say affection or veneration. You do not repose a tranquil confidence in them. You have to watch, and guard, and surround yourselves with every precaution. With many of them you find yourselves in undisguised competition; and with your very allies and coadjutors you dare not remit the exercise of a silent vigilance on their movements, and all the indications of their dispositions and designs,—a vigilance which, you need not doubt, is exercised on you in return. What invaluable beings you are to one another, if you be right in this reciprocal distrust!

Even as to religion, careless as you are about it, you occasionally feel a certain indistinct impression,

that some other worldly men are *too* careless; especially when you observe any of them in declining health, or far advanced in age, as eagerly intent on worldly pursuits as if they had the assurance of half a century of life before them. You could not avoid some perception of incongruity in this, which has betrayed you into the expression, It is really time for that man to begin to think a little of other concerns. It may very possibly have happened to you to be disgusted, and almost shocked, to see one of your thorough men of the world resuming all his ease, vivacity, and ambition, for playing his part in it, with hardly the shortest interval after some sad event in his family or nearest connexions. If such an event brought him an accession of temporal advantage, he waited, perhaps, barely "one little month," to rush, with the impulse of his new forces, and the exultation of having acquired them, into the busiest or the gayest scenes of life. Supposing, again, that you have been dangerously ill, and visited by one of your fraternity, you have seen what a man of the world can do in the way of consolation. What was the balm which that physician applied? If you could not believe the assurances which he made to you, (whether he thought so or not,) that you would recover, what resource was presented to you besides?

In short, you will not deny that, if there could be given you what you could believe to be an undeceptive presage, that though associated with the men of the world now, you should not be so hereafter, it would please you exceedingly. We mean, it would

do so at those most thoughtful seasons, when the real quality of your worldly association, its heartlessness, its want of mutual approbation, its poverty of the means of alleviating sorrow, and its destitution of moral dignity, are exposed, in a degree, to your reluctant apprehension ; and when to all this is added, that its advantages and pleasures, whatever they may be, are limited, both in fact and hope, to a diminutive portion of your existence. This closing consideration throws a deeply melancholy character over the whole vast spectacle of your multitudes and activities. A crowd of human beings in prodigious ceaseless stir to keep the dust of the earth in motion, and then to sink into it, while all beyond is darkness and desolation ! It is as if a great army, appointed to march on some magnificent enterprise of distant conquest, should confine themselves to waste all their energy in an idle tumult of strifes and revellings in their camp, and obstinately stay on the ground to perish away, and be interred there.

On a whole view of these representations, it must needs appear, that, in your devotion to the world, you are losing the grand object of your existence. This is the plain brief sentence on your course of life. And it is most striking to think how insignificantly it may sound to you, whose guilt and calamity it pronounces. Will you say what combination of words that you could hear, would pass more lightly off. You have heard it, and, perhaps within a few minutes after, retained in your consciousness no trace of any thing impressive having been made sensible to

your mind. Are you not tempted to repeat it for the mere curiosity of observing how much at ease you can be with what seems of such formidable import; as if you were playing with a snake, rendered harmless by the deprivation of its fangs, or by your possessing the Egyptian's charm against them. Repeat the sentence, which affirms you are disowning and losing the great purpose for which you are sent into the world, and smile at the seriousness which thinks it an expression of fearful meaning. Say you are sensible of nothing lost, as long as the good things of the world are gained. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?" It is not, however, that you are incapable of being profoundly affected by the short proposition in words of something disastrous in your situation. The few words that should announce to you that your house, or other valuable property, was in flames; or that, (supposing you a trafficker by sea,) a ship, in which you had an important venture, had been last seen driving, in a shattered state, at the mercy of a storm; or the judgment positively signified to you on a topical disease, that you could be relieved only by a frightful amputation; or the most laconic whisper that should apprize you of a design formed against your life; would produce such an intense excitement, as if all your strongest past emotions, extinct and almost forgotten, came, as by a general resurrection, again to life, combined in one tumultuous

alarm. And yet the melancholy truth, pressed upon you in admonition, that the primary object of life, the grand venture and value of your existence, is thus far lost, and in the course to be finally lost, through your devotion to the world, may leave your mind unmoved, to await the stronger impression of the next inconsiderable temporal misfortune.

But you are awaiting also, little as you may apprehend or care for it, impressions of another order, and from another cause. They are reserved, most inevitably to come, after a certain succession, longer or shorter, of emotions from ordinary causes shall have had their times and be gone by. A thoughtful religious mind often perceives intimations concerning you, prophetic images, as it were mingling with the sight of your persons, while it beholds you thus absorbed in wordly interests, and insensible of what you are doing in throwing away an infinitely greater. That man, and that other, how little do they care that all the powers of their being, and periods of their time, are useless for the noblest and the absolutely indispensable purpose of life! How content that what they are acquiring should be at the cost of what they are losing! How easily they can say, in effect, "Get thee behind me," to any thing that would tell them what it is that they are sacrificing to their idol, and warn them of the consequence. But, to each of them an hour is coming, at some certain distance in approaching time, when they will awake from the infatuation, to the surprise and dismay of seeing that their life has been so far in vain.

They will look back to behold it, with all its fair and precious possibilities, blasted and desolated by their having passed over it. They will look back to measure how far it might have carried them on toward the possession of incorruptible treasures, unfading honours, and eternal inheritance; and then to acknowledge the miserable fact, that it has not advanced them one stage or step. It *will* come,—the hour which is charged with the destination to afflict them. There *may* be temporal grievances or misfortunes, affixed by divine appointment to certain parts of the time coming on; but infallibly there is, somewhere in the train, the hour commissioned to bear the yet unkindled element which will flame against their consciences. Will it be while there are yet to follow days of protractad grace, and possible "newness of life;" or will it be the conclusion of their time, and lighten on them only that they may read the sentence of an inevitable doom? Or is the appointed moment, of that awakening to the conviction that life has been expended in vain, reserved to come *after* the last of the hours on earth?—With such thoughts the serious observer looks toward futurity on your account, while you are heedlessly, and perhaps you call it pleasantly, occupying your life in the very manner which will bring at length this conviction, that you have slighted and lost its chief end.

Allow us to remind you of so obvious a consideration, as that of the rapid passing away of your life.

A large proportion of you, of the character in question, have reached its middle period, many are going down into its decline, some have the certainty of being near its termination. And you can not but have been often struck with the reflection, how soon each period of it, which *had* been before you, was gone into the past. Have you never felt an impulse to quarrel with time for leaving you so fast, after you had perhaps been impatient for some particular portion of it to arrive? But it would neither stay to be your companion, nor slacken to receive your reproach. It seems to come past you but for the purpose of stealing away your life; each day, each hour, taking off a share of that as its spoil. Observe how the theft and diminution are incessantly going on, while you are planning, or consulting, or executing, while you are striving or relaxing, exulting in success of fretting at failure. The one continual fact is, that life is speeding off.

Now surely it is high time to adopt a determined policy with respect to that which, while of immense importance to you, is thus continually deserting you. And the right policy is, not to attach yourselves, as your main object of interest, to any thing to which *life* cannot be attached and fixed in abiding conjunction. In other words, how is any thing practically of value but as you can have *life* for its prosecution, possession and use? There are in the world riches, "respects of honour," amusements, gratifications of curiosity, delights of the senses, what you please. If you could command life to delay, or to take a fixed

state, so that you might effectually appropriate these, and unite them as it were to your being, that were something. But by the rapid departure of life, that is to say, of yourselves, you are denied the essential condition of making them yours. You but snatch at them in passing, hold them for a moment, are carried away from them; leaving them to make a similar mockery of offering themselves to the next coveters in the ever-transient succession. If you, believing yourselves to be immortal beings, can be content with this, if you are willing to place your all in things of which your fleeting life allows you to try the good but for a moment, how mysterious is it that such beings should have come into the world to be so befooled!

You will hardly be so unwitting as to retort, that neither can life be stayed, and rendered a durable condition, for taking and holding the good of the *spiritual* interests, any more than of these temporal ones. This would be true in but so narrow a sense as not to be worth the saying. For the cases are infinitely different. It is in the nature of those higher interests that they belong to this life only as a brief preparatory term, the great scene of their enjoyment necessarily being hereafter. The main principle of the aspirant's connexion with them here is avowedly not that of possession, but of anticipation; and in that anticipation he sees combined with them an endless life, as his condition for a full possession of them. So that he may be more than content, he may be gratified, that the present life is so

fleeting, because, in being so, it hastens him toward that where the circumstance of transiency, inseparable from the experience of a created being, will seem lost in the character of permanence. For, though he must possess his felicities in a succession of duration, the assured eternity of that duration will infuse a certain effect of the permanence of the whole, to be perceived in every successive point; thus precluding the character of evanescence from the series perpetually passing. In contrast to all this, *your* objects belong exclusively to time, and to the very short time of your life on earth. And therefore, the speedy pace of life is the rapid parting from all you are possessing, or endeavouring to possess. And the possession itself during its brief continuance, is turned to vanity, by your knowing that this pressing haste, with which you are carried away from each particular of it, is just so much fatal speed toward your losing it all.

But the consideration of the rapid progress of life toward a close, is enforced on you by more familiar and plausible forms of admonition. There must often be brought to your remembrance events and circumstances in your experience, which appear as receding far into the past. Can these recollections be always unaccompanied by the obvious reflection, If all the time since then be so much taken out of my life, how reduced must be the remainder; and, if the interval between that time and this, in one sense so wide, appears to have been very soon passed over, can I be reckoning on a very slow move-

ment, which shall afford leisure for all manner of occupations or diversions, in passing over any space that can be yet in reserve for me to traverse? Perhaps some of you are conscious of a feeling occasionally arising, which would shape itself into the wish that you could be young again. Is this sentiment dismissed without reminding you what progress you have made, and what despatch you are making, in the journey of life? Some of you see your descendants already busy in the worldly career; can you have evaded the suggestion, what period of *your* life it must be to which this stage in *theirs* is parallel; with this thought further, how soon they will, if they live, have reached the same point in theirs as you have in yours; and where will you be then? When sometimes a tempting occasion is presented to you, of embarking in a new scheme, the thought will come over you, like one of the cold winds precursory of winter, that you are gone too far for any reasonable prospect of living long enough to see such a project through to its desired result. You are compelled to a brief reluctant computation, of about what stage in its prosecution might very probably be the last in the course of your activities under the sun. Some of you may be seen building a house, for your more respectable and commodious residence in the latter part of your life. When, in such a case, we have observed the care and vigilance exerted to ensure that every part and adjustment be firm and durable, the question would occur. Is this person, so

careful about the soundness of material, and security of fixture, of each beam, each board, each carved ornament,—is he not silently visited by any thought of where he shall be, long before the time that the structure will show any signs of decay, long before the time at which it would vex him to foresee there would be any such signs? When you are planting young trees for fruit or agreeable shade, can you avoid the reflection, how likely it is, that before these trees will be matured to their full productiveness, or be amply spread and thickened round the dwelling, or over the walks, you will have entered another kind of shade? And then "whose shall those things be which you have provided?"

While exemplifications of so special a cast will bear directly on some of you only, there are many things of a more common kind, which would admonish any of you who would practise a little reflection. Consider how often you fail to complete what you had in intention limited to a certain time; and then you say the time was gone to soon for you to accomplish it. You appropriate a portion of time, to be taken from business, to some pleasurable pursuit; and how soon you have to say it is gone like a dream! The great changes of the year, or some marked point of it, the anniversary of your nativity for instance, return upon you by surprise; it is but as yesterday, you exclaim, since this was here before. The appointed terms for transactions and settlements in the course of your affairs are here upon you again, when you seem to have but just got rid of the last. Some

of you have become afraid of pledging yourselves to do one thing, and another, from experience that the time is apt to be gone before you can make any effectual movements. Many of you have begun to remark, that it seems to go faster now than it did in your earlier life. Some of you, perhaps, occasionally fall into a mood of thought in which you number the years between your present age and the farthest term to which it is in any way reasonable, under the most favourable circumstances, to calculate that you may live; and then intrudes the idea that, (even supposing you assume that you *shall* have so many years of life,) if they shall steal off as fast as an equal number of the preceding ones seem to have done, you will very soon be at the end. The most aged class, if they too must still retain the folly of reckoning on the future, unsubdued by the certain littleness of their nearly exhausted store, may consider, whether even all the infirmities and burdens of the last stage will so retard the lapse of time, that a very few more summers and winters will not quickly have vanished from between them and the exit out of life.

If things in some analogy to these were exhibited as the fancied circumstances of a fictitious order and condition of moral agents, devised to give a strong image of a state of urgency and danger, combined with insensibility, the representation would excite no little of that sentiment partaking of alarm, which you can feel by sympathy for even imaginary beings. But you, men of the world, know that this is a plain

description of your actual situation. It is yourselves who are beset by so many circumstances to apprize you of the rapidity of the course, by which you are passing out of life. And your unhappy case is, that you make your life as worthless to your true welfare as it is evanescent in its continuance, by rejecting from your care its one grand business. You act as if you really had understood your existence here and hereafter not to be the *same* existence; but that the present life was expressly appointed by the Creator to be occupied with the matters of this earth exclusively, that it was to be altogether "of the earth earthy;" and that, for the next, you are to be literally created anew, in a different order of being, constituted in a similar adaptation to be occupied with what there may be in another world, and having no reference or relation to the previous and probationary state. But, if such be *not* the law of your existence, reflect what a fatal proceeding you adopt in so devoting, through this life, your soul to this world, that when you leave it you will find the substantial thing that remains with you, after all its shadows and delusions are past, is an unfitness for a better.

Here we conclude this long course of remonstrance. Perhaps you are ready to say it is a rueful and offensive representation, just such as a splenetic spirit, which has quarrelled with the world, would be gratified to make, in the wish to poison the satisfactions of those who have yet some cause to regard it as a friend; and who, at all events, think it yet too

soon to fall into hostility with themselves. But consider at whose cost it will be that you repel a statement which you cannot refute. The *truth* of the matter goes, in reality, no further off from you for being rejected; any more than the hour of death can be deferred by refusing to think of it, or by heedlessness of the solemnity of the prospect. Where would be the sense of a man, (if such a case could be,) who should turn with impatient disgust from the sight of characteristic morbid appearances shown in a delineation, and at the same time be well content to bear in his own person the disease itself? That the preceding description of your state is in substance the truth, we may challenge you to deny; to deny, that is to say, upon such serious and honest consideration as you cannot refuse without being guilty of the most deplorable trifling, a trifling which you will in due time meet with something that will avenge. And we may appeal to your own reason, thus exercised, what you would think of a doctrine or a teacher, that would consent to leave you satisfied with a plan of life which, for the sake of this world, renounces the good, and braves the evil, of the world to come.

But, though the representation thus far be of menacing character, all is not dark. As we have seen in a pictured view of Babylon, supposed on the eve of its fall, there remains one portion of the hemisphere, and one celestial luminary, not yet obscured by the portentous shade. While no colours can throw too gloomy an aspect on the condition in

which you have been described, there shines on your view still that great resource to which all this series of what may have seemed austere reprehensions, has been aimed to constrain your attention. And if you could be made to apprehend the importance, which there really is in the considerations so inadequately conceived and expressed, you would be awakened to wonder and gratitude that, after so constant and systematic a rejection of the sovereign good, you should not now find "a great gulf fixed between it and you." On your side of that tremendous chasm there is still Religion, accessible to you in all its blessings of deliverance, peace, and security for hereafter. You are still on that favoured ground, where you are invited by a God of mercy, a Redeemer with his atoning sacrifice, a Divine Spirit with all powers and operations of assistance, to enter yet at last into the possession of that, which will be a glorious portion when all you have been striving with the world to gain will vanish in dust and smoke. But be warned again, that the time is passing, and a very short persistence in your folly may make it too late.

Shall we, in concluding, suppose that some of you may be disposed to answer these exhortations in some such manner as this? "But what *can* we do? We cannot *make* ourselves religious. Though we should admit that all this is true, and of the last importance, we cannot, for that, command and compel our dispositions, our affections, the settled habitude of our minds, to change into the new order required.

What *can* we do?" The answer to this should be appropriate to the temper in which it is spoken. We have heard of instances of expressions like these being uttered evidently in a spirit of impious and desperate carlessness. There was no real concern about the subject; but a determined addiction to the world, and to so much of sin as that should involve, a wilful avoidance of reflection, a stupid and defying indifference to consequences; and all this taking to itself an excuse, or almost a justification, from the moral impotence of our na'ure. The man was in effect saying, As I am resolved to pursue my course, it were a satisfaction to believe, and I *will* believe, that I could do no otherwise; and as I am to fulfil my destiny, the less I trouble myself with thinking about it the better. Now, to a person who should reply to religious admonitions in this disposition of mind, we should deem it utterly trifling and useless to offer any pleading of speculatively theological or of metaphysical argument. The reasoning faculty of such a man is a wretched slave, that will not, and dare not, listen to one word in presence and in contravention of his passions and will. The only thing there would be any sense in attempting would be, to press on him some strong images of the horror of such a deliberate self-consignment to destruction, and of the monstrous enormity of taking a kind of comfort in his approach to the pit, from the circumstance that a principle in his nature leads him to it; just as if, because there is that in him which impels him to perdition, it would therefore not be *he* that

will perish. Till some awful blast smite on his fears, his reason and conscience will be unavailing.

If he be guarded on the side of his fears, by entertaining a light opinion of that consequence on which he is so precipitating himself; should he say, that it certainly *would* be a dreadful thing thus resolutely to go forward torward it, and a flagrantly absurd one thus to satisfy himself in doing so, *if* he had any such appalling estimate of that future ruin as religious doctrine affects to enforce; but that he believes this threatening to be a prodigious exaggeration;—we have only to reply, that, as he has not yet seen the world of retribution, he is to take his estimate of its awards from the declarations of Him who knows what they are, and that it is at his peril he assumes to entertain any other.—If any one answer to this, that he does not believe in the existence of any such declaration, he is not one of the persons we are meaning to address.

But some of you will make the supposed reply, "What *can* we do?" in a less depraved temper of feeling. We will suppose, that you are not quite indifferent on the subject, that you seriously admit the necessity of religion, that you feel some uneasiness at your estrangement from it, that, in short, you wish you *could* be religious, and in this spirit somewhat despondingly put the question. For you we have a plain short answer;—indeed, we have anticipated this in some preceding part of the discourse. You *can* deliberately apply yourselves to a serious, honest, prolonged, repeated consideration of

the subject. Do not incur the shame, for one moment, of pretending to doubt whether you can do this. On any one of your worldly matters of importance, you know that you can fix your thoughts, attentively, long, and again; you can severely examine in what manner it is connected with your interests, can weigh the reasons for and against, and look forward to near and more distant consequences. And you can do all this with respect to religion. Do you allege that, the subject being a strange and hitherto foreign one to your thoughts, and also presenting itself to you with a disquieting and reproachful aspect, your minds are strongly inclined to escape from beholding it? What then? You *can* think again of the absolute necessity of considering it, and can compel them back to confront it once more, and still again. You can recollect that nothing will be gained, and all will be lost, by ceasing to think of it. You can reflect that, if you dismiss it now, because it does not please you, it will infallibly return upon you ere long to please you still less; and will return ultimately in such imperative force, that it can no more be evaded or dismissed.

Perhaps there may be some of you who will complain, that notwithstanding sincere and considerable efforts to this purpose, you find that the subject does not, and seems as if it would not, take effectual hold on your spirits; that you cannot *feel* it to have that importance which you *know* it to have. And what then? Again we reply. Are you going to make this

a reason for suffering your minds to withdraw from the subject and let it go,—the subject which cannot go without abandoning you to the dominion of death? The question whether to yield to this obstinate defect of sensibility, is the critical point of your contest with the deadly power of evil, within you and without you. Yield, and all will hasten to ruin. But, surely, the terror of such a hazard and such an alternative, or the clear conviction at least *that you ought to feel terror at it,* must incite you to persevering and more earnest efforts. Look at it, dwell on it, and see whether a more protracted and intense consideration of it will cause or suffer your resolution to remit. That it should so remit, is hardly conceivable of any rational being. But if it even did so remit, that circumstance itself would bring a new and frightful phenomenon to rouse the spirit which had such a consciousness, and excite it to call for all compassionate powers and agencies to come to its rescue.

And here you are to be admonished, that you cannot feel that you are faithfully making the required exertion, unless you have recourse to the most approved means for rendering it effectual. You cannot answer it to God or your conscience, that you are doing justice to your souls, in this their dangerous crisis, unless you have the resolution to withdraw yourselves as much as possible from trifling company; to seize from your secular occupations some portion of your time for solemn thought; to forego some recreations, not perhaps sinful in

themselves, for the sake of employing the time on the most pressing concern in all existence; to read serious books, with an effort of your own to inculcate their instructions on your minds; and read this excellent book, "DODDRIDGE'S RISE AND PROGRESS OF RELIGION IN THE SOUL," which we commend to your serious and thoughtful perusal; but especially converse with the Word of Life itself. And there is yet one more expedient, of obvious duty and practicability, and superlative in efficacy. You believe that the Almighty admits his creatures and indeed has with endless iteration invited and commanded them, to express their necessities in petitions to Him; and that he listens with peculiar favour, to applications for spiritual good. You are not *afraid* to do this; and you are convinced, on the strength of innumerable promises, and of the merits and intercession of Christ, that it would be successful. Though there did not appear to be any *immediate* success, you believe, you absolutely know, that perservering application to Heaven *will* finally prevail. You can, with this absolute assurance, implore the removal of that odious insensibility, that indisposition, that aversion even, which you allege as a discouragement from persisting to apply yourselves to the all-important subject, and feel as a temptation to turn away from it. This *can* be done, a thousand times over. It can be done as long as the evil and the danger continue. And each day of their prolonged continuance supplies a stronger, and still stronger motive, to a more earnest use of the

sovereign expedient. And again and again we tell you, that at each repetition you *know*, because God has declared it, that such application cannot ultimately fail. Let this be done, and you are victorious. And O is it not worth while !

Now, you *must* acknowledge, that this is what you *can* do. But what ! are we about to use a language seeming to imply that you are *reluctant* to acknowledge it ? What ! are we supposing you would wish it rather proved that you *cannot* perform this simple, efficacious, inestimable service to your immortal spirits ? Is it possible, that, because the process of discipline is hard, (it is confessedly so,) you would be willing to find in its impracticability a deliverance from its obligation,—at the cost, the inconceivable cost, of losing its great object ? Is your professed thoughtfulness on the subject rather employed in trying and feeling the state of your faculties, to verify that there are invincible bonds of fate around you, than in seeking the intervention of that hand which can break all the bondage off ? Beware that, while you pretend a solicitude for your eternal welfare, you be not, in fact, rather seeking to make a melancholy provision against the event of its failure, in the delusion of finding a resource of extenuation in some mysterious destiny, or the determination of the Almighty.

THE END.