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SERMON DVI.

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THE PESTILENCE.\*

“Before him went the pestilence.”—HABAKKUK iii. 5.

No one can fail to be struck with the sublimity of this passage of Scripture. God is represented as passing from one land to another, accompanied with the symbols of His glory. Among those symbols was the Pestilence, preceding His coming, either as an emblem of His awful majesty, or of the ease with which he prostrates the tribes of men; or as expressive of justice and judgment. Apart from the mere *poetry* of the representation, however, the main truth which seems to be taught is, the connection between the Pestilence when it visits the earth, and God; or, the pestilence as accompanying the divine Being in his movements among the nations. The thought is, that the Pestilence is not the work of chance, of fate, or of mere natural laws, but is somehow connected with the Divine administration of human affairs, and should be recognized as such: or, in other words, that wherever the pestilence is, there is God directing it for distinct and important purposes.

There are great inquiries which the Pestilence, in any form, is fitted to excite among men, and each one will pursue these inquiries with reference to his own proper department:—the physiologist, the moralist, the theologian. In regard almost to no visitations of Divine Providence to the world, are there so many questions that are still involved in difficulty and uncertainty, as in reference to the various forms of the pestilence. It may be added, also, that whenever it appears in the world, and in whatever form

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it may manifest itself, it is a proper occasion for men to inquire why God comes among them in this form of visitation, and what lessons he is intending to convey.

The term *pestilence* is a very general term. It is, essentially, some form of wasting sickness that cuts men suddenly down, and that stands apart, in some respects, from the ordinary and regular diseases with which our race is visited. Whether infectious or not, or contagious or not—if *any* diseases are contagious—its general characteristics seem to be, that numbers are simultaneously affected; that it is usually rapid in its work; that it defies the ordinary precautions for warding off disease; that it sets at naught the skill of medicine as applied in the usual methods of restoration of health; and that if it is governed by regular laws and controlled by second causes—as there is no reason to doubt that it is—they are laws of its own, and are difficult of detection and classification. It is an extraordinary, not miraculous, visitation of divine Providence to mankind.

The inquiries which are appropriate to this occasion are, what place does it occupy under the Divine administration, or as connected with the moral government of God? What bearing has it on us as rational and accountable agents? What purposes does God design to accomplish by it? What relation, if any, has it to the sins of individuals, or the sins of a nation? Why, in bringing it upon men, does God depart from his ordinary rules in regard to disease, and his common methods in closing human life? These are the only inquiries which pertain to this place and to this occasion. There are others of great moment which pertain to the Medical Schools; or the Sanitary Boards; and to the other conservators of public health. I have not the ability to go into them; I shall touch on them no farther than is appropriate to my department—to show to such men that *their* inquiries should not exclude the higher inquiry, in which as men and as sinners, we all have a common interest.

I propose to direct your thoughts to the one point only which has already been adverted to:—the place which the Pestilence occupies under the Divine administration, or as connected with the moral government of God. In doing this, I shall notice what seem to me to be some prevalent erroneous opinions in regard to it, and shall then endeavor to show you what is the true doctrine on the subject.

I. My first object is to examine some prevalent opinions in regard to the matter which seem to me to be erroneous. The views which I propose to notice under this head may be reduced to two:—those which do not recognize God at all in the Pestilence, and those which are the result of reasoning loosely and inconclusively in regard to His design.

1. It is undeniable that there is a very large class of persons that do not, practically, recognize the hand of God in such visitations at all, but who pursue their inquiries in such a way, as practically to exclude all recognition of the Great Ruler of the universe. There are few, indeed, that would take this ground openly and theoretically; and it may be hoped that the expression in the proclamation which has so appropriately called us together this day, recognizing the Divine hand in this visitation, may be regarded not only as giving utterance to the sentiment entertained by the highest authority in this Christian nation, but as an exponent of the belief entertained by the mass of the nation at large.\* But there *is* a large class, it is to be feared, among whom there is no proper recognition of God; a class so intent on searching out the secondary causes, that the acknowledgment of the Divine hand does not occur. This remark, indeed, need not be confined to inquiries respecting the pestilence, and it is peculiarly proper to make it here only because there is so much in the pestilence that is adapted to rebuke it. It is, indeed, remarkable, that inquiries *can* be pursued in our world on so many subjects with no practical and proper recognition of God. One would say, if he were to theorize on the matter, that it would be quite an impracticable thing to pursue the study of botany, or anatomy, or astronomy, or chemistry, without finding constant traces of wisdom, and benevolence, and power, that could be best explained on the supposition that there is a God, and that could be satisfactorily explained on no other supposition. Yet, how little is this theoretical view sustained by fact. What a large portion is there of those engaged in these pursuits who fail, in any practical and proper manner, to recognize in them the Divine agency. For this there are two causes: the one is, that having found, as they suppose, the law which explains the phenomenon or the cause which lies immediately back of it, they are satisfied with that, and regard their work as done; the other is that which is stated by

\* "At a season when the providence of God has manifested itself in the visitation of a fearful Pestilence, which is spreading its ravages throughout the land, it is fitting that a people whose reliance has ever been on His protection, should humble themselves before his throne; and, while acknowledging past transgressions, ask a continuance of divine mercy.

"It is therefore earnestly recommended, that the first Friday in August be observed throughout the United States as a day of *Fasting, Humiliation, and Prayer*. All business will be suspended in the various branches of the public service on that day; and it is recommended to persons of all religious denominations to abstain, as far as practicable, from secular occupations, and to assemble in their respective places of public worship, to acknowledge the infinite goodness which has watched over our existence as a nation, and so long crowned us with manifold blessings; and to implore the Almighty, in his own good time, to stay the destroying hand which is now lifted up against us.

"Z. TAYLOR.

"WASHINGTON, July 3, 1849.

the Apostle Paul as operating on a large portion of the minds of ancient philosophers; "even as they did not *like* to retain God in their knowledge." The reference of this to the pestilence, however, is the only point before us.

Of the *fact* adverted to in reference to this, I fear that no one can have any doubt. There are multitudes of men who fail altogether in recognizing the Divine hand in this visitation. They are absorbed in inquiries as to atmospheric influences; as to electricity; as to malaria; as to the natural causes in cities which may effect the public health; as to the proper quarantine and sanitary regulations. In themselves, all these inquiries are well; but what I would wish to suggest to this class of men is, that the pestilence *seems* as if it were a part of God's design in sending it, to rebuke the atheistic spirit with which you ordinarily pursue your investigations into the works of nature. In the regular laws of health or of sickness in the human frame, and in the beautiful laws of chemistry and of botany, you fail to see any traces of Divine wisdom and goodness, and even in the laws of astronomy, you fail to see the great and glorious Creator and Upholder of all. Those laws are so regular and so beautiful, and so satisfactory in themselves; there seems to you to be so little of Divine agency in them, and the whole thing works so much like a beautiful machine; there is to your mind so little evidence of intervention, or of any foreign influence, that your thoughts are never raised from the formation of the crystal up to the God who *may* make each particle seek its appropriate attachment; from the flower up to Him who has so beautifully pencilled it; from satellites and suns up to the One mind that directs them all. Yet here, in the pestilence, is a visitation that is eminently adapted to rebuke that spirit. It *seems* to come direct from God. Its laws are to you unknown. You yourself can trace it to nothing short of his throne. You are not able to rest in secondary causes; not even to tell what those secondary causes are. About the pestilence there is no atheism. If you find atheism anywhere else, for the same reason that you find it there, there is none here. If your mind rests in the regularity of the laws of nature elsewhere, it cannot *as yet* here; for here is a new aspect of the Divine administration that is opened upon you. If you are a practical atheist here, it is for reasons which have not operated to make you an atheist on any other subject.—and you are here left to resist the *new* demonstrations that there is a God, and to find *new* reasons for being an atheist. There are features above the pestilence which *look* as if they were under the control of an intelligent Ruler of the universe—of One who does according to his will in the army of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth;—of One, in reference to whose dealings the impressive thought of the king of Babylon is so strikingly applicable:—"Who can stay his hand, or say unto

him, What doest thou?" To almost nothing can the apothegm of Bacon be more properly applied than to this very case:—"A little philosophy inclineth a man to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion;—for while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no further; but when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity."

2. I notice a second view which appears to me to be equally, erroneous. It is that where there *is* a recognition of the hand of God, but it seems to me on no principles demanded in the Bible, and authorized by no rational views of the Divine administration. This view embraces two aspects: that which speaks of the pestilence as if it were a miracle—and that which regards it as a specific judgment for particular sins. *In regard to the former*;—while there is abundant recognition of God, and while there is an intention to honor Him, there can be no doubt that there is among religious people, a view of all such subjects that regards these visitations, as being as much beyond all secondary laws, as any of the miracles were which the Saviour wrought, or as the judgments with which God afflicted Egypt in its resistance to His commands, or as the plagues that He brought upon his people when under the theocracy. It is much, even for good men, to learn that God can rule the world in its ordinary administrations, without miraculous interference; and it is not a departure from all proper recognition of the Divine hand, to suppose that the pestilence has its place under His government, substantially as other events have, and that it is administered by similar laws.—*In regard to the latter opinion*—that the pestilence is to be regarded as a special judgment for particular national sins,—it is worthy of careful inquiry, whether this is the correct view which is to be taken of the relation of these extraordinary visitations. I know that it is a very common view. I doubt not that this will be the view which will be taken by many in the public discourses this day. It has been so at all times, and there is a strong tendency among certain classes of men, and perhaps particularly among ministers of the gospel, to take this view of the design of Divine judgments. The prevalence of the plague of pestilence, of famine, of war, of any great public calamity, is set down as a proof of the Divine anger, and regarded as a demonstration of God's displeasure against some abounding form of iniquity, and as a call for repentance on account of *that* special form of public transgression. It is often judged to be an easy matter to determine what *are* the sins for which a people are thus visited; and the Divine displeasure against that form of national transgression is supposed to be marked by the severity of the infliction. In estimating the sin for which God thus visits a people, each one will

be likely to select that which in his own view is most aggravated and prominent, though there be no apparant connection between *that* sin and the peculiar form of the visitation. With one, it will be the national sin of intemperance—with another, that of oppression—with another, that of infidelity—with another, that of ingratitude—with another, that of Sabbath desecration—with another, that of waging war—with another, that of licentiousness—with another the idea is, that in all these respects we are becoming worse, and that the visitation of the pestilence is a Divine judgment for all combined. Accordingly, a fast day, appointed like this, is usually an occasion on which the ministers of religion dwell—and not improperly, except in the point of view now before us—on the prevalence of national sins. Two things would strike the hearers of many discourses on such occasions: One, that we are a nation given up to wickedness—a nation where every form of evil abounds, and where no good influences prevail—a nation so sunk in depravity that a stranger, if he had no other source of information, would infer that we are the most ungrateful and corrupt people on the earth; and the other would be, that the nation is in all respects growing worse, and that there was no way of recovering it but by this extraordinary visitation, levelled directly against prevailing sins. Accordingly it is painful to read the “fast sermons” preached in other days, in our own country; and painful that they should be preserved as serving in any way to mark the real character of the times.

Now, there can be no doubt that there are sins enough in the nation, over which we should mourn, nor that those sins are of an aggravated character, and that they are such as to deserve the severity of the Divine displeasure. There can be no doubt that it is proper for us, and for all this people, this day, to call them to remembrance, and on account of them to humble ourselves before God, nor that our nation has much to apprehend from the prevalence of those sins, because they are a violation of the Divine law,—and because, in their own nature, and being a violation of the Divine law, they are “a reproach to any people,” and tend to national disaster. Nor do I mean to intimate that this visitation of Divine Providence should not be, in any respect, contemplated in connection with the existence of national sins, or that it is in no sense to be regarded as a rebuke for prevalent iniquity. But that of which I am expressing a doubt is, whether it is to be regarded as a *direct judgment* for these, or any other national sins; and whether, because we are thus visited, we are to infer that we are “sinners above all that dwell upon the earth,” or are, in fact, becoming more corrupt, abandoned, and ungrateful. In other words, I doubt whether it can be demonstrated, and whether it ought to be so represented, that God means that this judgment should be a rebuke for any particular form of prevalent sin; or

as a proof that we are a singularly depraved people: or as a demonstration that we are growing worse; or as an argument that religion and virtue are not, on the whole, advancing in the land.

It would consume too much of the time to state the reasons why this view is entertained, and I will not draw them out in detail. They are summarily these:—That the Saviour seems to have settled the principle in what he says about the eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices (Lukæ xiii: 1-5); that there is no prevailing form of sin for which this judgment seems to be particularly intended—that is, that it is not so *confined* to any particular form of iniquity, is not so directly and clearly in the line of our national offences, as to convey any distinct lesson on any one of these specific subjects; that, as already remarked, it cannot be regarded as of the nature of a miracle, like the plagues of Egypt, and must therefore, be designed to teach lessons more general in their character; and that it cannot be interpreted as levelled against the particular sins of this nation, for it has a wider sweep; it began on the other side of the globe, it has travelled among all the nations; it has gone where the peculiar sins which exist here do not prevail, and it has, therefore, some greater and broader lesson to teach mankind at large, and as one family, about God.

II. But, in the second place, what are we to regard as the true doctrine on the subject, and as the true principles of judging in the case? This inquiry will bring up the consideration of the relation of the Divine judgments to the sins of men. I say “to the sins of men;” for I do not deem it necessary to attempt to prove that there *is* such a relation, and that the different forms of evil with which our race is afflicted are to be regarded as connected with the fact that it is a sinful race, and are, at once a proof of that fact, and a means of estimating the manner in which God regards transgression.

There are, then, two great principles on the subject which I desire to set before you, and which, if correct, exhaust the subject. One is plain; the other, embracing the matter before us, is more difficult.

(1.) The *plain* principle is this:—that there is a class of sins that bring their own punishment, sooner or later, along with them; sins in reference to which the judgment is in the line of the offence, so that there can be no mistaking the cause and the effect. These embrace a very large portion of the infractions of the Divine laws, civil, social, domestic, and individual; and these are the standing proofs that there is a Divine moral government, and are an indication of its nature, and a vindication of the revealed doctrine respecting the penalties of law. The

instances that illustrate this are too numerous, and the principle is too plain, to make it proper to dwell on the point now. The most obvious instance, perhaps, to illustrate this, is intemperance in the use of intoxicating drinks. In referring to this, I mean that there is a *class* of results as the consequence of this habit that flow directly from it; that are found nowhere else; that, as a great law, always follow from it sooner or later; and that, therefore, may be interpreted as an expression of the Divine view of that habit, and as a proof that some clear law of nature, armed with an appropriate penalty, has been violated. For these effects are not such as follow a mode of life which God approves. They are effects which are found appended to no other course of conduct. They are results so uniform as to show that there is an infraction of law, and so fearful and destructive as to demonstrate that the law was one which He who made our frame meant particularly to guard. The babbling, the poverty, the disgrace, the ruin of the intellect, the corruption of morals, the debasement of manners, the blunting of the moral sense, the train of diseases, the liability to commit crime, the sense of personal misery, and the peculiar form of mania to which the inebriate is subject, and which so frequently closes life—these and kindred things are of the nature of *penalty*, and come upon men as an undoubted judgment for what God regards as wrong-doing—and what in all His dealings with men, in spite of all their devices, He will *continue* to regard as wrong-doing. Here we never make a mistake in connecting the judgment with crime; nor is any other part of the Divine administration better understood than this.

There are multitudes of things in the world which, if not in all respects equally plain, are no less illustrative of the principle:—things so numerous and so certain as to enable men to understand that there is a moral government over the world; to determine with a good degree of accuracy what its principles are; and to furnish constant confirmations, by the course of Providential dealings, of the laws which have been disclosed in the volume of revealed truth. Thus, licentiousness has its own most awful and unmistakable penalty; war has its penalty; slavery has its penalty; avarice has its penalty; pride has its penalty; dishonesty, indolence, fraud, falsehood, all have their penalties. That is, there is a class of evils which spring out of each and every one of such things which spring from nothing else, and which would *not* be suffered if some law of God had not been violated, and its penalty incurred. It is not necessary to specify these things farther.

(2.) I turn, then, to the consideration of the second principle referred to. This relates more particularly to the case before us, and concerns a large part of the Divine dealings in this world. The case is, that where the judgment—if it be a judgment—or the



calamity, if it is to be regarded as a mere calamity (and whether it is or not, is the very point before us), cannot be shown to spring directly out of human conduct, and to be the regular result of a specific violation of law. This class would embrace most of those things which are commonly spoken of as "judgments," and would comprehend the plague in its irregular but fearful visitations; the pestilence, in the various forms in which it appears; famine—whether more limited or more general; tornadoes, tempests, earthquakes, conflagrations, inundations, perhaps the irruption of barbarians, and the ravages of an invading army. Under this head, also, might be brought revulsions in the commercial world; a derangement of the monetary affairs of nations; the downfall of governments, and the revolutions of states and empires. The question before us is, How are these to be interpreted as connected with the Divine administration? By what principle are we to judge of them, and how are we to feel in regard to them, when we are visited by them? I design, in what I have yet to say on this point, to lay down a few principles which truth seems to me to warrant, of so general a nature as to be applicable to all of them; but to derive the illustrations solely from that fearful visitation with which our land has been afflicted, and which is the occasion of our assembling to-day.

(a) The first principle, then, which I state is, that they are all under the control and the direction of God. I make this remark in opposition to a view which was adverted to in the former part of the discourse; but I do not deem it necessary to attempt to prove its truth at length. If *anything* is under the control of God, it will be admitted that tempests, and storms, and earthquakes, and conflagrations are; that the plague, pestilence, and famine, are his ministers. Certainly, in the apprehension of the mass of mankind, God is more *likely* to be recognized in these things than he is in the gentle sun-beam, the dew, the running fountain, the daily care that ministers to our wants: and among the mass of men, and especially in civil governments, the tendency is to recognize Him *only* in these tremendous displays of His power, and thus to regard His operations as lying somewhat in the regions of miracle. And certainly if we are to admit that God is in the world at all, it is proper to admit that He *is* in the midst of these great doings, so much adapted to impress the minds of men, and to produce changes on the earth. But I shall dismiss all that I have to say on this particular, by a reference to a few passages of scripture pertaining to the very subject before us—the pestilence. "I will send the pestilence among you," Lev. xxvi. 25 "I will smite them with the pestilence," Num. xiv. 12. "The Lord shall make pestilence cleave to thee," Deut. xxviii. 31. "He gave their Life over to the pestilence," Ps. lxxviii. 50. "I will consume them by pestilence," Jer. xiv. 12. I will send

to her pestilence, and blood into her streets," Ezek. xxviii. 28. "I have sent among you the pestilence," Amos iv. 10. And the text, "Before him went the pestilence." The *design* of quoting these passages is merely to show that the pestilence is uniformly spoken of as under the control of God, and as one of the instruments with which He accomplishes His purposes among men.

(b.) Another thing, then, which may be laid down in regard to it is, that it is to be presumed that God *has* some clear and definite designs which it is proper for men to regard, in such visitations. It cannot be that this is the mere play of his power; it cannot be that it is in wantonness or without purpose or end; it cannot be that he so departs from the ordinary and well-understood laws of His working without intending to convey some lesson that may be of use to mankind, or without some adaptation to His great and ultimate plans; it cannot be that He suddenly and in a fearful manner, cuts down multitudes of men of all classes, and with new and unusual forms of suffering, without intending to impress the minds of the living with some appropriate view of Himself. If these things are the mere operation of unconscious laws, they are one thing; if the work of chance, or of fate, they are another; if they are the work of an intelligent, and just and beneficent Father, they are another. Let those who believe in the former account of them, explain them as they may, and derive such consolations and instructions—as they can from an explanation which excludes alike intelligence, design, benevolence, justice, and wisdom; but let us who have higher views of the universe, sit down reverently and ask what the Universal Father would have us learn from these wonderful dealings. And this brings us, then,

(c.) Directly to the inquiry to which all the remarks which I have made have been converging. That inquiry is What *are* the lessons taught a people by such a fearful visitation as that which has come upon our land, and upon the world? Let us look at this as if it were, as it is in some respects, a new visitation of the nations—a new going forth of God upon the earth, and see if we can discern the reasons of our Maker's doings and ways. I will state, in their order, some of those lessons which this visitation seems to me adapted to convey, and which should be before our minds in the services of this occasion.

(1.) A visitation of this kind is adapted forcibly to convey the truth that God *rules* in the nations of the earth. In a very distinct form, indeed, this truth is conveyed by *all* the interpositions of Divine Providence, and all the events that occur, if men would so regard it; but there is a peculiarity in the teaching conveyed by the events which we are considering that is adapted in a most impressive manner to convey this lesson to the mind. This remark will apply to *all* those interpositions which are a de-

parture from the ordinary and regular laws by which He governs the world:—to the pestilence and the plague; to famines, conflagrations, tornadoes, earthquakes, and wars. In the ordinary course of events, as already intimated, we are prone to forget God. We fail to see Him in the sun-beam, the stars, the dews, the springing grass, the healthful action of our own frames, the opening leaf, the regular tides of the ocean. We learn to feel that we can explain these things without God. We become confident in our own wisdom, and rely on our own sagacity, and pride our selves on our skill. God comes, therefore, with the pestilence; with storms and tempests; with commercial embarrassments; with famine and war, and disturbs the self-confident tranquillity of our souls, and shows us how short-sighted is our wisdom, and how vain is our philosophy. He shows us that the lives of men are at His disposal; that all nations are under His control; that cities, towns and people are continued by His sufferance; and that when He gives command, all that we deemed secure and firm is swept away in a moment. There is no skill that can anticipate Him; there is no invention that can ward off His approach; there is no power that can resist Him. This visitation that has come upon our land, and upon the world, has shown this, and is still showing it in a most impressive manner:—for where is the nation that is secure; where is the frame so stalwart and hardy that it may not soon be cut down; where is the talent, the eloquence, the piety, or the patriotism that constitutes immunity from the attack of the destroyer?

(2.) Such a visitation of God to our world is fitted to show that He has *hidden* resources for effecting His purposes, yet unknown to us; that there are means of accomplishing His ends which are not yet developed. We are very apt to feel that, in regard at least to *originality*, the Divine resources are exhausted; and that all we have to do in order to “find out God” is to study the methods in which He *has been* accustomed to go forth among the children of men; or, in other words, that all that there is in the Divine plans is now before us, and that there is to be nothing new. Even earthquakes, and famines, and tornadoes, we are endeavouring to reduce to the same laws, and are seeking, in our wisdom, to feel that God is limited in his operations, and that soon we can comprehend the mode and the reason of all His doings. So men endeavor to master the laws of disease, and vainly suppose they can classify, and arrange, and perhaps counteract all the maladies to which the human system is liable. Yet here is a *new* form of disease; a new visitation of God to our world. It is but recently that it has become known. There are those now living who were living when it was first heard of on the earth. It was reported as a strange disease; suddenly cutting down one wing of an army while the other wing was secure; descending

on camps and villages apparently without any law, and sweeping off families and villages at once. But it was in a far distant land. It was supposed to be local in its character. It was regarded as connected with the peculiarities of equatorial climates. It was believed to have some singular affinity for the Asiatic temperament, and other nations were supposed to be secure. The strange visitant having domesticated itself on the other side of the globe; having retained its local character so as to lull the nations to repose; having identified itself apparently with the diseases of a particular part of the world, suddenly left its home, and began its mysterious march to the West. It followed no beaten pathway; it observed no known laws. It paid no respect to climate, and seemed to have no predilection as to the course of its march. It invaded alike hills and valleys; descended on the city and the hamlet; was at home in hot regions and in cold; pursued no regular line of march, except that it kept on its fearful journey to the *West*; was undismayed by walled towns, by deserts, and by oceans; now resting in some spot fearfully visited, and now slipping from place to place; now following the course of rivers, and now leaping from mountain to mountain. We heard of it from afar, and trembled; it came upon us, and was all, in the mystery and fearfulness of its visitations, that we had dreaded. No man understood it; no one could explain it. No sage in medicine, accustomed to explain everything, could tell what this was; no one can tell now. Whether in the blood, or the atmosphere, or in some derangement of the electric fluid—who can tell? Who knows the laws of its coming? Who knows how to meet it? Who can make himself secure from its assaults? The short and most philosophical account of the whole matter is, that it is a new visitation of God among the nations; the lesson which we are to read in it is, that God has resources for accomplishing His ends which are not yet exhausted, and that in studying His ordinary dealings we have not yet “found out the Almighty to perfection.” We see our Maker here going forth with a new form of manifestation. How much more He may have in reserve, unknown to us, who can tell? The atmosphere; the electric fluid; the gases; the waters of the deep; the noxious and poisonous secrets of the vegetable world, are all under His control, and a touch of His finger, or a breath from His mouth, *may* send some infinitely more fearful form of calamity than this sweeping over the nations.

(8.) This is to be regarded as an extraordinary means of arresting the attention of mankind. We become accustomed to His ordinary dispensations, and cease to be warned or alarmed. Men move on in the business of their farms or merchandize—amidst their pleasures and their books—though their fellows are dying around them with the ordinary diseases to which our race

is subject, as if disease were never to attack them, and as if they were never to die. Who is warned of his own death when others are cut off by consumption, or pleurisy, or fever? Who expects to die in that manner, and who, therefore, regards the death of his neighbor as a warning to himself? As a matter of fact, death by these ordinary and regular diseases fails to move the minds of men, and a funeral makes little or no impression on the living. God, then, has this other method of speaking to men in reserve—showing them that they are mortal; warning them to be ready to die; reminding them of the fact that the race is sinful, and calling on them to repent, and to prepare to meet Him. In this terrific scourge which is now going over the land, He shows them that no one is secure; that He can strike where He pleases, and that each one should “set his house in order.” Nothing can be conceived of as better adapted to do this than this pestilential visitation, and if it does *not* have this effect it is only one proof added to thousands to show how man disregards his Maker, and how distasteful to him are all the methods which Divine mercy and judgment use to recall him from sin, and to teach him to prepare for heaven.

(4.) This visitation which has spread over our land, and over the world, has, in an eminent degree, this peculiarity as a Divine judgment—that it is of the nature of a proclamation in favor of virtue and piety. Far more than any other plague that has afflicted our race, it has a close connection with certain forms of vice, and selects its victims among the polluted and the abandoned. It is true that the righteous fall. It is true that the great and the good, the pure and the holy, are, in some instances, cut down. This is inevitable unless God should work a miracle to protect each one of his friends. But, in its general march through the earth, it has distinguished itself eminently from the plague, the sirocco, the tornado, the earthquake, and the ravages of famine. It has gone to the abodes of the debased and the profligate; it has sought out the miserable retreats of the intemperate and licentious; it has smitten down those who are worn out with vice, and whose frames, enervated by the indulgence of sensual passions, have prepared them easily to fall. To an extent which has occurred in no other extraordinary visitation of Heaven in this world, it has made a difference between the righteous and the wicked; between the unclean and the holy, and thus, in a degree, unknown in any other remarkable judgment, it falls in with the ordinary laws of the Divine administration—inflicting a penalty for a well-known and a marked offence against the laws of God. The best protector against it is temperance and religion: that temperance which has saved the frame from the ravages which licentious indulgence produces, and that religion which makes the mind calm in God. It is terrible in its

approaches to the intemperate and the debauchee ; it is fearful in an almshouse or a jail ; it is terrific in the haunts of vice and the places of low dissipation. To an extent which has occurred in no other pestilence with which the nations have been visited, have the remarkable declarations of the ninety-first Psalm been verified in this disease : “ He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.” This fearful visitation is a preacher of temperance in all things,—temperance in eating ; temperance in drinking ; temperance in the government of the passions ; and it comes, at a remarkable juncture to confirm *all* the lessons which have been proclaimed by the temperance societies in this age. It is a preacher of righteousness, and confirms the doctrines of Christianity about the duty of subduing the soul, and keeping it calm in God : for a fit of anger, a state of high excitement, or the indulgence of any ungoverned passion, is among the things that expose to its ravages. All the precautions that have been found of service against it, accord entirely with the sternest lessons of morality and religion, and the conclusions to which its march through the world would appropriately lead men are just such as God inculcates by his law, and would produce by the fair influence of his gospel. Not thus distinctly has He commonly visited men ; not thus distinct are the lessons taught by the tornado or the earthquake.

And here it is not improper to notice the *comparative* solicitude which is felt in regard to the evil which, as a nation, we this day pray may be removed, above a far more fearful and destructive plague that pervades our land. We all feel the propriety of the services of this day, and all respond cheerfully to the voice which as summoned us to this house of prayer. We have been appalled by the evil that has come upon us. We trembled at its approach. We knew not which of our friends—which of us—it was commissioned to cut down. We sought the means of warding off the scourge ; guarded our ports ; cleaned our cities ; built hospitals ; sought the best medical aid ; removed the probable instigators of the plague ; called upon God in our families, and in our regular public devotions, and now do it

in a more set and solemn manner by this extraordinary day of devotion. Meantime there has been in our land—there is still—a scourge far more dreadful than this, about which the nation feels little alarm, and for which it has set apart no season of special prayer. This Asiatic scourge visited us seventeen years ago, and then departed. It cut down a few thousands, and then left us. It makes no one vicious; is connected on the part of no one with criminality. That more fearful scourge of which I speak is with us year by year. It never leaves us. It has spread all over the land. It demands some thirty thousand annual victims; many of them among the brightest men of the land. It fills our prisons; our almshouses; our grave-yards. It makes widows, orphans, wretched homes, wretched graves—the homes and the graves of drunkards. It is the parent of poverty, and disease, and crime, and death; and where this Asiatic scourge has demanded one victim, that has required and received more than ten. Yet the public is not alarmed. The voice of the magistrate does not summon us to the house of prayer on account of the evil; even the warning voice of the ministers of God is well-nigh silent in regard to it. How small an evil is this Asiatic scourge compared with intemperance! Yet how differently are they treated and regarded! Against the one we use every precaution; the other we sustain by laws, and invite and cherish by high example, and prevailing customs. Fountains of poison are opened on every highway, and at every corner of the street; and every art is resorted to, to induce the young, the vigorous, the talented, and the promising, to become the victims of the curse. Splendid houses are reared in public places; and the fascination is spread before our sons everywhere, and at all times; and no man can feel that his dearest friend is secure. On the Sabbath, and on every day and every night in the week, the allurements are spread around us; and while we are unconcerned, the curse is cutting down its thousands and its tens of thousands. Suppose the same course could be, and actually were pursued by any class of citizens in regard to this Asiatic cholera. I see a magnificent house erected in a central, and attractive, and much-thronged place in this city. I see it fitted up with every appliance of taste and art. I see it richly carpeted, and splendidly furnished. I see its doors open day and night—on the weekday and on the Sabbath, and always thronged. I see a multitude of young men there—the pride and the hope of their families. I ask what this is; what it means? Let it be told that it is a place where, for money, men are scattering this Asiatic cholera—where they are retailing that which will be certain to cut down victim after victim, and to spread this direful pestilence through the land. With what indignant feelings

would such a place be regarded! How long would it be tolerated! And yet this would be a trifling evil—a curse not worth naming compared with the evils spread over the land by the dealers in alcoholic drinks. The numbers are not by far so many; the sufferings are less; the tears shed are fewer; the range of evils is infinitely more limited. This Asiatic cholera of itself produces no cursing; no crimes; no poverty; no debasement of character; it breaks no heart of a parent over the profligacy of a child; it cuts no man off from communion with God, and sends no man to hell.

Yet in view of the scourge with which our land is visited, there is an obvious propriety that we should come before God in the manner in which we have done this day. It was meet that in view of the ravages of this destroyer, the Chief Magistrate of a Christian nation should summon the people to their places of worship to pray. It is God who has commissioned this scourge to go forth; God who directs its march; God who designates its victims; God who conceals the laws of its movements from us; and God who alone can remove it. He comes forth that we may recognize his hand in the affairs of nations; that He may teach men their dependence, and show them how fearful are the tokens of his wrath. By the same power by which He brought it upon us, He can continue it; and with the same ease with which he has caused it to spread over the nations, he can cause it to retire. Dependent, then, as we are; sinful as we are; deserving of reproof as we are, it becomes us to approach Him this day with true repentance, and to pray that he will remove the scourge. It may, however, still linger—hanging over us, lest we too soon forget our sins and our repentings. It may, it probably will, have other victims, before it departs. And in the *manner* of its departure, when it does go, it is commonly as marked and peculiar as it is in its approach. Here and there as it recedes, it suddenly strikes down its isolated victims, often selecting its most illustrious and its brightest victims as it retires from a land. As if not content with the numbers of the profligate and the intemperate that it has slain; as if dissatisfied that it has gone into the abodes of filth and poverty, as it has done, it selects here and there a victim higher in this world's estimation, and its last trophies are often among its most illustrious. Neither strength, nor beauty, nor piety can stand before it; and the bright and promising boy, the lovely maiden, the man of tried virtue, the pillar of the church, the support of the state, the self-denying and the skilful physician suddenly falls. Let us not, then, vaunt ourselves in any fancied security, as if *we* were exempt; but let us feel that, like a flash of lightning emitted from the departing storm, this fearful scourge may yet arrest any one of us, and summon us before our Judge. Happy they, and they only, who, whether they live through the



pestilence or die, have a well-founded hope of heaven in Christ Jesus; who, with a mind calm in God, and with a solid hope of future holiness and happiness, are at all times found ready for their change.

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## SERMON DVII.

BY REV. C. WHITEHEAD,

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### THE DIGNITY AND HOPE OF THE CHRISTIAN.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."—1 JOHN, iii. 2.

MEN of this world, deceived by the dazzling appendages of earthly greatness, behold not the real dignity of the child of God, nor appreciate the privileges that flow from so glorious a relationship. Hence the humble disciple of Jesus, though an heir to the unfading inheritance of heaven, is often regarded with indifference, and his professions of peace and joy are treated as the effusions of enthusiasm. "The world knoweth us not."

This mere negative feeling is, however, the mildest form of that opposition which the unregenerate world cherishes towards those who are inspired by the hopes and governed by the principles of the gospel. Often it degenerates into pity, sometimes into contempt, and even into deep-rooted enmity. In the early ages of Christianity such was the hostility of its adversaries that it goaded them on to bitter persecution, and glutted itself in the groans and agonies of the expiring martyr.

The Saviour exhibits the moral turpitude of such feelings, by tracing them to their origin—an aversion to Himself,—“Marvel not if the world hate you; ye know it hated me before it hated you.” The Apostle John discovers the same connection. Speaking of Christians sustaining to God the relationship of sons, he adds, “therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew him not.”

But mark the contrast between the judgment of the world, misled by sin, and the judgment of the believer, directed by grace. That very relationship which men dispute, is the subject of his