

*from his most of Sermon
John Chester*

Knowledge and Holiness the sources of Morality.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED BY APPOINTMENT,

BEFORE THE

ALBANY MORAL SOCIETY,

IN THE

North Dutch Church,

OCTOBER 5th, 1821.

AND BY REQUEST,

ON THE FOLLOWING SABBATH, TO THE PEOPLE
OF HIS CHARGE.

BY JOHN CHESTER, D. D.
Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Albany.

ALBANY:

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1821.

AT a Meeting of the Trustees of the SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION in the city of Albany, October 8th, 1821.

WHEREAS this board consider the promotion of sound morality of primary importance to the welfare of society ; and

WHEREAS a publication of the Sermon delivered before the Moral Society, by our Rev. Pastor, and again, (by request,) before his congregation, last Lord's day morning, would, in their opinion, conduce essentially to that desirable end : Therefore,

RESOLVED, That the Rev. Dr. CHESTER be respectfully requested to furnish them with a copy for the press.

By order of the Board of Trustees,

JOSEPH ALEXANDER, President.

A SERMON.

CXLIV PSALM, 15th VERSE.

Happy is that people that is in such a case ; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.

THE means of promoting public happiness have engaged the attention of philosophers and statesmen in every age. Innumerable systems have been formed by wise and benevolent men, to secure the safety and felicity of the community; and they have been pressed upon society in every form, and by every motive. The world has been flattered with promises of peace and enjoyment, and under the pressure of actual misery has adopted, with eagerness, the most visionary schemes for relief.

Almost all the ancient sects were founded with a sole view to public and individual happiness. Some imagined they should be happy in the possession of ease, or solitude, or luxury. Some retired to mountains and caves, and others rushed into business and pleasure. Some advised to severe austerity,—others to unbounded indulgence. There were distinguished men, whose wisdom is still the admiration of the world, who devoted their lives to the study and pursuit of happiness, and left the result of their investigations as a legacy to posterity. It would be

impossible, on this occasion, to mention their names, much less to hint at their systems.

How entirely they have all failed in securing the objects which they professed to gain, the crimes and miseries of men bear melancholy and ample testimony. The whole history of pagan nations is the illustration and the evidence that "*the world by wisdom knew not God.*"

Reason, though often improved by learning and refinement, never succeeded in its attempts to secure the real happiness of mankind. It sometimes burst upon the night, in meteor splendour, but it could not banish the darkness which "it rendered visible," nor pierce the gloom in which it was enveloped. It had no antidote for misery. It could speculate upon suffering, and sometimes sympathize with it, but it had no power to soothe or relieve its anguish. Its wisdom was folly,—its strength, weakness;—and even its charity was exercised without benefit to the objects upon which it shed its tears, and spent its efforts.

The subject was beyond the reach of human philosophers. They did not understand the disease to which they ministered, and they often aggravated the misery they endeavoured to relieve. They had no correct views of sin, no true knowledge of God. That they should labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought, was to be expected. Men "cannot gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles." They undertook to accomplish a moral impossibility,—to make men happy without holiness, and safe without God.

All experience justifies the assertion, that efforts to promote public happiness, that have not been

connected with the knowledge of Revelation, and controlled by it, have failed. Pure morality is essential to public felicity,—this cannot exist without piety. Holiness is inseparable from faith; they are the only fountains of good morals.

The sweet singer of Israel was taught of God. The inspiration of the Almighty gave him understanding. He saw the connection between morality and happiness. They sprung from the favour of Jehovah, and in all his efforts to establish the security and improvement of his people, he acted under the full persuasion, “that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding.”

In this Psalm he is engaged, with his whole heart, in celebrating the praises of that God, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, and with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. He acknowledged and adored Him as the author of all security, stability, and comfort. To Him he ascribed the glory of all good things. David felt his own dependence. He rejoiced in the universal reign of the King of kings. The perfections of God’s character,—the wisdom of his law,—the mercy of his providence,—the tenderness of his parental care, were themes that had engaged the ardour of his youthful songs;—they lingered on his latest breath, and even now they seem to flow from his harp, while the hand that swept it is still in death, or strikes a loftier strain among the throngs of glory.

And such strains of grateful praise can never cease while the church endures. Grace is as sure to produce thanksgiving as it is salvation. To ex-

press our gratitude to God, for temporal and spiritual mercies, with a thankful sense of our dependence upon Him, is as much the duty of redeemed sinners on earth, as it is the pleasure of glorified saints in heaven. And if there is a spot in the vast dominions of Jehovah, where praise should be more fervent and constant than any other, it is in this revolted world, that has been redeemed by the precious blood of the SON OF GOD. It is on this earth, dignified and exalted by the presence of GOD MANIFEST IN THE FLESH; which has been wet with his tears, sprinkled with his blood, and governed by his Spirit sent down from heaven. Of all the people who inhabit the earth, they are under the strongest obligation to magnify and praise the name of the Lord, who have heard the joyful sound of the Gospel, who enjoy its protection, and who entertain the hopes of glory.

Praise is not only the felicity of angels, but the perfect praise of God is the attainment upon which faith fixes her most ardent gaze, and for which she stretches her wings in her flight to glory.

Let the example of the man after God's own heart, animate our devotion, and his song, glowing with inspiration, become, not only the language of our praise, but the subject of our meditations on this occasion.

The text is the sublime close of a prayer which David had offered for the happiness and prosperity of his country.

In the ninth verse, he proposes to sing a new song unto Jehovah. *I will sing a new song unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery, and an instrument of ten strings, will I sing praises unto thee.*

He lifts up his eyes to the throne of God, and beholds him seated in ineffable splendour; surrounded with veiled worshippers, and dispensing blessings to *all* the creatures of his power. He listens! and all heaven is filled with his praise. As if he felt the influence of the spirit that animated the heavenly hosts, and already mingled with their employments, he exclaims, I will sing a *new* song unto thee, O God.

Hearer, remember his theme. With the angels he saw and adored the Divine Perfections; but the subject of this NEW SONG, was redeeming love. He bowed before a God of *salvation*, who delivereth his servants. This God is known as the hearer of prayer. He listens to the cry of his children, and with him the fervent effectual prayer of the righteous man availeth.

DAVID SUPPLICATES,—

“*To be delivered from vanity and falsehood.*” That he might be saved from the ruinous effects of fashionable dissipation and vulgar vice.—From profanity, intemperance, and all that train of evils, that flow from a disregard to the authority of Jehovah. He would have the nation delivered from the vanity that distinguishes that course of life, which is spent in the ambition of shew, and the splendour of fashion. “*The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.*”

He then remembers what no real patriot can ever forget, what every lover of his country's glory will esteem of the highest importance,—the education and welfare of the children and youth. He prays that they may “be trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,”—That they may be pre-

pared for public stations in the church and state, and for the humbler duties of private life. "*That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth, and our daughters as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.*"

He next prays for a blessing upon "the fields and stalls." Israel, like almost every other free people, was a simple agricultural community. Their king had been accustomed to the duties of an husbandman and shepherd. As a wise friend to the prosperity and comfort of his people, he seeks from the Source of all good, a blessing upon their "toil and substance." He prays that the land "*may abound in good, that the garners may be full, affording all manner of stores,—that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets, and that our oxen may be strong to labour.*" He knew the value of industry to the interests of morality and religion. He endeavoured to promote every thing by which it is stimulated and rewarded. Constant industry is one of the greatest preventives of vice. Idleness is a most prolific source of dissipation and iniquity. That community is most exposed to the evils which flow from profligacy, profanity, intemperance and their sister crimes, which, from any circumstances, contains a population that is only *partially* employed, or whose labours are uncertain in their products and rewards. Abject poverty is almost always attended with vices. It presents a thousand temptations to fraud. When employment is uncertain, those who are disposed to be industrious become discouraged. The love of regular labour is lost in fruitless efforts to obtain it. A wise friend of the order, morality, and happiness of society, who is anxious for its reformation and pu-

city, will enter into the spirit of David's holy patriotism:—*education*, and *virtuous employment*, would prevent the grosser immoralities; and charity would exercise one of her kindest offices, in preventing, by her wisdom, the necessity of her alms.

One of the reasons why large cities are more exposed to a profligate population, is the unsteadiness and uncertainty of labour. Few people would prefer to gain a living by fraud, who could obtain it by honest exertion. But where the labouring class are often disappointed, the strength of principle is wasted, their children grow up in poverty and its attendant vices, and ripen for every evil. Well might David, as a *moralist*, as well as a ruler, value the paths that “drop marrow and fatness,”—and as he contemplated the “full garner,” and the “increasing flocks,” exclaim in grateful fervour, “*Happy is the people that is in such a case.*”

Lastly. He prays for public order, tranquillity, and virtue. The last is the source and security of all the blessings which can be desired for the community. He intreats for PEACE. He had been a man of war from his youth. His sword had drunk deep of the blood of his enemies. He had also tasted the sweet cup of peace. His principles of humanity and religion prompted the petition, “Let there be no breaking in, nor going out.” He was constantly exposed to invasion and insurrection. His arms were his pillow, and his shield the covering of his rest. He deeply felt and lamented the public commotion, and he prayed that the desolation might come to an end. The repose which he sought for his country, was essential to the progress of public improvement; to public justice and happiness. In

the ferment of war, the arts languished, and those pursuits which are most conducive to intellectual and moral cultivation, were abandoned for the splendour of arms, and the ambition of conquest. There were many complaining in the streets, of rights neglected by authority, and of oppression unredressed by the arm of power.

The king, filled with love to God, and the best interests of his country, lifted up his voice in entreaty, that "*Wisdom and knowledge might be the stability of the times ;*"—that "*righteousness might run down the streets, as a river, and judgment, as a flood.*"

What Christian patriot can behold the example of this pious, supplicating ruler, without wishing it may be followed by all who are in authority? Who can listen to his petitions without repeating them for the benefit of the community in which he lives? Who that loves the liberty, honour, and virtue of his country,—the spread of religion,—the prevalence of morality,—the extension of happiness, and the glory of God, will not pour out his heart in behalf of his country,—that we may be the people in *such* a case, —that happy people whose God is the Lord?

May we not say, with humility, deepened by a sense of our unworthiness, and with gratitude, warmed by the remembrance of our mercies.

Happy America, thy God is the Lord !

1. Here he has been, in a peculiarly kind and gracious sense, the God of salvation. Our religious privileges have been wholly unequalled. The offers of grace have been made to every individual who would receive them. The Bible was the pillow of our cradles; and from our infancy our ears have been familiar with the Gospel's joyful sound. Reli-

gious liberty, in its fullest perfection, is the birth-right of all our citizens,—and, from its unrestrained fulness, has sometimes caused indifference, and degenerated into licentiousness. Our Lord Jesus Christ, in all the perfection of his atonement,—in all the plenitude of his grace, has been freely offered, with the divine assurance, that whosoever cometh unto him should in no wise be cast out; should not perish, but have everlasting life. In this general and important view, he has been the God of salvation to all Gospel lands, but emphatically so to this “GOODLY HERITAGE.”

He has been the God of our common country. Its whole history is a continued proof of his great goodness to his American Israel. Our fathers fled from oppression. By the protection and favour of God, they subdued this wilderness for two of the noblest objects that ever engaged the attention or employed the energies of men,—to vindicate the rights of conscience, and to establish civil and religious liberty. They secured them on the broad basis of individual holiness and public morals. We shall never feel proper gratitude to God, if we do not remember with praise, our religious and intelligent ancestry; to whose wisdom, courage, and perseverance, we owe, under God, our best blessings.

He has provided the most liberal supplies for all our temporal wants. Our fields are clothed with harvests; our mountains are covered with flocks and herds; “*our garners are full, affording all manner of store.*”

Prosperity and security are as perfect in the midst of us, as in any land which the light of the sun cheers. Public justice is as pure as it can be among

imperfect men, and freedom is as great as is compatible with safety or with itself. Enterprize is not only stimulated but rewarded. The means of education are multiplying on every side. Common schools, colleges, and seminaries, are rising and flourishing; and above all, so far as general happiness is involved; "SUNDAY SCHOOLS," the truest foundations of pure morals, and the most blessed charities of the age, have opened their doors to the neglected and forgotten. They promise more for the happiness of the forlorn poor,—for that vast population that hangs, as a pestilence, on the borders of society,—more for the order, peace, and purity of the community, than *any*, I had almost said, than *all* other institutions of an age of Christian enterprize and charity. They furnish, in every stage of their progress, a threefold blessing,—first, to their suffering neglected pupils.—then, to their parents,—and then, to their instructors and benefactors.

These peculiar favours we enjoy, not on account of our superior wisdom, or worthiness, but *solely*, because God is our Lord.

We have no intention of flattering this community with the praises of their goodness. Compared with what our moral and intellectual culture and improvement, ought to be, when our superior privileges and advantages are considered, we are a degenerate people. If there are many instances of high cultivation and exemplary virtue, it must be confessed, that public morals are much degraded. We have many blessings, but they all spring from the possession of the Gospel, and the influences of the Spirit. It is because our God is the Lord. Every true patriot will endeavour to promote public hap-

piness, and secure and perpetuate our blessings, by extending the knowledge, influence, and power of evangelical religion.

But let us examine more particularly the declaration of the wise and inspired David,—“Happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”

And is it not most manifest, that the people are happy that are in such a case? Contrast the situation of the community in which we live, with that of any other people! Compare it with the miserable condition of those whose lands are parched with drought—blasted with mildew, or scourged with pestilence! Your plenty, with their famine; your peace, with the ravages of war!—your institutions of justice, liberty, and religion, with their’s who tremble before the rod of a tyrant, and wither under the scourge of oppression, or perish beneath the car of an idol. Behold your sons educated and trained to honourable employments; cultivating a soil which they call their own.—Your daughters polished after the similitude of a palace. And contrast *this* with the condition of those, whose sons are slaves, and whose daughters are degraded to servitude and dishonour; or contrast your “happy case,” with the case of those, whose children are the victims of superstitious sacrifice, and the fuel of the flame of sacrilegious impiety.

Are not the people happy that are in your case?

Let the citizen answer, whose rights are protected by equal laws; whose person is free; whose dwelling is a fortress; whose fireside is a sanctuary.

Let the father answer, whose children are preserved to his affections, bright in honour,—smiling in health,—and progressing in knowledge.

Let the Christian answer, whose altar is not invaded ; whose temple is open to his devotion ; whose religion is unmolested by persecution ; whose faith knows no law but the Bible ;—and his conscience no umpire but its God. “ *Happy is that people that is in such a case ; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.*”

We enquire, more particularly, who are this favoured people ?—And why they are happy ?

In a general sense, the inhabitants of a Christian land, in which the Gospel is known and proclaimed, are that people. Although multitudes may be found among them who do not acknowledge and serve the Lord, still they enjoy innumerable blessings which flow from the Gospel. God blesses the community for the sake of his children. For them the wilderness is glad, and the desert blossoms as the rose. The disciples of Jesus are not only the “light of the world,” but “the salt of the earth,” by which it is preserved. When God *blessed* Abraham, he made him a *blessing*, and his spiritual seed have succeeded to his mercies,—and have been permitted, not only to *enjoy*, but to *bestow* them.

In a special and strict sense, God is the Lord of those who are renewed into his image, who are redeemed by the precious blood of his Son ;—“ who walk in his ordinances and statutes blameless,”—“ adorning his doctrine,”—and “ living by faith,”—“ soberly and righteously.” In whom Christ is formed the hope of glory. “ Being justified by faith, they have peace with God.” They are his friends, his children, his heirs,—“ saved by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Whether we consider this truth in its general, or

more strict view, it should awaken all our feelings of gratitude, and all our powers of praise.

Consider, my brethren, what effects pure religion has produced in general morals, justice, and security; and upon individual happiness, for this world, and upon their prospects for another.

This view will establish the truth of the text, and, it is hoped, will bring conviction to every mind, THAT HOLINESS IS INDISPENSABLE TO HAPPINESS,—THAT TRUE MORALITY CAN SPRING FROM NOTHING BUT PURE RELIGION,—AND THAT WE ARE INDEBTED TO A MERCIFUL GOD, AS WELL FOR THE ORDER AND SECURITY OF SOCIETY, AS FOR THE SALVATION OF INDIVIDUALS.

Compare the effects of the religion of the Gospel upon temporal order, security, and felicity, with paganism, philosophy, or infidelity, and where is the man in the exercise of his reason, who will not exclaim, Happy is that people whose God is the Lord.

How different is the OBJECT of their adoration and confidence. The deluded pagan bows before a stock, a reptile, or the host of heaven. He worships the devices of men's hands; or if he prostrates himself before the works of Jehovah, he is ignorant of his existence and his will. Emerging from his forest, he builds the altar,—the screams of infancy drown the voice of his worship, and at last die in the sacrifice. His aged parent next ascends the "fire of Moloch," and when the worshipper himself expires, the mother of his children presents herself a living sacrifice, to cover his ashes with her own. Hearer, look if thine eye can pierce that moral gloom; it is the shroud of death and woe! There, faith is delusion, and worship is a crime. Life is spent under the dominion of lust, and when despair settles upon

the hopeless sepulchre, it sways its leaden sceptre with eternal power.

Christian, think of your "happy case." No agonizing enquiry bursts from your trembling lips,—*"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the Most High?"*—Shall I give my first born for my transgression? The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul!

Oh no! thine eye is directed to "the hills whence cometh thy help." There is thy Father, and thy God, seated on a "THRONE OF GRACE." He is infinitely perfect, wise, benevolent, and powerful; he is "thy very present help in every time of trouble." "He knows our frame, he remembers we are but dust." He is able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come to him through Christ,—believing that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them who diligently seek him." It is he who gives us life, and breath, and grace, and all things richly to enjoy.

Contrast yourselves, in the next place, with the pagan idolater, in your SOCIAL RELATIONS AND ENJOYMENTS. Behold him, the slave of appetite and lust,—thirsting for blood, and ferocious for revenge. Physical power is his law of right. Weakness provokes oppression and violence. Selfishness, in its most odious, cruel character, prevails without restraint, and influences the tyrant of the day, and the assassin of the night. The pagans have no sabbaths,—no courts of "equal and exact justice,"—no provision for the poor and destitute, for the forlorn and neglected. They know little of the comforts, and nothing of the refinements and delicacies of life!

Look at your condition, see what Christianity has done for you, whose God is the Lord. How safe,

how comfortable, how refined ! Behold your temples of justice,—Your sanctuaries of religion,—Your sabbaths,—Your asylums for the destitute,—Your treasuries for the poor. Contemplate the charities and sympathies which the Gospel produces and controls. They extend through every part of society, relieving many of its miseries, and imparting balms and cordials to sorrows which they cannot remove. “Thy God is the Lord.”

Again. The contrast is infinitely in favour of the truth of the text, if we extend it to INTELLECTUAL ATTAINMENTS. The Gospel has been the constant friend of learning and science in every community in which it has prevailed. It has added vastly to the sum of knowledge. Learning has never flourished so much as under its light ; and in proportion to the purity of religious knowledge, have its interests been promoted. The man who opposes the Gospel, who despises and rejects pure and undefiled religion, is an enemy to the cultivation of the mind, to the real interest of learning, and the dignity of his species. The dominion of God, wherever it is established in the hearts of men, and in proportion to its influence in the community, produces the happiest effects upon the *understanding*, as well as the *affections*, and exalts both to happiness and glory.

The contrast would be heightened, if we should compare a Christian community with a society of *infidel* PHILOSOPHERS, bowing at the shrine of reason, and worshipping intellect ; but we have only time to illustrate the truth of our text, as it respects those individuals who have truly embraced the Lord Je-

sus Christ by faith, and of whom it is true, in the highest sense, that their God is the Lord.

They are happy in their present enjoyments, in the communications of grace; in their hopes and prospects; and in the supports of religion. God is reconciled to them, and "*there is now therefore no condemnation to them who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.*" The Lord Jesus Christ is their Saviour and Friend, and the Holy Ghost is their Sanctifier and Comforter.

Their portion is in heaven; there is their treasure and their hopes:—" *They are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.*" They meet the tyrant in the panoply of faith,—they descend to the grave, leaning upon the arm of love,—and they lie down in the dust, in the assured hope of awakening in his image, in whom they have believed. The sinner's trembling!—the sinner's horror!—the sinner's despair, cannot reach them!—Oh! "*happy people, whose God is the Lord.*"

Did it pertain to mortal eye to pierce the shadows of the valley, you might see the Christian "*fearing no evil.*" Could mortal hand lift the veil that hides eternity, you would behold him clothed in the purity of perfect righteousness,—holding the palm of victory, or sweeping the harp of praise. The crown of glory sparkles on his brow,—"*as the firmament he shines for ever and ever!*" "*Oh, happy people, whose God is the Lord.*"

In view of this subject, I cannot but confidently trust that every *Christian*, every *patriot*, every *philanthropist*, will be anxious to enquire how this religion may be diffused, and this morality, which is so

essential a branch of piety, may be promoted, extended, and secured.

This inquiry has pressed, with deep solicitude, upon those "*who fear God and regard man.*" It involves the interests of *two* worlds, and is most worthy of the high regard of all benevolent men.

It is a subject which ought to be discussed with very temperate zeal, and with deep humility, for it is one, upon which great and good men have differed. In my humble view of the subject, it appears evident that MORAL SOCIETIES, which were organized for this express purpose, have almost wholly failed. Though we can never speak of the motives in which they originated, and by which they have been conducted, but with sincere respect, still their history proves that they have disappointed the wishes of their respectable members and patrons, and the expectations of the community.

In our view, the principles upon which these societies rose, were mistaken, or misapplied, and the whole subject appears to have been misunderstood. Efforts of the most honourable and disinterested kind have not been wanting, but it is believed that they have been misapplied. The evil intended to be relieved, has been approached on the wrong point; and it seems that a just view of man, and the peculiar situation of our country,—of our manners and habits,—has not been taken.

The great object has been, to enact *penal laws*, for the suppression of immorality, and to *enforce* them with *rigid exactness upon offenders*. But to me it appears that it was not considered that an institution of benevolence, which was created by voluntary compact, and was intended to operate upon the free

will, should exercise *persuasion*, and act by the *influence of motive*, and not by FORCE. You can not coerce a free people, that are jealous to fastidiousness of their rights; and those who have not the power of legislators and executioners, should never have assumed their prerogatives. A moral association, that has no other bonds than those which are created by a choice which may be changed at pleasure, or thrown off altogether, must not attempt the tone of authority. They may admonish and warn, but after all, *persuasion* and *instruction* are their appropriate weapons; and even these must be wielded, not in *wrath*, but in *love*.

Charity will never be controlled by human power. Force changes its nature. When it is combined with power, it is no longer charity. We cannot legislate upon matters of free choice in their very nature. Law is only tolerable where there is an absolute mutual interest between those by whom it is given, and by whom it is obeyed. In benevolent associations, designed to benefit those who have no claim, by those who have no obligation, coercion is wholly misapplied. The Gospel of the grace of God, is charity; its principles, its offers, its operations, and its effects, are all charity,—and it has no treaty with power, no assimilation with force.

Of all subjects, nothing can be more delicate than that which relates to the religion and morals of a community; and misdirected efforts to reform and improve them, however benevolent in their motive, are sure to injure. In a free country, it is immediately feared that moral societies, armed with statutes, and followed by officers, are intended to abridge the liberties, and destroy the rights of com-

munity. Many good men become alarmed, and the profligate—those we are most interested to reclaim, and benefit, improve this circumstance to resist your efforts, and make them odious. Hence they pretend to derive an apology for their sins, and go on the broad road that leads to hell, uninfluenced and unimproved.

The providence of God, upon all subjects in which the efforts of men are to be honoured, in the promotion of his own merciful designs, is very singular and instructive. He seems to intend to shew us how independent he is of us, and our wisdom; and to make us humble in the very best of our well doing.

When christendom first awoke to the duty of missions, there was much *theoretical* and *practical* error upon the whole subject. When Christians were driven to a throne of grace, and from a deep sense of their weakness, and ignorance, asked wisdom and assistance from God,—then BIBLE SOCIETIES arose, as if by miracle. The seed was sown before there was any attempt to reap, and the missionary, following the path of the Bible, found the fields every where “ripe for the sickle.”

The first attempts to evangelize the Indians, were made with the same inattention to the nature of man, and the orderings of Providence; and it is a comparatively recent* conviction, that, so far as means are concerned, we must combine with religious instruction, a knowledge of the arts of life.

What has been thought almost *hopeless*, is now

* Our ancestors understood this subject much better than their descendants, which the history of their efforts fully proves.—*Vide Life of Elliot, Mather's Magnalia, &c.*

accomplished with comparative ease;* and the Bible, not disdaining the *plough*, the *loom* and the *artizan*, accomplishes the designs of the Spirit for eternity, while it begins the first lessons of civilization, and devotes itself to the temporal comfort of the savage.

The same defects were found to exist in the system and operations of moral societies. They acted upon wrong principles, and they have accomplished *little*; not because there was not *much* to be done, but because they mistook the means by which they might have been successful.

Public opinion, in most cases, is the precise rule of reformation. We cannot often transcend it. Here we are to devote our strength, if we succeed in convincing the minds of men, there will be little difficulty in improving their morals. And how is it, that this obvious principle has been disregarded upon this subject? It is not in other things. We do not obtain contributions to spread the Bible, or support missions, or publish tracts, or maintain Sunday schools, by applying to the legislature for a law, or to an officer, to execute it. It is by proving to the community the importance of these objects, and influencing it, by every motive we can employ, to assist them.

Several causes have contributed to create and perpetuate errors, whose operations have produced the defeat of some of the best enterprizes of Christian benevolence. We have overlooked the simple, obvious, and I might add, the **SINGLE SCOPE OF THE GOSPEL**. Our Saviour, and the apostles, never

* Witness the effects at the south and west,—at Brainard, and Elliot, &c.

attempted to enlist the energies of *government* to aid the spread of Christianity. They did not seek the arm of power to punish errors of opinion, or practice. They did not combine for the purpose of coercing the belief, or the conduct of men. They sought to *instruct* the ignorant, to *regulate* the heart. They addressed the consciences of men. They carried light to all who were in darkness. They scattered knowledge amid every circle to which they could gain access. They asked nothing more from the governments than that which we possess in unqualified perfection, the enjoyment of the unmolested privilege to preach the Gospel to every creature that would hear them. They made every effort to spread truth before the minds of their hearers. They brought motives from heaven and from hell, to persuade men to become holy.—They sought to correct and influence the *opinions of men*, but they never made the slightest attempt to coerce them. And what men ever met with such success in reforming manners, and promoting morals? The whole aspect of society changed under their exertions. Their converts “cast their idols to the moles and the bats.” They destroyed the trappings of their vain worship. They burnt their books of divination, and demolished their temples of sin. In Asia Minor,—in Greece,—in cities of the most corrupt and dissolute character, the preaching of the Gospel, in its *simplicity* and *integrity*, effected more for morals, than all the laws that were ever executed, or enacted.

The simple course which the apostles pursued, not only made all human power unnecessary to their purposes, but it rendered it nugatory to oppose them. The whole influence of law and power was

directed against them in vain. The instruments of torture,—the prison,—and the fire,—though all brought to bear against the spread of Christianity, actually assisted it. They brought it into notice,—they displayed its principles of firmness, faith, and patience,—and when their victims expired in triumph, that torture could not tarnish nor destroy, the very “blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.”

Upon this subject we have probably been led into error, from an honest, but mistaken view, of the old testament dispensation, and by a partiality for the system of our ancestors in England, which is a matter of education, which all their sufferings, and all our experience, has not corrected. In the theocracy of the Jews, the civil and ecclesiastical powers were so blended, that religion and government were mutually dependent. They could not be separated without mutual destruction. Many of our ancestors were educated under a government in which was an established religion, interwoven on the very texture of the constitution.

The Gospel recognizes neither the one nor the other. “*Ye are not under the law, but under grace.*” Let us adhere to the doctrine of the New Testament, and to the practice of its first preachers, and all our operations will be simplified, and our success, in all our efforts to do good, will equal theirs.

Will you permit me to suggest a few means, by which, it is humbly thought, we may all assist to promote the *morals*, the *happiness*, and the salvation of *ourselves*, our *families*, and our fellow men.

1. BY OUR OWN EXAMPLES. These are the most effectual and successful teachers. Many *schemes*

have been unavailing, and much of *sentiment* and *profession* have been *wasted* ; but a single good example of sobriety, order, and morality, was *never lost*. “ He that ruleth his own spirit may take the city.” Without personal and exemplary morality in individuals, their combination is worse than useless. “ *Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man, shouldst not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?*”

It is a humiliating fact, that, in some instances, those who have been loudest in censuring others, have been most guilty themselves. The dissolute have taken a fair advantage of those who have called for reform, and exemplified its necessity in their own profligacy. It is by no means intended to be alleged, that the members of moral societies have *generally*, or *frequently*, been immoral, but many of them have admitted dissolute individuals, and have greatly diminished their influence by improper associates. Let us take heed to ourselves to reform our own lives. Our humble example will do much to benefit our fellow men. A virtuous man *will* command respect, and his consistent conduct will not only rebuke, but reform many, that his voice cannot reach.

2. BY FAMILY INSTRUCTION. Let parents feel their solemn obligation to “ *bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” It is in the family that the basis of a moral education must be laid. If parents were faithful to their children and households,—to pray with them,—present them a humble and constant example of holiness, to keep their feet from profaning the Sabbath, and to teach them to call “ the holy of the Lord honourable,” we should have

less profligacy, and fewer crimes. The state prisons would moulder without inhabitants, and public executions would be unknown. If the principles and practice, of self-denial and temperance, were taught at the fireside, our streets would not be filled with vagrants, drunkenness, and blasphemy.

3. BY THE OPINIONS, INFLUENCE, AND EXAMPLES OF DISTINGUISHED INDIVIDUALS. The great mass of the community are influenced by the few. There is a fashion in morals, as well as in dress. The influence of distinguished men is felt in the remotest parts of society. Their example is worth more than all their wisdom, and all their authority. Influence is power; and no man is without it. But men in high stations, of commanding talents, of extensive wealth, possess it to a fearful amount, and use it under a most tremendous responsibility. The power of the torrent is in proportion to the breadth of its bosom and the height from which it descends,—and it resembles either the “*summer flood*,” that desolates, and is forgotten,—or the broad, rapid river, that refreshes while it flows, and carries plenty and peace, while it glides to the ocean.

4. BY PATRONIZING, CHERISHING, AND EXTENDING SUNDAY SCHOOLS. Upon this subject, moral societies, in this state, deserve almost unqualified praise. Here they have applied the true remedy to the very source of the disease. Let our united exertions be directed to this object, and we shall find that the Lord will be the God of our children,—and that “*of such is the kingdom of heaven*.” All efforts to *enlighten* and *instruct* men, with the blessing of God, will do more to promote good morals, suppress intemperance, and hallow the Sabbath, than all the associations, to en-

act penal laws, that were ever formed. The Millennium is to be introduced by the diffusion of light and knowledge, and we hail Sunday Schools, Bible, and Tract Societies, and Missionary Institutions, as its unequivocal heralds.

5. This grand design of promoting the piety and morals of the community, must be promoted by the **HUMBLE, CONSISTENT LABOURS AND EXAMPLES OF THE CLERGY.** By sound and modest instruction from the pulpit. That is the appropriate field in which we are to reap our harvest,—and we seldom leave it without injuring the cause that we would support with our lives. It is doubted whether we shall induce men to “*sanctify the Sabbath day and keep it holy,*” by preaching to them of its importance, in *public vehicles* ON THAT DAY: or promote religion, by any assistance which we can render the civil magistrate, to execute the laws that are intended to preserve its purity, or its sanctity.

6. True morality may be greatly promoted by **WISE* POOR LAWS, and a BETTER REGULATION OF CHARITY INSTITUTIONS.** Our poor laws, and many of our benevolent societies, are, in effect, offering a reward to the idle and the profligate. They have set a price upon intemperance, and made it a comfortable thing to be an idler, and a drunkard. The wretch who spends his wages upon his cups, will drink them dry,—while one gives *fuel,*—another *clothes,*—another *medicine,*—and another *food,* to his forsaken

* The efforts that have been made for the suppression of pauperism, are worthy of honourable regard. The societies in Philadelphia and Boston are noble, and worthy of imitation. We would particularly mention a report made by a committee in New-York, attributed to the elegant pen of COL. HAINES, as a lucid and important paper, worthy of the study of every real friend of public morals and happiness.

wife, and neglected children. He will despise the efforts of ministers and reformers, and improve their benevolence to gratify his lusts, and accelerate his ruin.*

7. By disseminating, in every form, the truths and warnings of the Bible. The friends of morality must defend the institutions of the Gospel against the pernicious errors of infidelity and liberality, both of which are engaged in endeavouring to overthrow the Sabbath. There is a laxity of sentiment and practice upon this subject, which is truly alarming. The sanctity of the Sabbath is assailed, and its sacred obligations are denied by many who *profess* to be Christians. Well may those who contend for

* We have no qualifications to make with regard to our "Poor Laws." Nine-tenths of the money that is expended on this subject, it is believed, is *worse* than wasted. With regard to benevolent societies, we should be very sorry to be misunderstood. They are honourable and creditable to their benefactors. They are, beyond expression, valuable to those who compose them; and every Christian must regard them with unqualified approbation in their design. The poor are the legacies of *him* "who had not where to lay his head." "They are always with us." But the distinction between the *unfortunate poor*, the *profligate poor*, and the *improvident poor*, has not received the attention which it merits. Was it wisely considered, the tax which is now paid for the support of paupers would be greatly diminished, and there would be a much larger contribution from voluntary liberality for the noblest purposes of benevolence. It is not pretended that it is possible that a just discrimination can always be made upon this subject; and it is well known that many excuse the most niggardly selfishness, under the specious pretensions of enlightened liberality,—but after all, there are true principles which ought to be known and acted upon, that are often neglected. Among the institutions of this city, whose charities are wholly unexceptionable, we mention, with heartfelt pleasure, the "*Ladies' Society for the relief of indigent Women with small Children.*" A society where the managers extend their benefactions under their own inspection. There are many institutions of charity among us, most worthy in themselves, and inexpressibly beneficial; and we would rather our tongue should cleave to the roof of our mouth, than speak against them.

pure morals, defend their great citadel, the Sabbath, for could it be obliterated, the Gospel would be driven from the earth.—The light of Revelation would be extinguished, and the night of heathenish darkness and ignorance, would occupy the places of truth, holiness, and happiness. If the battle is to be fought on *this ground*, then the full time is come for every Christian, and every lover of his country's liberty and honour, to “**SELL HIS COAT, and buy a SWORD.**”

We must be faithful in representing the stupidity, vulgarity, and guilt of PROFANITY. This is the most inexcusable sin that ever disgraced a moral being. A sin without temptation, or palliation,—that cannot plead even selfishness for its excuse. It is a wanton attack on the majesty of heaven, and an unblushing exhibition of unmixed depravity. A sin which nothing but divine forbearance would endure, and whose awful punishment, nothing but the patience of grace could delay.

The sin of INTEMPERANCE, the most ruthless destroyer of individual health, family peace, and national strength, that ever scourged a people, must be met in every place, where remonstrance can be heard, or motive presented. This is the darkest, most portentous “*sign of the times.*” Its baleful effects are reaching farther and wider every day. The ease with which spirituous liquors are obtained,—the fact that they have become a part of the regular support of the labouring class,—that they are found at the entertainments of the rich, and have become a constituent part of hospitality,—may well alarm every friend of virtue. Even this case is not hopeless. It is to be met with sound instruction.

Public opinion can be influenced,* and be directed against an evil which threatens the ruin of the community.

Lastly,—we must not only give our examples and efforts, to this cause of benevolence and reformation,—but we must be instant in prayer, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The work is the Lord's. He must be **OUR GOD**.—Acknowledged, feared, adored, and depended upon. If we cherish a sacred regard for his glory,—if we serve him in the beauty of holiness,—if we feel real solicitude for our own purity and virtue,—and a tender regard for the souls of our perishing fellow-men,—then he will be **OUR GOD AND REDEEMER**. “*Our SONS will be as plants grown up in their youth ; our DAUGHTERS as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.*” Our streets will echo to the songs of joy,—and “*WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE will be the stability of our times.*” “*Happy is the people that is in such a case ; THRICE happy is the people, WHOSE GOD IS THE LORD.*” *Amen.*

* We noticed with pleasure that at the *Fair*, in Saratoga county, this fall, a premium was given to a man, by the name of Fyler Everett, who had laboured two hundred days, without using a drop of ardent spirits. Let this example be followed, and petty “*dram shops*” would soon want customers in all our agricultural districts.

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