

THE
DESTRUCTIVE
INFLUENCE OF SINNERS:
A
SERMON,

DELIVERED IN

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THE DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE OF SINNERS:

A SERMON.

One sinner destroyeth much good.—Eccl. ix. 18.

SINNER, is the unhappy name, that belongs to every one of the human family. There is not one exempt: *there is none righteous, no not one:—all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* The dreadful import of this title, is unknown to millions of our race. They have never made inquiry into it. It is but partially understood, and consequently, but little felt, or regarded, by many who profess to have bestowed on it some attention. They are unacquainted with the total depravity of the human heart, and the deceitfulness of sin. Many have acknowledged they were sinners with a smile, or a levity of countenance, which indicated they did not believe the fact. They did it, probably, through mere custom, or to compliment the judgment of others. The wickedness, the madness, and the misery of sinners, are discoverable every day. Insensible of his moral condition, and danger;—regardless of his responsibility to his Maker and Sovereign, *the wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts: His ways are always grievous: his judgments are far above out of his sight.* Hence, they pursue a downward course, being taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will. They form a great multitude that do evil. They strengthen each other's hands, encourage their fellows in the road of folly, and accelerate, as well as ensure each other's final destruction.

Every man has his influence, more or less, in the circle where he moves. If his powers be great, his principles corrupt, his practice vicious, and his ex-

ample alluring, then is his influence the more pernicious and destructive. Imitators swarm, coadjutors increase, in numbers and boldness; while pupils, taught gratuitously, and with great facility, speedily become graduates in vice, and adepts in all manner of wickedness. But as there are various ways, and methods, adopted by sinners, wherein they verify the declaration in the text, we shall, in pursuing the subject, attempt an illustration of it, by pointing out its truth, *First*, in the fall of man and his subsequent history; *Secondly*, in families and neighbourhoods; and, *Thirdly*, in the church of God. By a little reflection on the character and conduct of men, in these departments, we shall soon discover how "one sinner destroyeth much good." It is discoverable,

I. In the fall of man and his subsequent history.

The first man was made upright,—after the moral image of his divine Creator. He possessed human nature in all its original unsullied purity. He was blest with the smiles of his Maker, and walked in the light of his countenance. How happy in his primitive state!

"When yet warm from his great Maker's hand,
He stamp't him with his image, and well pleas'd,
Smil'd on his last fair work.—Then all was well.
Sound was his body, and his soul serene;
—————Nor head, nor heart,
Offer'd to ache; nor was there cause they should;
For all was pure within: no fell remorse,
Nor anxious castings up of what might be,
Alarm'd his peaceful bosom."

Behold the first parents of the human family, in the sweet garb of heaven-born innocence! "The loveliest pair that ever since in love's embraces met." The envy of devils;—the eye-sore of hell; —the objects of God's favour and delight;

"Adam, the godliest man of men since born
His sons, the fairest of his daughters Eve."

See their paradise! No pestiferous breath has yet infected it. No tread of a sinner has yet polluted it. The withering curse of heaven has not yet fallen upon it. The thorn, and the brier, have not yet infested it. The sweat of the brow has not yet soiled their face. The groans and travail of creation, were then unknown; nor was *the creature then made subject to vanity.*

“About them frisking play’d

All beasts of the earth;—

Sporting the lion ramp’d, and in his paw

Dandled the kid; bears, tigers, ounces, pards,

Gambol’d before them; the unwieldy elephant,

To make them mirth, us’d all his might, and wreath’d

His lithe proboscis.”

Here all was happiness, because every thing was perfect in its kind. Blessed, thrice blessed days!—But ah, how short! What sudden turns! What strange vicissitudes in the first leaf of man’s sad history!—To-day most happy, and ere to-morrow’s sun has set, most abject. *Man being in honour abideth not.* His name is soon called Ichabod; for *the glory is departed.* Their paradise is not long enjoyed.—These happy tenants of this fair spot, scarce had time to prove its sweets, when straight they must be gone. The cruel tempter had entered: he commenced his assault upon the weaker vessel: and here, this first, this great sinner, this “Apollyon,” destroyed much good:—he succeeded;—and, “*the woman being deceived was in the transgression*” In that dreadful moment,

“Her rash hand, in evil hour,

Forth reaching to the fruit, she pluck’d, she eat:

Earth felt the wound; and nature from her seat,

Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe,

That all was lost.”

The Apostle Paul has informed us that, *Adam was not deceived.* (1 Tim. ii. 14.) He was not seduced by the serpent. He sinned knowingly. His sin,

therefore, was the more highly aggravated. His fond affection for her who was bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh, induced him to follow her, in his first transgression.

—————“He scrupled not to eat,
Against his better knowledge, not deceiv'd,
But fondly overcome by female charm.
Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
In pangs; and nature gave a second groan;
Sky lour'd, and uttering thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completing of the mortal sin
Original.”

Here the father, the head, and representative of the human family falls. Here human nature lost its virtue, its innocence,—and the image of God. In this fall, all Adam's posterity became involved, and ruined. *By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners;—by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. In Adam all die:—the wages of sin is death.* Who can tell how much good hath been destroyed by this *one man*. His whole race is corrupt. *They are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one.* (Ps. xiv. 2, 3.) They are under heaven's curse. They are *by nature children of wrath*. They are now liable to all the miseries of this life, the wrath and curse of God, and the pains of hell forever. The very ground is cursed for man's sake. *The creature is made subject to vanity, not willingly; and the whole creation groaneth and travaileth* under the dreadful weight. This sad moment of departure from God, has brought wretchedness and woe, in all their dreadful forms and consequences, arising from penal, moral, and natural evil, upon all our unhappy race; all of which would have been prevented, and unknown, had not sin entered into the world *by one man, and death by*

sin. Truly this one sinner hath destroyed much good.

But man's subsequent history affords many lamentable instances of the truth of our text. A few only shall be selected as specimens. The direful effects of the great transgression, are awfully exhibited in the *first murder* ever committed in the human family. Who can tell the good that was destroyed, when Cain wickedly rose up and destroyed the precious life of his righteous brother,—rent the tender bosom of him that begat him, and of her that bear him,—destroyed his own peace forever,—entailed an additional curse and a reproach upon his posterity through many generations,—and whose very name associates with it, upon every mention of it, the horrid invention, the shocking deed, and the terrible example of making away with life, by murderously opening the channels of its precious fluid, and letting it out upon the ground!

Another sinner, that destroyed much good, was *Achan, the son of Zerah*; that troubler in Israel, who, in direct violation of the law of God, (Joshua vi. 18,) made *the camp of Israel a curse*, by coveting, taking, and concealing, a *Babylonish garment, two hundred sheckels of silver, and a wedge of gold*. In consequence of this wicked conduct of this *one sinner*, the Israelites could not prevail against their enemies;—*they fled before the men of Ai, who smote of them about thirty and six men*. Israel was greatly troubled: Achan is detected: the foul deed is confessed; and lo, here follows the direful result:—*Joshua and all Israel took Achan, the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had:—And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. Surely much good was destroyed by this covetous*

wretch, as many a one has done since his day, under the influence of the same wicked propensity, which has procured the destruction of the lives and property of millions in our unhappy world, and finally brought down the curse of heaven upon their own heads.

The Levite's adulterous concubine, or as it may be rendered from the original, *a wife, a concubine*, by her lewdness and wicked elopement from "her husband," as he is called, proved the *occasion* of the almost entire extirpation of the tribe of Benjamin, and of immense slaughter in the other tribes! Her unfaithful and guilty conduct, which was punishable with death by the law, led, by a chain of circumstances, to one of the most desolating civil wars that ever happened in any nation, which blazed and raged several days, with the most furious indignation, accompanied with blood and carnage, until between sixty and seventy thousand men, besides women and children, fell by the sword, and all this among brethren of the same family! How incalculable the mischief and ruin down to this day, occasioned by the adulterous woman! *She forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. Her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead. None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life. Her end is bitter as worm-wood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death: her steps take hold on hell. Whoso committeth adultery with her lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get, and his reproach shall not be wiped away. He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks: till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteneth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life. For this horrid sin, this abounding iniquity, the land mourneth, because it is polluted:*

The earth groaneth, and the very shades of night are sullied with the abominable deed! O had I a voice like thunder, I would roar in the ears of that young man *among the simple ones,—among the youths, that young man void of understanding*, and warn him of the house of death;—of the dishonour and reproach that cannot be wiped away! O if my pen “were dipped in the gall of celestial displeasure,” how would I portray, in emblazoned colours, the unnatural, the brutish, the peace-destroying, the soul-ruining deed of that man, who forsaketh *the wife of his youth, his companion, and the wife of his covenant*, to follow *the strange woman, whose steps take hold on hell!*—*Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body?* (1 Cor. vi. 16.) But let me address such in God’s name;—in the words that the Holy Ghost useth, and warn them of their folly and their danger:—*Hearken unto me, now, therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart incline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.*

The time would fail, the ear be pained, and the heart sicken, were I to present before you the ten thousandth part of the history of human wickedness and woe, occasioned by the *royal sinner*,—the proud ambitious *monarch*, and the *favourite*, still prouder,—the rebellious *subject*,—the slaughtering *general*,—and the bloody *assassin*;—Of Rehoboam, the son and successor of Solomon, who, in consequence of his imbecility and ambition, in a few weeks goaded ten tribes out of twelve to revolt from his dominion, and set up a rival government, which produced a source of great uneasiness and endless bickerings amongst brethren hitherto dwelling together in unity and amity under one head;—Of Jereboam, *who made Israel to sin*, by setting up calves at Bethel and Dan;—

Of Manassah, who *shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another*;—Of Absalom, who stirred up multitudes to insurrection and rebellion against his father David, and involved the nation in the horrors of civil war;—Of Jezebel, who *slew the prophets of the Lord*, and Saul of Tarsus, who *breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord*;—Of Haman, the A-melekite, whose pride and envy led him to lay a wicked plot for the extirpation of all the Jews under the dominion of Ahasuerus, his master, but which, by a reaction, caused the destruction of himself, his ten sons, eight hundred men in Shushan the palace, and seventy-five thousand more, who fell by the sword of *the other Jews that were in the king's provinces, who had gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives*.

These are a few out of the many instances found on sacred record, where the truth of the declaration in the text is abundantly substantiated. But who can, without mixed emotions of grief, horror, astonishment, and indignation, turn over the pages of profane history, both ancient and modern, and there learn what seductive arts, what disgusting lewdness, what cruel butcheries, what savage conduct, what barbarous treatment, and what horrid enormities, of every description that hell could invent, have bursted forth from that dark source, and found abettors and practitioners among all ages and classes of men! But we proceed to show how the declaration in the text is strikingly illustrated,

II. In families and neighborhoods.

Here objects swarm, and press upon our notice. We must select the most prominent. See the unnatural conduct of the *imperious, ill-natured husband*. With all the ardour of youthful passion, he sought for that amiable woman, to make her *the wife of his youth*. For her he professed to sigh and languish.

while she hesitated, and thereby rendered his final happiness doubtful. He swore that he loved her, and could not live without her. He called heaven to witness his fond attachment,—his solemn pledge of perpetuated affection and fidelity, if she would consent to become *his companion, and the wife of his covenant*.—Overcome by teasing importunity, and won by the flattering expectations of a terrestrial paradise, with an unclouded atmosphere, she sustains his plea, reciprocates his attachment, and becomes his wife, the companion of his days, and the fond mother of his children. But, alas! she is deceived. Instead of a tender, affectionate husband, she soon finds herself in the possession of an ill-natured savage, who knows not how to honour the wife as the weaker vessel. Having previously lost the fine, chaste sensibilities of youthful passion, in the forbidden course of sensual indulgence, he wanders, like the brute, in search of other objects, and goes to the house of the *strange woman*, which is in the way to hell. His avowed fondness for his wife, which one would suppose to have been rivetted with tenfold endearment by the infantile smiles and innocent prattling of a tender offspring, has vanished like the morning cloud and early dew. His scowling brow, when he enters her room, appals her. She is alarmed at his approach, and trembles when he speaks. Day after day, and night after night, she sighs, and deep calleth unto deep, while wave upon wave of wretchedness and sorrow break in upon her spirits, render life a burden, and reduce her to a living skeleton. What a monster must that man be, who treats his wife as a slave,—who daily violates the sacred pledge he solemnly gave before God and man, on the marriage union, that he would be to her a faithful and affectionate husband, until separated by death. *The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast*

dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. (Mal. ii. 14) May every such wicked husband seriously think on this,—consider his ways,—and timely lament that so much good has been destroyed by his chilling indifference, his savage ill-nature, his violated fidelity, and his imperious disposition and cruel barbarity towards her, whom he is bound to love as his own body,—whom he ought to nourish, and cherish, and love, *even as himself.* *He that loveth his wife, loveth himself.* (Eph. v. 28, 29.)

But on the other hand, who can tell the good that is destroyed, and the evils produced, by a *peevish, fretful, contentious, scolding wife.* Such an one is enough to make a wise man mad;—to embitter his days, and drive him to desperation. The good man's peace is destroyed. His happiness is gone. His life is a continued scene of vexation and wretchedness. She is a great curse to him, instead of a blessing. *The contentions of a wife are a continual dropping;*—worse than a leaky house when it rains, affording no comfortable place either to sit or lie down in. *A continual dropping in a very rainy day, and a contentious woman are alike. Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind.* (Prov. xxvii. 15.) He may as soon hush and conceal the noise of the wind when it blows, as to silence her clamour, or conceal her imprudent and froward conduct. A brisk shower, though sometimes inconvenient and troublesome, is, nevertheless, soon over; but a constant, soaking, sleet-drizzling rain, driving all day long, admits of no remedy but patience. Such is the unfortunate lot of that man, whose companion is a cross, ill-contrived wife. *It is better to dwell in the corner of the house top, than with a brawling woman in a wide house;* “who upon every occasion, and often upon no occasion, breaks out into passion, and chides either him or those about her, is fretful to herself, and furious

to her children and servants, and, in both, vexatious to her husband." *It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.* (Proy. xxi. 19.) There is doubtless more comfort enjoyed in the solitary wilderness, exposed to wind and weather, than in a palace with such a woman. And even the roar of the lion, the howling of the wolf, and the screaming of the owl, would be music in his ear, compared with the continued clatter of a scolding tongue. How wretched must that man be, whose house is Bedlam; under whose roof there is domestic misery enough to canker all his gold and silver; to corrupt all his wealth; to embitter every enjoyment; and to make him groan even upon the most downy bed or costly sofa! Instead of being received with open and welcome arms, by a loving and affectionate companion, he meets with a thorn in his flesh; he is compelled to continue in the element of discord; his house is the seat of strife, the house of bondage and misery. Conjugal felicity! whither hast thou fled from the abodes of hundreds who are suing to our judges, and importuning our legislators to break the unwelcome tie, and dissolve those bands, which, a little while ago, were sought after with all the seeming ardour of youthful love, impassioned friendship, and prospective happiness! The daily discord, the unhappy bickering, occasioned by the ungovernable wife, or the imperious husband, has driven thee far away, probably never to return. The want of good temper, or the lack of self-government, is doubtless the fruitful source of more than half the mischief that arises to interrupt, if not destroy all the matrimonial happiness, and domestic tranquility, so desirable in the married state. It requires more reciprocal attention, and cultivation, than many are either aware of, or, if aware, yet unwilling to bestow. "Connubial happiness," says one, "is a thing of too fine a texture to

be handled roughly. It is a sensitive plant which will not even bear the *touch* of unkindness—a delicate flower which indifference will chill and suspicion blast. It must be watered with the showers of *tender affection*—expanded with the glow of *attention*—and guarded by the impregnable barrier of unshaken *confidence*. Thus matured, it will bloom with fragrance in every season of life, and sweeten the loneliness of declining years.” All this good might be enjoyed, and the contrary ills prevented, if every husband and wife would attentively listen to, and carefully follow the advice of heaven:—*Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times, and be thou ravished always with her love.—Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. Husbands, love your wives. Yea, let every one of you in particular, so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.*

Behold the *refractory, disobedient, prodigal child*. Here is a sinner that has destroyed the happiness of father and mother, disgraced the family, and brought wretchedness and infamy upon himself, perhaps, forever. Here all the flattering hopes of a fond mother, and the anxious expectations of an anxious father, are blasted in an instant. “Evil communications corrupt good manners.” A promising daughter, like “Dinah the daughter of Leah, went out to see the daughters of the land,” and has been *defiled* and ruined. A prodigal son has wasted “his substance with riotous living.” But, unlike the prodigal in the gospel, he neither comes to himself, nor does he repent; but pushes on in his course of dissipation, until he becomes habituated to vice, and established in every evil work. The restraints that were at first upon him are all broken, and the bands of moral ob-

ligation dissolved. The anxious father, who often said to him, "My son, if thou be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine," now learns, with a sorrowful heart, the unwelcome lesson, that "the father of a fool hath no joy." The fond mother, whose tender solicitude for his welfare, so often induced her to exclaim, "What, my son, and what, the son of my womb, and what the son of my vows!" now, alas! is taught the heart-rending lesson, that "a foolish son is a heaviness to his mother." But see the father without property, the mother without a home, and the son without a character, and learn, that "he that wasteth his father and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach," and in so doing, "destroyeth much good." "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother. If sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

See *the drunkard!* He once was rich. He began the world with high and flattering prospects. He joined his fortune to that of a lovely wife. Their sons and daughters were candidates for public favour, usefulness and eminence in the world. They might have been joyful, happy, and honourable, for many generations. But now, his estate is wasted. His health, his strength, his mental faculties, his character, his usefulness, his temporal life, and his immortal soul, are all in ruins. His amiable partner is broken-hearted. His lovely children are reduced to poverty and wretchedness. The hearts of virtuous connections and friends are filled with anguish, and their faces covered with confusion. What moral devastation is occasioned by this hideous destroyer! He spreads around him an infection worse than the plague. His evil conduct, his wicked ex-

ample, vitiates the habits and manners, and corrupts the minds and hearts of many in the respective circles and classes where he moves. He scatters the seeds of temporal and eternal destruction wherever he goes. And yet how little excitement is produced by the mischievous consequences with which his intemperance is fraught! What multitudes there are whose conduct tends to generate intemperance in themselves and promote it in others, by the practice of drinking intoxicating liquors with a frequency and freeness which cannot be needful for any good purpose. And "what multitudes more, either from an ill-advised hospitality or generosity, are continually putting the cup to their neighbors mouths, or from a fatal complaisance or pliancy, are accustomed to treat the practice with fostering indulgence." Such persons forget that they are *partakers of other men's sins*. The Lord hath said, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken, that thou mayest look on their nakedness." (Hab. ii. 15.) By the same authority it is also written, "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night till wine inflame them! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink." (Isa. v. 11, 22.) This horrid, destructive practice, is strikingly portrayed in the following laconic description: "Drunkness expels reason, drowns the memory, distempers the body, diminishes the strength, inflames the blood, causes internal, external, and incurable wounds, is a clog to the senses, a devil to the soul, a thief to the purse, the beggar's companion, a wife's woe, children's sorrow, the picture of a beast, and self-murderer, who drinks to others good health and robs himself of his own."

Yonder sits *the gambler!* amidst his cards, his dice, his cups, and his profane companions like himself.

He has wasted his precious time, his strength, and his money. Or he has by fraud and cunning robbed his unwary fellow of his earthly all. He either "getteth riches, but not by right, and in the end shall die a fool," or, in one unhappy night, is reduced to beggary, with all his family. How uncertain and hazardous must be the condition of that amiable female who gives herself and her fortune to a gambler! While "she looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness, her candle goeth not out by night, but layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff," behold the wicked monster of a husband, under some lying pretext, deserting her amiable society whole days and nights together, and, ere he returns, has put in jeopardy, if not actually gambled away, the property she brought him, the house that covers her, the bed that rests her, and the very bread which she and her children depended on for their sustenance. Ye fair damsels, take care how you give away yourselves and your fortunes into the hands of men whose trade is gambling, whose gains are the fruits of cheaterly and fraud, and with whom you are destined to rise or fall in this world, by the casting of a die, or the fling of a card. Rather spend your days with the parents who love and will provide for you, and ever esteem it one of your highest privileges, one of heaven's richest blessings, one of life's sweetest enjoyments, to escape the curse of being yoked for life with a beastly drunkard, the wasting prodigal, the wicked gambler.

Yonder comes *the tale-bearer!* with all the little stories he can pick up, whether true or false, going from house to house, industriously employed in the devil's work, which is to make mischief and sow discord among friends and neighbors. What an odious, mischievous character is here! "A tale-bearer revealeth secrets, and a whisperer separateth chief friends."

Unprincipled wretches! They reveal secrets with which they have been entrusted, and which they swore not to divulge, or they have, by unfair means, come to the knowledge of secrets which honour, peace, and happiness, require them not to reveal. They sow in the minds of people deep-rooted jealousies of their rulers, of their ministers, of their relations, and of one another. The whisperer, the backbiter, and the tale-bearer, are vile incendiaries, who, loaded with combustible matter, feed and spread the fire of contention throughout a whole region. Yea, their "tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity—it setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.—Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!—The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds," deep and dangerous; they strike the very vitals; they wound the reputation of him who is belied; they wound the love and charity of him to whom they are spoken; they give a fatal stab to friendship; they paralyze all good and social feeling between neighbors and relations, and excite contentions like *the bars of a castle*. Happy is that town, that village, that neighborhood, which is not infected with these factors of the devil! "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no tale-bearer the strife ceaseth." This odious practice meets with too much indulgence and encouragement. The tale-hearer, as well as the tale-bearer, is guilty of no small fault here. Many an ear is itching and widely opened to admit the tale of mischief and scandal, while the tongue administers neither caution nor reproof. Heaven has pointed out a successful remedy against this shameful, deleterious practice, and put it in the power of the hearer to employ:—"The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue." (Prov. xxv. 23.) Let every one, instead of countenancing, promptly discourage this sin. Let them

frown upon it. If ever an "angry countenance" was justifiable and praise-worthy, it is so here. Sin, for the most part, is cowardly:—it is conscious of its own shame. Let the whisperer, then, meet your frowning brow, when he comes with his defiling tongue, instead of your open ear, and there will soon be a check to this common, this growing, this wide-spread evil, which indeed destroyeth much good.

Nearly allied to this mischievous character, is *the base slanderer*: whose "lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it:" who utters false speeches against his neighbor, whom he avowedly hates, to the prejudice of his fame, safety, welfare, and that out of malignity, vanity, rashness, ill-nature, or bad design. He is the "ungodly man that diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is a burning fire." What pains does he take to find out something or other on which he may found a slander, or give some colourable pretext for it. "If none appear above ground, rather than want it, he will dig for it, by diving into what is secret, or looking a great way back, or by evil suspicions and surmises, and forced inuendoes." Ten thousand are the vehicles on which infamous, malignant slander is conveyed. "Of all characters in society, a slanderer is the most odious, and the most likely to produce mischief." "His tongue," says the great Massilon, "is a devouring fire, which tarnishes whatever it touches;—wherever it passes, leaves only dessolation and ruin;—blackens what it cannot consume;—a disguised hatred, which sheds in its speeches the hidden venom of the heart;—an unworthy duplicity, which praises to the face, and tears to pieces behind the back;—a deliberate barbarity, which goes to pierce an absent brother."—"It is a restless evil, which disturbs society; spreads dissensions through cities and countries; disunites the strictest friendships; is the source of hatred and revenge; fills whatever it enters with disturbance

and confusion; and every where is an enemy to peace, comfort, and christian good breeding. It is an evil full of deadly poison: whatever flows from it is infected, and poisons whatever it approaches; that even its praises are empoisoned; its applauses malicious; its silence criminal; its gestures, motions, and looks, have all their venom, and spread it each in their way."

Another sinner, who destroyeth much good, is, *the vile seducer*, who, like the devil, described by Milton, found in Adam's bower, by Ithuriel and Zephon,

"Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve,
Assaying by his develish art to reach
The organs of her fancy,"——

So this incarnate devil enters the abode of peace and happiness, and decoys the darling daughter, or defiles the wife of his unsuspecting neighbor. Do you hear the sighs, and behold the tears of yonder disappointed, broken-hearted parents? Alas! the cruel spoiler came. Their beautiful flower is blasted: their tender plant is withered, and destroyed forever. Their fond hopes, their pleasing prospects are all vanished. O had it been death, instead of the beguiling serpent, that had entered their humble mansion, and prostrated their beloved child, their grief and sorrow had been hushed, and their tears dried up long ago. To have laid her in the grave, and embalmed her memory in their tender affections, in their parental bosoms, would have been hailed as a high privilege, a precious boon from heaven, instead of the foul disgrace, the disappointed hopes, and the everlasting reproach under which they must groan, until their hoary heads go down with sorrow to the grave! Behold the grief-worn countenance of that dejected, forlorn, wretched husband! Ah, sweet peace and domestic comfort, which once smiled upon his humble abode, and lightened the toils of the day, are gone forever. The wily serpent, the

unsuspected monster in human shape, has unhappily succeeded in alienating the affections, and destroying the fidelity of her who was the desire of his eyes, the wife of his youth. This "poor man had one little ewe-lamb, which he had bought and nourished up:—it did eat of his own meat, and drink of his own cup, and lay in his bosom." It was the partner of his joys, the soother of his sorrows, and the solace of his life. Thrice happy days! had they but continued. But, instigated by the devil, and hurried on by the force of a base passion, the fell destroyer came. The worst that could happen was success. He *took the poor man's lamb*, and pierced his bosom with many sorrows,—beclouded his moral atmosphere,—embittered his days, and hurried him to the tomb.

Yonder comes *the duellist!* Honourable man! he has just slain his brother, whom he hated, in *honourable* combat! He has, like a bloody savage, shot him through the heart, and hurried him, unprepared, to meet his righteous judge. Behold what mischief he hath done! That happy family, whose earthly prosperity, under the smiles of an indulgent providence, depended upon the fostering care and skillful management of an affectionate husband and kind parent, is now beclouded with sorrow and threatened with poverty. Ah! who can hear the grief-vented sighs, and behold the flowing tears of that new-made widow; who can hear the tender cries of those fatherless children who so lately prattled on a doting parent's knee, but must, with all his soul, forever execrate the horrid practice, which has its origin from hell, is the fruit of malignity and hatred, having the name of *honour*, falsely so called, and, being fostered by pride and ambition, ends in blood and havock here, and in eternal perdition hereafter. To this rash, mistaken mortal, his great Creator, his righteous Sovereign says, "Thou shalt not

kill.—Vengeance is mine.” And moreover tells him that “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer:” and that “no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” Heaven-daring rebels! who can thus despise their Maker’s laws, contemn his authority, assume his right to take vengeance or dispose of life, and in an awful moment, blinded by a mistaken notion of honour, and under the domination of the wicked passions of malice and envy, hatred, ambition, and murder, hurry themselves, stained with each other’s blood, before the dread tribunal of their offended Sovereign.

“O shame to men! devil to devil damn’d
 Firm concord holds, men only disagree
 Of creatures rational, though under hope
 Of heav’nly grace: and God proclaiming peace
 Yet live in hatred, enmity and strife,
 Among themselves, and levy cruel wars,
 Wasting the earth, each other to destroy:
 As if (which might induce them to accord)
 Man had not hellish foes enough beside,
 That, day and night, for his destruction wait.”

Finally, *the sinner who destroys his own soul*, awfully verifies the declaration before us. The soul of every man is of incalculable value. This at once appears from the excellency of its nature, the perpetuity of its duration, and the amazing price of its redemption. One single soul outweighs ten thousand worlds, “and twice ten thousand more,” and “calls the astonishing magnificence of unintelligent creation poor.” “The *eternal* salvation of one soul,” says Dr. Doddridge, “is of greater importance, and big with greater events, than the *temporal* salvation of a whole kingdom, though it were for the space of ten thousand ages; because there will come up a point, an instant, in eternity, when that one soul shall have existed as many ages, as all the individuals of a whole kingdom, ranged in close succession, will in the whole have existed in the space of ten thousand

ages: Therefore, one soul is capable of a larger share of happiness or misery, throughout an endless eternity, for that will still be before it, more than a whole kingdom is capable of in ten thousand ages." How great, then, is the loss of one soul forever! The gain of all this world, and ten thousand such, with all their boasted enjoyments, would not indemnify one man for the loss of his soul. So our blessed Saviour, who knew the worth of souls, has taught us. (Mat. xvi. 26.) And yet how many are destroying their souls as fast as they can, by daily transgression, by neglecting the only way of salvation, by pride and self-righteousness, inordinate love of the world, by error and delusion, and the various ways suggested by a depraved heart, and devised by the god of this world, who blinds the minds of them that believe not, and leads them captive at his will. But we hasten,

III. To show how the divine apothegm, in the text, is illustrated and verified, in the church of God.

And here the first who meets the eye is *the slothful minister, or idle shepherd*. He is placed as a watchman on the walls of Zion. His duty is to warn the sinner when the sword cometh; to feed the flock over which he hath taken the oversight; to watch for souls, as one who has to give account; to be instant in season and out of season; to nurture and discipline souls for heaven. But in all this he fails. He seeks his own ease, profit and pleasure. The church languishes and pines away under his hand. His preaching is calculated neither to edify the body of Christ, nor to convert the sinner from the error of his way. Instead of being an ornament to his profession, and a blessing to the world, "he brings his sacred function into reproach, scattering the flock whom he should have gathered, and destroying whom he should have saved." Should he

moreover, be scandalous in his conduct, by intemperance, covetousness, or lewdness, he offends the people of God, hardens the hearts of sinners, brings a reproach upon the ministry, weakens its influence, and proves a stumbling-block to sinners wherever he goes. Such an one is Satan's best friend, and the greatest enemy of God and man. But if a *heretical teacher*, who can tell the good he destroys, by "privily bringing in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them." For, alas! "many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." They "handle the word of God deceitfully;"—they "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine of Christ, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." Such false teachers ruin many souls by causing them "to depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils." Then it is that "they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." The good Lord have mercy on those ministers, who, denying the proper divinity, and real sacrifice of the Son of God, deny *the Lord that bought them!* If these be not *damnable heresies*, then where shall we find any? Yet these are industriously taught, and too successfully propagated, under the plausible name of *Unitarian*, or the more beguiling and unsuspecting name of *Christian*, assumed by those who are well known in this country to have been long and industriously engaged in disseminating and inculcating the damnable doctrines of Arianism and Socinianism. One such *reverend sinner*, active, popular, and influential, at the head of a party, a university, or roving through the country, "handling the word of God deceitfully," deceiving the "hearts of the simple, by good words and fair speeches,"

(see Rom. xvi. 17, 18,) can destroy more good than a host of candid, open, avowed infidels. The licentious antinomian, likewise, who teaches that the law is no rule of life to believers under the gospel, that nothing is required in man's salvation but faith in Christ, thereby destroying the obligation to good works and holy living; as also the teacher of universal salvation, which destroys all distinction of character,—strikes at the root of all experimental religion,—confounds all notions of virtue and vice,—saps the foundation of morality,—takes off every restraint from vice,—opens the flood-gates of iniquity,—and speaks peace to the wicked;—from such teachers may the Lord speedily deliver our land, and from their poisonous errors save the souls of men!

There is likewise *the proud, conceited, ignorant, disputatious sectary*. If the people are awake to the concerns of religion;—if they are hungering for the bread of life;—if they are desirous to be taught *the good and the right way*,—instead of promoting their spiritual interests, and the good of the church, he forms parties, stirs up strife, distracts the minds of the simple, weakens the bands of brotherly love, and is made rather a successful instrument of satan to depreciate real christianity. He fights about matters that are comparatively indifferent; offends the pious of other denominations by misrepresenting and ridiculing their religious sentiments; hardens the hearts of the ungodly, and disgusts the people of God, and caricatures the pulpit, by his indecent, fulsome, ridiculous stories and expressions, designed “to court a grin, when he should woo a soul.” In the church, likewise, among its inferior officers, and private members, is to be found many a “Hymeneus and Philetus,” with their *profane and vain babblings*;—*and their word will eat as doth a canker*.—Many an “Alexander,” to weaken the hands of a pious

minister, as "the coppersmith" did St. Paul's, when he did him *much evil*,—"for," says he, "he hath greatly withstood our words."—Many a contracted, bigotted, imperious, intolerant "Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence,—prating against" those who are God's servants, and followers of the blessed Saviour, "with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would." (3 John 9, 10.) Whose cry is, "stand by, I am *sounder* than thou.—The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we." Who is ready to exclaim,—*I only am left*—yes, they are *few* indeed, if none belong to Christ who do not belong to their party—that do not see with their eyes—or hear with their ears—that sing not with them—that are not dipped with them, or sprinkled with them—that casteth out devils, and yet followeth not them. This abhorred spirit hath done more mischief in the world than can be possibly estimated. "The readiest way in the world," says the excellent Mr. Jay, "to thin heaven and replenish the regions of hell, is to call in the spirit of *bigotry*. This will immediately arraign and condemn and execute all that do not bow down and worship the image of *our* idolatry." Such a religion is without judgment, though not without teeth,—it bites and devours, and in times past has deluged the church of Christ with the blood of her martyrs! The forbidding sternness of bigotry is yet destroying the peace, the happiness, and the spiritual interests of many. It enters not into the kingdom itself, and others that would go in, it hinders. It not only assumes the authority to dictate, but likewise imposes its dogmas upon others, a wife and children perhaps, under pain of eternal damnation. What an usurpation of power, what an unauthorized stretch of domination is here!

“Let Cæsar’s dues be ever paid
 To Cæsar and his throne;
 But *consciences and souls were made*
 To be the Lord’s alone!”

May this implacable spirit, whose ignorance and folly are written in characters of blood,—whose ensanguined crest has so long been reared to affright the children of men,—and whose rash accusations, cruel surmises, and malignant anathemas, have withered and blasted the tender endearments of brotherly love, the fond enjoyments of domestic harmony, and ruined the souls of men, be speedily banished from the earth, to curse the world no more,

“Till joined in Christian fellowship and love,
The church on earth shall meet the church above.”

Time would fail, my brethren, and your patience be exhausted, were we to attempt an enumeration of all the evils occasioned by the unhappy conduct of wicked and mistaken men in the church of God. I shall therefore only mention *the professor that walketh disorderly*. This is a character, alas! too frequently to be met with:—and scarcely is there any one that does greater injury to the church and the souls of men than he. His covetousness, his dishonesty, his lewdness, his intemperance, his inflamed face, and inebriated breath, his carnal conformity to the world—yea, one act of his, brings the whole church into disgrace, and makes religion to stink in the very nostrils of those around him. “And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me, to make me to stink amongst the inhabitants of the land, amongst the Canaanites and Perizzites.” The disorderly walk and conduct of professors, forms the most popular and successful objection against christianity. ’Tis here the Philistines rejoice, and the uncircumcised triumph. ’Tis here the ungodly laugh, and exclaim, *Ah, so we would have it*. Christianity is stigmatized, and its professors arraigned as hypo-

crites. The wicked are hardened and emboldened in wickedness, the weak are offended, the saints are dishonoured, and the very name of God is blasphemed in the world. See how God himself complains of this in the case of David, (2 Sam, xii. 14,) "Because, by this deed, thou has given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also, that is born of thee, shall surely die." How great then, must the evil be, when by such conduct a man's own household, and the multitude around him, become disinherited and offended, and set against the very means of salvation! We hasten to make a few reflections which the subject naturally suggests.

1. This subject is calculated *to awaken inquiry, promote self-examination, and excite conviction.* The universal law of love requires of us that we love our neighbor as ourselves. That we endeavour to promote both his temporal and spiritual prosperity, by doing him all the good within our power. That we do unto him, as we would that he should do unto us. But how little have we done to fulfil this law of kindness and universal happiness! Instead of doing good in all the ways and opportunities afforded unto us, we have at many times and in various ways destroyed much good. We have done evil abundantly and successfully, and omitted the good that was within our power. We are greater sinners, and consequently more guilty than we are aware of. Indeed, we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. The malignity and the deceitfulness of sin is exceedingly great beyond conception. *Who can understand his errors?* And who would not be justly alarmed and tremble were all the evil he has done to himself and his fellow creatures fully portrayed and presented before him in the light of eternity, or in the light in which it will shortly appear before the bar of God! O how deeply are we fal-

len and sunk down into the lowest state of moral degradation and wretchedness! Surely man in his best estate is altogether vanity!

2. We are loudly called to *genuine sorrow and repentance for the evil we have done*. None are exempt from this duty. For though we may be ever so free from the more flagrant instances that have been mentioned, yet by means of our example there is not one amongst us who has not done much evil. We have by our neglect of salvation and the worship of God encouraged others to do so likewise. "And whether we intended it or not, we have confirmed many in their ungodly ways, and have contributed to their eternal ruin." But if any have answered less or more the description given, what need then have they for speedy and deep repentance! 'The imperious husband, the contentious wife, the disobedient child, the drunkard, the tale-bearer, the slanderer, the gambler, the seducer, the *honourable* murderer, and the self-destroying sinner;—as also the idle shepherd, the heretical teacher, the troublesome sectary, the bigotted professor, and the one that walks disorderly—all have need to weep to the latest hour of their lives; and were their "head a fountain of tears to run down incessantly" until that period, it would be no more than the occasion calls for. Let *the scoffer*, too, whose sneers and ridicule, whose menaces and actual unkindness, have discouraged and destroyed his wife or his child for whom Christ died, and who, but for such an obstacle, would have got safe to heaven, deeply wail because of the good he has destroyed, and for the blood that must be required at his hand. "If the whole world be of no value in comparison of a soul, then, in than single act, the scoffer has done more harm than the whole world can recompense." But how shall all our destructive influence be counteracted? The unhappy subjects thereof cannot

now, one half of them, be found. Many are gone to the eternal world; many are unknown to us; many have emigrated to other lands, and are there diffusing the contagion which they received from us. O, it is now put beyond our power to trace or even conceive of the evil we have done. Humble penitence is the only remedy. God be praised that such a door is yet open! Grant us every one, good Lord, a truly penitent heart, and a merciful forgiveness for all the good we have destroyed, and all the evils we have ever done!

3. Let us use all diligence, to the utmost of our power, *to repair the evil we have done.* To make satisfaction for sins with respect to God, we know, is the work of Christ only; whose blood alone cleanseth from all sin. But means and opportunities to do good are given to us. Let us try what *our example* can do. This is more forcible and extensive than all we can say. Let us fully consecrate ourselves to God. Let us glorify him in our bodies and our spirits; let our light so shine before men, that they may be constrained to glorify God likewise. *Our influence*; small as it may be, let it operate in the proper direction to counteract past evils, by using every mean in our power, and neglect no opportunity to awaken our fellow creatures and stir them up to flee from the wrath to come. *Our intercessions*; let them be fervent and continued at a throne of grace, that God may speedily counteract the reign of sin by his universal reign of grace. And let us earnestly pray for those particularly, who, unhappily, may have been allured by us from the path of rectitude and duty, that their souls may be saved and reign with Christ forever and ever.