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THE MADNESS OF MANKIND.

A SERMON BY THE REV. SAMUEL FINLEY, PREACHED IN THE "NEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH," PHILADELPHIA, JUNE 9TH, 1754.

"And madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead."—ECCOL. ix. 8.

WHOEVER seriously views and wisely considers the manners of mankind, and brings them to the test of right reason, will be forced to receive the same melancholy idea of them represented in this text. The words are Solomon's, who was not only an indefatigable student of nature, but an accurate observer of divine providence, of the conduct of men, and the several consequences of actions, divine and human. He here tells us the result of his researches respecting these. As to providence, that though God has a special regard to the holy and good, yet in external things he makes no difference, but "all things come alike to all." As to mankind, that they take occasion from these promiscuous dispensations to commit wickedness without reserve. "Their heart is full of evil;" for they observe, that "such as work wickedness are set up; and they who tempt God are even delivered." Mal. iii. 15.

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This has sometimes been puzzling to the pious, but has struck the ungodly with madness. Hence it comes, that "madness is in their heart while they live."

Madness is a state of irregularity and discomposure. The person affected with it is not fixed in his purpose; is not influenced in his conduct by the most engaging motives; pays no regard to the dictates of right reason; nor is careful about what is decorous, disadvantageous, or dangerous. Now, we are assured by unerring truth, that this is the state of the "sons of men." It is true, they make high pretences to wisdom, and have a show of it; but "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." 1 Cor. iii. 19. If madness were concealed in the heart, we could not discover it; but "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. xii. 34); and so by mens' words and actions we come to know what is in their hearts. Hence, a course of life contrary to right reason, and just rules of conduct, will evidence heart-madness.

In treating this subject, I am naturally led to show wherein the madness of human hearts discovers itself. This cannot be done but by mentioning particular instances of human conduct. And as I apprehend that the method of such a narration is in a great measure arbitrary, I shall not attempt a nice arrangement of the general heads in natural order, but propose them as they occur.

I. Precipitant conclusions concerning persons, things, or opinions, formed without evidence, and often in defiance of demonstration to the contrary, discover a degree of madness. The crowd of mankind determine the most im-

portant points, without weighing the reasons on both sides of the question. In their own imagination they quickly penetrate matters, which to the more judicious are abstruse and intricate. If they embrace truth, it is by accident. They contend for religion not because they see its proper evidence, but because they have been accustomed to it. And thus they may be orthodox and regular Christians, from no better principles than those from which the Turks are Mohammedans. Nay, they form their judgment of religion, the highest concern of all, with more indifference than of the small affairs of this life. From hence arise the many sottish opinions, wild reveries, and destructive heresies, that pass for pure religion with their respective votaries, divide the christianized world into so many opposite parties, are contended for with a peremptoriness that knows not to yield to argument, and promoted frequently with a bitter, sometimes with a bloody zeal. What intelligent Christian is there, who, without a mixture of pity and contempt, can observe the professors of wisdom become fools (Rom. i. 22); hear the dictates of eternal wisdom pronounced folly, with a supercilious air, and fanciful chimeras substituted in its room? It would seem as though the faculty of reasoning was, to many, given in vain; while one asserts the uselessness of it in religion, another, its *sufficiency* in our lapsed state. This denies the necessity of any divine revelation; that asserts, every circumstance must be immediately revealed. One thinks saving grace consists in moral honesty; another places it in the observance of invented forms. One is a libertine, who

fancies he serves God while he gratifies his lusts; another is superstitious, and thinks to please him by monkish austerities. One is content with a dead faith, which neither "purifies the heart," nor "works by love;" another is persuaded he shall be saved by his good works, though imperfect, without faith in the righteousness of Christ. This lays the whole stress on orthodox principles; that thinks it indifferent what we believe. Some doubt not their safety, because they are of such a particular religious denomination; others are of opinion that all denominations stand alike fair for salvation. Here is a bigot, who esteems every circumstance in religion to be essential, and whatever he believes to be right and true must be a term of communion; there is a latitudinarian whose religion has little or nothing in it that is important, or worthy to be earnestly contended for. Here unassuming speculation is triumphant; there ignorance is the mother of devotion. Here religion is dressed in gaudy attire, with Jewish, worldly pomp, insomuch that its first institution is hardly at all discernible; there the pure, external ordinances of God himself are rejected with scorn, from a swollen conceit of spirituality. Now all these contradictory parties will be equally stiff and positive in their notions; yet are all equally extravagant and monstrous, all opposite to divine revelation and the reason of things. And are all these, O my soul! are *all these* the rational sons of men? Are all these *sure* they are wise? Can truth, divine truth, be a system—a *system* did I say?—a heap of dotages? Can reason, strict reason, approve contradictions? or rather, must

we not assuredly conclude, "that madness is in their heart while they live?"

Nor shall we find more wisdom in their judgment of men, than of things. They conclude of characters in the lump; can hardly see anything amiable and good, when some things displease; nor are blemishes apt to be disgusting, when some good qualities shine. Superficial defects hide substantial excellencies from the vulgar eye; whilst the absence of all valuable accomplishments is easily supplied by mere sound, and empty show. Wisdom and virtue, meanly clothed, are despised; whilst ignorance and vice, dressed in purple, are honoured. An easy air, and genteel address, often recommend nonsense, and make flattery appear sincere; but an uncouth mode will cause the same persons to disrelish undissembled regard, and solid discretion. Even learned critics do sometimes defend the very absurdities of a favourite author, and censure what is truly sublime in another. Whole communities, nay, whole nations lie under the censure which belongs only to a part, and perhaps a small part of them. Thus mankind judge as though reason taught them to make the conclusion universal, when the premises are only particular.

II. Men judge not more precipitantly, than speak and act inconsiderately. How frequently may we see proper and improper confused—no respect had to time, or place, or persons; nor a thought of the obvious and unavoidable consequences! How many live as if there was no need of caution, no possible danger of missing the right, nor any extreme to be feared—as if nothing could follow from

any course of conduct, and a necessary cause would not produce its genuine effect—as if prudence and circumspection were names, and no power of deliberation had ever been given! They live at random, and seem to consider right and wrong with absolute indifference. In the religious life some are offensive, others stumble and fall, and some take offence when none is given. In the civil life, many ruin themselves in their worldly affairs, and others too, by indiscretion. Some live above their ability, engage in matters too high for them, and fall by those means by which they thought to rise. The imprudent pursuit of grandeur brings others into contempt, whilst they industriously seek to obtain a character which they cannot support; and climb to a pinnacle, where their brains are turned and they cannot stand. Many in a devout qualm engage in a course of strict religion, without a rational sense of its importance, or “counting the cost.” Luke xiv. 28. They think not what offences and stumbling blocks are in the way—what artifices of Satan—what allurements of the flesh, and what terrors of the world are combined to turn them aside—how “strait the gate,” how “narrow the path,” (Matt. vii. 14,) how arduous the ascent, and how deceitful and impotent their souls—what self-denial, what humbleness of mind, what watchfulness and care, and what courage and determined resolution, are requisite for the purpose. They assure themselves that they will stand firm against all assaults, though they were at no pains to dig deep, and found themselves on a rock. Hence, when the rain descends, when the floods come, and

the winds blow and beat upon them, they fall, (Matt. vii. 26, 27,) and are carried headlong down the stream. Hence their goodness is as a morning cloud, and vanishes like the early dew. Hos. vi. 4. They either become profane, or are taken in the snare of some delusive opinion or heresy. "They turn away their ears from the truth, and are turned unto fables," (2 Tim. iv. 4,) and thus ends their religion.

III. Many appear to have false views of what is advantageous or hurtful, and draw false inferences from actions and events. In how strange a light do they look on strict piety, who disdain it as mean, or avoid it as unpleasant; and how come the paths of sin to appear honourable and blissful? Religious persons and spiritual conversation are by many shunned, as though they were dangerous, while the loose and profane are chosen for companions, as though they were most safe. They are not afraid to violate the laws of God, yet they dread his threatened vengeance. Hell is their terror, sin their sport and entertainment. They tremble at the effect, yet delight in its proper cause. But how absurd is it, mentally to separate misery from sin, when they can never be separated in fact? The eternal reason of things has made their connection inviolable. What false apprehension have many of their own cases! The aged and infirm think of years to come, and hence defer their intended preparations for death. The drunkard never knows his capacity, but thinks he may safely venture to take the other glass; nor does the covetous miser ever judge truly of his necessity, and therefore lives poor in the midst of plenty.

Every occurrence is perverted. The goodness of God, which would seem sufficient to melt hard hearts, and form them according to his will, becomes a mean of hardening them against him. If he gives to some abundance of worldly wealth, they use it as though it were a license given them to indulge wantonness, excess of riot, luxury, and all those sensual pleasures, which to others are forbidden. If honour and power are conferred on them, they act as though they were advanced above a scrupulous regard to the divine commands. They seem to say, "Who is the Lord that we should obey him?" Ex. v. 2. Because the wicked prosper, they conclude that it is quite safe to follow their ways: "and because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed" (Eccl. viii. 11), they are bold in impiety, presuming on perpetual impunity. They see men despise piety, and even sit in the scorner's chair, yet no visible evil befalls them; hence some are tempted to think divine threats are but bug-bears, and religion but a fancy. On the contrary, pious people are distressed, often severely reproached and run down, and no visible regard manifested for all their care to please God. Upon this, others readily determine, that "it is vain to serve him!" Mal. iii. 14. Some, who made a plausible profession of strict religion, fall away, and prove themselves, by their after conduct, to have been but hypocrites; therefore, others carefully avoid any appearance of piety, that they may avoid hypocrisy. They expect to be accounted honest and upright, when they are openly wicked and glory in their shame.

IV. There are numbers who do not so much as attempt to form their judgment or regulate their practice, by reason. They follow the vogue without scruple. They seek no other test of truth, than that it is said by the great or the many; nor any other proof of the propriety and goodness of their behaviour, but that it is modish. Custom is to them instead of reason, and influences them much more powerfully, than the authority of God himself. Let their conduct be irrational, let it be wicked too, provided only it be fashionable. Has it a multitude to patronize it? Then it is no matter though it cannot stand the test of scripture; no, nor of common sense. The crowd, like a torrent, carries them along, and they lose themselves in it. Their weak minds are confused with the tumult, and made giddy with the glare of giddy pomp. Sedate thought and calm reason, by means of numberless airy vanities, lose their weight, and are resolved into fume and vapour. In this plight, it is no wonder that they esteem those contemptibly weak who choose rather to expose themselves to the censure of the world, than to offend God. They judge of religion itself by the fashion. By that they determine which of the divine commands it is proper to obey; and which of them, for the sake of decency, is to be laid aside. If religious discourse is reckoned impolite, a serious expression will shock a gay company, and a few would go near to disperse them. Though it is the will of God that sin should be reprov'd, and the sinner made ashamed, yet we would offend against modern politeness, should we discover even a calm disapprobation

of what is wickedly spoken or acted in company. They who would be quite acceptable to this world, must *at least seem* to approve what God condemns, that so none may ever be made uneasy by their presence. They must "say to every one that despises the Lord, and that walks after the imagination of his heart, Ye shall have peace, and no evil shall come upon you." Jer. xxiii. 17. "But, surely, the friendship of the world is enmity to God." James iv. 4. But let us proceed further, and take a view of men who mistake not their duty; who acknowledge the things "that are excellent, being instructed out of the law," and we cannot but conclude that they exceed in madness: for

V. Multitudes continually counteract their judgment and conscience when rightly informed. They own the soul to be more excellent than the body, yet are most anxious to provide for the latter. They spare not cost and pains to cure a bodily distemper, while the immortal spirit, all disordered, is quite neglected. Remedies are carefully sought for a head-ache, but none for a hard heart. A fever is deplored, irregular and distorted passions are indulged. The body is gorgeously clothed and delicately fed, while the soul is naked, without righteousness, and no bread of life sought after for its nourishment. It is of more value than the "whole world," yet is bartered away for a very small part of it, for vanity, for songs, for trifles. That heaven is infinitely preferable to this earth, eternal glory to temporal felicity, is not disputed; yet sinners choose to live here always. They are conscious to themselves, that

they would desire no other kind of blessedness than this world affords, could they but still enjoy it, and enjoy it fully, and, hence, grasp the present regardless of the future. They acknowledge that they should make it the very business of their life to please God, and that his favour is more valuable than the favour of all mankind; yet they gratify their appetites and humours, when they know they displease him in so doing; and if they stand fair in the opinion of men, are quite careless about his approbation. They commend virtue, but practise vice; and while they own that wickedness is the way to hell, walk boldly on in it at all adventures. They confess that reason should guide, and the passions should be governed by its dictates; yet when their passions become clamorous, the voice of reason is drowned, and its loudest remonstrances no more heard. The covetous man is drawn into absurdities by the love of money, the voluptuous hurries on in pursuit of ruining pleasures, and thirst of praise carries the ambitious headlong.

They make no suitable improvement of their own experiences, nor correct past follies by after observation. The world and its evil customs are infectious; they have been often caught in the same snare, yet never learn to be guarded and circumspect. The review of past scenes of guilty pleasures gives griping remorse, the present do not satisfy, yet many trials convince them not that the future will surely disappoint them. After drinking to excess, the heart is thirsty; and hunger succeeds the most plenteous repast. "In the midst of laughter the heart is

sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Prov. xiv. 13. For oftentimes reason is debauched, the conscience seared, the passions inflamed, the constitution broken, the estate ruined, and the person despised. Guilt is contracted, time wasted, and the spirits flag by means of an immoderate elevation. Sensual joys clog and surfeit, but do not content: they gratify the brute, but starve the man, and frequently ruin the Christian. Yet we see multitudes of mortals eagerly fluttering to grasp joys which, like airy phantoms, still elude their embraces, and are hardly the shadows of realities! Disappointed, they nevertheless still pursue, still go the tiresome road, and tread the same beaten path in vain! In fine, after numberless experiments, they neither learn the emptiness of earthly things, nor the deceitfulness of their own hearts.

VI. It is well known that madness hurries persons, who are affected with it, into most desperate courses: and this is the case of mankind. "They know the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death" (Rom. ii. 4); yet they do those, and delight in them. They sin against plainest precepts, guarded with most awful threatenings. In the very sight of Sinai's burning mount, amidst the thunders of offended Jehovah, hardy rebels durst form a god of gold. Sinners are still the same. They sin against shocking terrors, felt by themselves; and disregard alluring offers of pardon, and charming promises of eternal salvation. They sin, while they are receiving tender mercies, never considering, "that the goodness of God should lead them to repentance" (Rom. ii. 4), and

while they suffer the infliction of severe judgments. Examples of despair, the fearful ends of wretched offenders, deter them not; nor are they persuaded to be religious by the death-bed joys of pure and living piety. Let their dearest friends, and the most learned and godly ministers, convince and beseech them, yet will they not yield themselves to God. Solomon, with all his wisdom, the royal authority, joined with the sublimest strains of the "sweet singer of Israel," the persuasive oratory of Apollos, with Peter's burning zeal, could not turn sinners from their course. Let miracles be wrought, the mountains removed, the dead raised, the deaf made to hear, and the blind to see; even these things will not have the force of argument with them. "Uncover destruction, make hell naked" before them, with open eyes they rush into those flames. Let angels come from heaven, and fiends from the infernals; let eternal raptures, and endless horrors, be presented lively to their view, and they will hardly so much as make a pause. Tell them, nay, show them, how sottish and foolish their way is, yet they will not be ashamed. Conscience speaks, but it is not heard; commands, but is not obeyed. What shall I say more? They "rush on God himself, on the thick bosses of his buckler"(Job xv. 26)—they provoke incensed Omnipotence to unequal engagement; defy his power, despise his truth, and like leviathans, "laugh at the shaking of his spear." Job xii. 29. They cannot successfully contend, nor is it possible to escape, yet they will not submit—will be broken rather than bow, and "dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel,"(Psa. xi. 9.)

rather than comply with the confessedly righteous will of God. They are told that eternal damnation cannot be avoided, nor eternal glory obtained, but only by the merits of Jesus Christ; yet many, (could it have been thought?) many make light even of a Saviour! despise the Redeemer! most horrid, most desperate thought! His exquisite agonies, his exceeding sorrowful soul, his bloody sweat, the soldiers' scourges, the crown of thorns, the cruel mockings, the painful and accursed death he endured for sin, instead of affecting them with reverence and love to his person, are the matter of their scorn; or, at best, received with cold indifference. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." Gen. xlix. 6. "Be astonished, O ye heavens," at the madness, the daring impiety, of guilty mortals! "be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate." Jer. ii. 12.

VII. Madness discovers itself in absurd and unreasonable hopes. Earthly-minded and sensual persons hope to content their lustful appetites by gratifying them to the full; whereas it is plain, that all vicious passions, like the dropsy, increase by indulgence. Endeavours to satisfy them, and by that means to get rid of their importunate cravings, is the same as heaping fuel on fire in order to extinguish it, which yet only serves to heighten and perpetuate the flame. There is no mean that has a proper tendency to quell irregular desires, but only self-denial. Some hope to obtain heaven without holiness; "to be glorious in the eyes of the Lord," though quite unlike him; to dwell for ever in his presence, though "enemies in their

minds by wicked works ;” and to enjoy spiritual blessedness, while they carnalize their affections, and more and more indispose themselves to relish it. Thus they separate what God has joined together, while they expect the end without the appointed means. They hope to be pardoned without a heart-purifying faith, and accepted of God without the imputed righteousness of Christ—to be embraced by that mercy which they grossly abuse, and spared by that patience which they continue to provoke. Nay, they propose, what is obviously impossible, to live with the wicked, the worldly, and debauched, and yet to die with the holy and self-denied ; to be followers of the meek and humble Jesus, and yet indulge wrath and ambition ; and to be happy without friendly intercourse with the Father of their spirits, and fountain of bliss ; and hence, live contented, without “having fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ.” 1 John i. 3. Though all fallible and prone to deceive, they nevertheless depend more firmly on each other’s word, than on the promise and oath of God, “who cannot lie.” Tit. i. 2. They hope to get victory over sin by slothful wishes, without striving earnestly against it, and to become somehow good, without ever “exercising themselves unto godliness.” 1 Tim. iv. 7. Oh, what shocking disappointments they meet with! The higher they rise, the more dreadful their fall. They will be “cut down like a tree,” (Job xix. 10,) and end in certain despair.

VIII. Madness appears in the precarious fickleness of human hearts. Mankind are blown hither and thither,

like withered leaves in autumn, or like chaff, the sport of winds. They are not only contradictory to each other, but the same individual is discordant with himself. One thing is approved in the morning, the contrary in the evening. Now love is predominant, but the next pulse beats disaffection to the same object. This hour the sinner, disturbed in mind, rejects a favourite lust with abhorrence; the next, he calls and embraces it. He now resolves to be religious in earnest, but presently defers it till to-morrow; and when the morrow is come, he has forgotten the whole.

Now the judgment is clear, and things appear in comely order; now it is covered with clouds, and what was order becomes confusion. Now the heart is calm, easy and pliant; now a tempest ruffles the bosom, and obstinacy that cannot bend takes place. Now mercy and kindness sweeten the temper, which is presently soured by revenge and moroseness. Now he steers a steady course this way, but turns to a different point with the next veering gale. Excellent sentiments are quickly blotted, and the last impressions razed out by the next succeeding. A determinate and fixed resolve but mocks the observer, and seems more like the effect of chance, than of judgment and deliberation.

How ludicrous are the quick changes of customs and fashions! yet each of them approved, and each of them censured in its turn by the very same persons! Now it pleases; now it gives disgust; and now it pleases again. The gay and fashionable, and they who live in affluent circumstances, are busied too, and even perplexed in the

variety of vanity, and wearied in the giddy chase—and though many of them are, in some lesser points, more polished than others, yet they afford us a prospect not more rational, nor less wild, than those they despise. Worldly prosperity, perverted from its use by human depravity, makes their passions impetuous, their impatience violent, and their judgment weak. This being the character, though not of all, yet of the greater part who glory in *high life*, what can follow from it but a wild inconstancy? O my soul! how evanid are human thoughts and human things! how delusive the scenes of mortal pleasure! and how little reason is there to depend on the power, or wisdom, or fidelity of the fallen human race! “Trust not in princes themselves, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help,” (Psa. cxlvi. 3,) but rather “cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?” Isa. ii. 22. These characters are no fictions, nor exaggerations of the truth, but are all taken from the life. And though the half is not told, yet in what a shocking point of light do even these rough and imperfect sketches set mankind!

But what aggravates this madness to the highest degree is, that “after all they go to the dead.” Solemn consideration! The gay and jovial, the rich, the great, the poor and mean, the sorrowful and afflicted—all depart hence, and are seen no more among the living! See whole ages swept away by the “besom of destruction!” noisy and bustling millions silent in the dust! and all their mortal honours, their sensual joys, and earthly cares, are for ever

departed with them! What authority or empire have Alexander the Great, Cyrus, or Cæsar now? Where are their favourites, their friends, their flatterers, and their subjects? Who fears their frowns, trembles at their threats, or courts their favour in the house of silence? And what do their triumphs and spoils avail them now? Implacable enemies are hushed into everlasting peace. Are these the men that "made the earth tremble, that shook kingdoms?" Isa. xiv. 16. They are become weak as the meanest; their pomp is brought down to the grave; the worm is spread under them, and the worms cover them. Isa. xiv. 10, 11. Thus mankind in every age bustle and die. Like bubbles they are blown up, and glitter and break; like flowers they spring, bloom, and are cut down, and like "shadows they pass away," and "continue not." Job xiv. 2. But whither do they pass? Where shall our curious or rather solicitous thoughts follow them? Is death the end of their existence? No; "after that comes the judgment." They are summoned to appear before the august, the impartial, and sovereign Judge; they stand at his bar, and hear an irrevocable doom. What doom! Can we bear to contemplate the state of those, who madly provoked their Judge, and perished impenitent? Does not the heart recoil, the imagination startle, at the direful thought of a horrible gloom—regions of eternal despair—the steam of sulphur mixed with unquenchable fire—the torturing gripes, the relentless lashings of a guilty conscience, that gnawing, never-dying vulture—the insufferable impression of almighty wrath, and the hideous shrieks

of damned souls? And are the bare thoughts of these things shocking? what, then, will it be to endure them? And can we judge those to be sober, and in their right minds, who are in continual danger of plunging into these miseries, and yet are secure and careless about any endeavour to escape from the wrath to come? What an amazing scene do the sons and daughters of pleasure exhibit to us! They are daily exposed to a thousand deaths; are easily broken by numberless unforeseen accidents; and if they die impenitent, they are for ever undone: yet are no more alarmed than if they were immortal. All thoughtless, all volatile, hating serious things, and lectures of death, which, therefore, surprises them, finds them unprovided, hurries them away, and pushes them reluctant down the dreadful precipice—from time into eternity. O the hardy adventure! to take a leap in the dark into an endless, unalterable state! Merry company, balls, assemblies, and plays, amuse them so, that they forget they are mortal, till they die, and see not their danger till they are beyond relief. They live in jest, “and after that they go to the dead” in earnest. What degree of folly is it to catch a feather, and let go a crown! to gain a toy, and lose a kingdom! for a morsel, to barter a birth-right! and for a moment’s pleasure, to part with everlasting joys, and suffer eternal woes! Are these your men of sense, who look indignant on those who are so weak as to be deeply concerned about such important affairs? “Vain man, forsooth, would be wise, though he is born like a wild ass’s colt.” Job xi. 12. It is an inexpressible absurdity, that

temporal things, whether riches, honour, or pleasure, should engross the intensest thoughts of beings bound for eternity. And it is an eternal solecism in religion, to be engaged about the concerns of it in a cold and indifferent manner. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Matt. xi. 12.

After considering all these things, will it seem an abuse of mankind, if I compare this world to a great bedlam, filled with persons strangely and variously distracted? Some are so desperate as to refuse all salutary medicines; and the habit so inveterate, as to non-plus the physician's skill, and make him almost despair of their cure. Some appear hopeful for awhile, but relapse, and their case is more dangerous than before. And some are actually recovered in a less, some in a greater degree; but not so much as one perfectly well. My text will warrant the comparison; and I may not flatter mankind by soothing expressions, when their case requires plain dealing; nor be so polite as not to learn of God how to speak, when I deliver his message.

From the whole we are taught

1. How little reason any one has to be puffed up with popular applause, or dispirited when he does not obtain it. For, consider, who are the judges? Are they all persons of sound mind, whose conclusions are according to truth? Far from it. It is true, all fancy themselves mighty good judges of merit; but I speak charitably, when I say, perhaps one in a hundred can distinguish. That soul, therefore, is lighter than vanity that is tossed hither and

thither, according to the ebbing and flowing tides of inconstant affections. The favourable opinion of mankind is chiefly to be valued as it gives an opportunity to serve their best interests more successfully.

2. How much reason there is in that divine exhortation, "Be not conformed to this world." Rom. xii. 2. Do not act upon its principles, nor accommodate yourselves to its evil customs and modes. For this world is at variance with God, and "no man can serve two masters." Matt. vi. 24. It is here modish to make light of religion, and treat it, if treated at all, with an air of the most absolute indifference and unconcern. Nay, with many it is polite, to sneer at solemn devotion, and make a mock of sin. He appears big, who dares trample on sacred and inviolable authority, and laugh at divine threatenings; and wise, who can ridicule the mysteries of the gospel. He who is a companion of such fools shall be destroyed. Prov. xiii. 20.

Lastly. Let the follies of others be a motive to engage your more earnest pursuit of saving wisdom. "Seek her as silver, search for her as for hidden treasure." Prov. ii. 4. "Happy is the man that finds her, for she is more precious than silver, than fine gold and rubies—her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Prov. iii. 13—15 and 17. If any of you lack this spiritual wisdom, ask it of God, who gives liberally and upbraids not; and let it ever be a small matter with you, to be judged weak and foolish, by a mad world, provided always that you are wise to salvation.

THE END.