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John B. Romeyn

THE
DANGER AND DUTY
OF
YOUNG PEOPLE:
A
SERMON,

DELIVERED IN THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, IN CEDAR-STREET, NEW-YORK,

APRIL 4, 1810.

BY JOHN B. ROMEYN, D.D.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace,
with them that call on the Lord, out of a pure heart."—2 Tim. ii 22.

NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY WILLIAMS AND WHITING,
AT THEIR THEOLOGICAL AND CLASSICAL BOOK-STORE, NO. 118,
PEARL-STREET.

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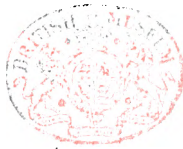
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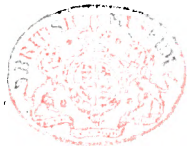
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TO
THE YOUNG PEOPLE,
WORSHIPPING IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
IN CEDAR-STREET,
THIS SERMON,
PREACHED FOR THEIR BENEFIT, AND PUBLISHED
AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS INSCRIBED,
WITH
EVERY SENTIMENT OF RESPECT,
AND
EVERY FEELING OF AFFECTION,
BY THEIR PASTOR.



A
S E R M O N,
&c.

ECCLES. XI. 9, 10. XII. 1.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

YOUTH is a season both important and interesting. Important, because then principles are acquired and habits formed, which will produce comfort or misery in the different stages of subsequent life. Interesting, because then the disposition is frank, the temper docile, the manners inartificial, and the whole life comparatively innocent. And yet it is true, lamentably true, as the wise man says, that "childhood and youth are vanity." We all bring with us into the world a sinful nature, which discovers itself in our earliest, as well as our more advanced and declining years. "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child*," and "the iniquities of our youth," are distinctly noticed in God's holy word, as a just cause of reproach, even

* Prov. xxii. 15.

in mature age*. Young people ought then to be warned of the peculiar dangers to which they are exposed, and exhorted to walk in the ways of wisdom, which are pleasantness, and her paths, which are peace. These two great objects are comprised in the words of the text, spoken by the Royal Preacher of Israel, and will constitute the topics of the present discourse. May God give you ears to hear, and quicken your consciences to apply what you hear, that his glory may be promoted, and your precious souls saved!

I. The preacher warns young people, in the most solemn manner, of the peculiar dangers to which they are exposed: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." "In these words it is supposed, that the persons addressed will not be convinced that all was vanity, until they had made the trial; that they would desire liberty and opportunity to pursue every pleasure, and to gratify every inclination, and regale every sense, during the vigour of youth; and that they were sanguine in their expectations of happiness! Well, says the wise man, follow the bent of your desires, wherever they lead you; but be assured, at the same

* Psal. xxv. 7. Jer. xxxi. 19.

time, that for all these things God will call you into judgment*." To enter fully into the spirit of the warning, thus understood, it will be necessary to illustrate the delusions of young people about happiness, and then unfold the judgment of God, to which they are exposed on account of these delusions.

First: Youth is a dangerous season. Care then sits lightly on the breast. Gay spirits brighten the face. The passions, budding and hastening to ripeness, usurp the place of the understanding. Worldly pleasure, though decked in the voluptuous attire of an harlot, appears to the disordered imagination with all the attractive charms of the most bewitching beauty. Young people, acting from the impulse of the moment, without reflecting upon consequences, consider her as abundantly able to afford them the happiness they seek and desire. Without attempting an analysis of the youthful mind, my design is to combine a few of its prominent traits in one view, that you may see some of the sources of this delusion to which it is exposed.

The *love of distinction* is one of the prominent traits of the youthful character. Originally this was a virtuous passion, implanted in our constitution. It was a love of moral excellence. But by the fall it has been corrupted. Sinners do not love to be like

* Scott, on the text.

God ; but to be superior to their fellow-sinners in any respect, even in sin. To be unknown ; to be humble ; to be inferior, is grating to human pride. One of the first evidences we give of our fallen state, is the love of distinction. The mere child is pleased with a superiority above other children in his dress ; in the attention which he receives, or the flatteries which he hears ; nay, in his very play-things. Nor does this passion subside as he advances in years. Youth are emulous of distinction ; they sigh after it ; it is the fondest wish of their hearts. No motive so powerful as this can be presented to their consideration ; no reward so gratifying to their feelings can be offered to them. Would to God it were always a distinction in moral excellence ; in likeness to God ! but it is a distinction in any thing. Rather than not be distinguished, young people will make themselves notorious in vice and wickedness ; in profligacy and impurity.

Another prominent feature of the youthful character, is the *love of variety*. The mind is formed capable of attending to the different objects presented to its view, in the empires of Nature and Art. On none of these does it love to dwell long at any one time ; for a consciousness of the want of something necessary for happiness, prompts it to rove from one to the other, that it may find the chief good. Besides, curiosity, which originally was

a laudable and holy desire of knowing the perfections, works, and ways of God, to increase our admiration and love of him, has become by sin a restless, insatiate appetite after new things, merely for the pleasure they produce. One of the best writers in the English language, in his essays on the pleasures of the imagination, considers Novelty as one of the sources of these pleasures, "because it fills the soul with agreeable surprise, gratifies its curiosity, and gives it an idea of which it was not before possessed. It serves us, he adds, for a kind of refreshment, and takes off from that satiety we are apt to complain of, in our usual and ordinary entertainments*." To the young especially does novelty appear with irresistible charms, and in their minds the love of it predominates with peculiar power. This renders them so generally fickle in their choice, unsteady in their pursuits, and averse to habits of application. Just entering into life, with understandings not yet strengthened by exercise, and judgments not yet matured by experience, every thing around them seems lovely and excellent. They wish to enjoy the whole, and wander from object to object, to taste its sweets, to enjoy its gratifications. The more they wander, the more they love to wander. If not checked in season the passion becomes rooted, and produces a maturity and old age, vagrant, capricious, and useless.

* Spectator Vol. 6. No. 412.

The last feature I shall notice of the youthful character, is *the love of animal indulgence*, or the gratification of those appetites, which are peculiar to the body. Through sin the body has become the prison of the soul, and keeps all its faculties in subjection to the will of the flesh. Sensual objects bound the views of all who know not God, and love not the Lord Jesus Christ. Their great concern is, what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed. Pamper their taste, decorate their persons, place them in splendid mansions, and you please them more than to procure them the joys of heaven. They have no conception of happiness, apart from material objects. This is particularly the case with young people. They have in general very confused ideas of the soul, and its superior importance. They wish to gratify their senses; to please their eyes, their ears, and their feelings. The body to them is of more importance than the soul; and the indulgence of its appetites is, in their estimation, the grand object of every exertion. The soul is merely a servant in waiting, to administer, from time to time, by its powers, to the gratification of the members of the body.

These prevailing passions of youth which have been merely noticed, separate or combined, influence the choice they make of their reading—of

their conversation—of their company—of their enjoyments. In each of these particulars they most seriously and awfully mistake their true interest, and real happiness.

1. Their *reading* is generally of a light and trifling kind, such as novels, romances, dramatic compositions, abridgments, selected beauties, and the like. Of these works, to the regret of every reflecting, serious person, we have an overflowing, and accumulating abundance. They are, at best, not suited to the actual state of mankind; or if suited, by no means calculated to do them much good. They contribute largely to impoverish the human mind, and produce habits unfriendly to social intercourse. Scarcely any exertion of intellect is required to comprehend them, and the least space of time suffices to digest them. The slightness of their contexture, the addition constantly made to their number, and the nature of the matter which fills their pages, render them peculiarly acceptable to youthful minds. To these sources they eagerly resort, to gratify their curiosity, and from them they profusely furnish themselves, with the miserable shreds and patches of knowledge, to attract notice.

The superficial information thus acquired, produces, in too many instances, an overweening and

absurd self-conceit. Nor is this all the mischief to which they are exposed from such reading. In novels, romances, and plays, with scarcely an exception, they meet with such loose morality, and such pagan religion, as cannot but corrupt their notions of truth and their habits of life*.

2. The *conversation* of young people is ordinarily vain, loose, and unprofitable. They hesitate not to indulge themselves in profane swearing. I tremble when I think of the solemn fact, that miserable worms of the dust dare to sport with Jehovah's name, to their own undoing. At that awful name which they take in vain, the mountains melt, and the earth quakes, nay, the very devils tremble. Truly "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind; but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil full of deadly poison†." Oh why do men so willingly commit in mere sport, the sins of the tongue! No practice so strikingly proves the corruption of our nature, as that of profane swearing. It gratifies no passion or appetite but pure, unmixed hatred and malignity, of the great God.

* See Note I.

† James iii. 6—8.

And yet young people are guilty of it. Many of them think it manly to take God's name in vain. Others act thus to show their superiority to vulgar prejudices. Miserable deceivers of themselves! And yet how numerous!

Youth also delight in light and frothy conversation; conversation which does no good, which affords no happiness. What the Christian poet says, is strictly applicable.

“ Fashion, leader of a clattering train,
“ Whom man for his own hurt permits to reign,
“ Who shifts and changes all things but his shape,
“ And would degrade her votary to an ape ;
“ The fruitful parent of abuse and wrong,
“ Holds an usurp'd dominion over his tongue ;
“ There sits and prompts him with his own disgrace ;
“ Prescribes the theme, the tone, and the grimace ;
“ And when accomplished in her wayward school,
“ Calls gentleman whom she has made a fool*.”

Could the conversation which takes place in the most polished circles of youth be penned, and exhibited in all its inanity, its pure frivolity, its silliness, its idleness, its thoughtlessness; how would blushes mantle the cheek, and confusion fill the heart, of those who engage in it! Serious, manly, useful topics, when introduced, damp the spirits, and seal the lips. Such conversation destroys their

* Cowper, on Conversation.

pleasure! I need say no more to show what kind of conversation they choose.

3. The *company* which young people choose is the thoughtless, the gay, the dissipated, the irreligious. Such characters please them, being suited to their *taste*, and their propensities. With them they can associate without being reproved and admonished; without hearing one word of God, of death, or eternity. These things, though realities, they never wish to be applied to their hearts or consciences. They desire not the knowledge of these things, and therefore shun the fellowship of those who would feel it their duty to warn them. The proverb is true, and strictly applies, "tell me your company, and I will tell you the man." The friends we choose constitute an index of the state of our hearts, and our prevailing temper of mind. Young people as well as old, associate with those who love what they love, feel as they feel, and live as they live. You will ordinarily find them among those that fear not God, nor keep his commandments; among those who are lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God, lawless gamblers, licentious wits, blasphemous scoffers. They walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the way of sinners, and sit in the seat of the scornful.

4. The *enjoyments* of young people, are of the

same nature with their reading, their conversation, and their company. I might enlarge on them in several discourses; but, adapting my remarks to the present times, I shall briefly notice the theatre,—parties of pleasure,—games of chance,—and sports of the field. These constitute so many sources of imaginary happiness to unthinking youth, and require distinct consideration.

(1.) The *Theatre* by some is called a school of morals. But I ask, who established it as such? Has God? Is there any direct or indirect warrant for it in the Scriptures? No. It originated in Heathen lands, and has ever been considered by the Christian Church, as unfriendly to true religion*. If it be a school of morals, it must be a handmaid to the ministry of the word. The two must mutually assist and support each other. But is this the fact? Will the spirit and the views which the theatre produces, harmonize with the spirit and views which the preaching of the gospel produces? Can these two means of teaching morals be identified? Assuredly not. Either then the morality of the gospel is unsound, or that of the theatre is so. The morality of the latter is grossly adulterated; and exactly in proportion to its influence over the mind, will be the distaste felt for the morality of the gospel. As an evidence of this, mark

* See Note, II.

those who frequent the theatre. Are they religious, pious people? people who love to read the Scriptures, and to pray? People who fear to sin, and desire to be like God? Judge ye. Besides, what is the character of the actors? Do they fear God, and keep his commandments? Are they, in the gospel sense of the word, virtuous? Are they moral and exemplary? By their fruits, said Christ, speaking of false prophets, ye shall know them*. The text will apply in this case, as well as in others; and when applied, proves the theatre to be a school, whose very tendency and direct effects are hostile to the spirit, as well as the letter of the gospel. Let a man, by the preaching of the gospel, be made sensible in some good degree of his perilous situation as a sinner, and then attend at the theatre; he will find his impressions diminished, and that in proportion to the interest he has felt in what he has seen and heard. Let him, or any other person, after returning from the theatre, attempt to read the bible, or to pray, and he will find himself indisposed and disqualified for both employments. Indeed, there never was advanced a more unfounded position than this, that the theatre is a school of good morals. It is encouraged generally, only in a corrupted state of society, and by those individuals particularly, who are very careful not to possess, or at least to manifest too much religion. The

* Matt. vii. 16.

theatre ever has been, and ever will be, merely a place of amusement. In this light it is viewed by those who frequent it, as must appear to every person who attends for a moment to the character of those plays which draw the fullest houses. To the young especially, the theatre is a source of enjoyment, as it suits their prevailing taste, and gratifies their ruling passions. They meet in it with no hindrances to sin ; no warnings against irreligion ; no mementos of a future judgment. They return from it as they went, strangers to God, confirmed in their dislike to his truth, by the very pleasure which it has afforded.

(2.) *Parties of pleasure* constitute another source of enjoyment to young people. On this subject I desire to be correctly understood. The love of social intercourse, is a principle implanted in our very constitution, the gratification of which is necessary, not only for our happiness, but for the performance of our duty. The gospel sanctions this principle, and encourages all its followers to cherish it more and more. The meetings of friends to enjoy each others company, are then proper. The interchanges of civility between men for the purposes of relaxation from business, by conversation or the moderate enjoyment of the bounties of providence, are proper. The multiplied courtesies of life, which, springing from our social nature, render our con-

nexion in the community a blessing to us, are also proper. But meetings of friends, interchanges of civility, courtesies of life, whose professed object is pleasure; not intellectual; not spiritual; not the pleasure of friendship, or of conversation, or of benevolence; but a pleasure which dissipates reflection; which kills devotion; which prevents the blandishments of friendship; which makes conversation idle prattle; which diverts the kind designs of benevolence;—they cannot be proper: for the pleasure they contemplate is merely that of the animal spirits, in which the rational soul has no concern; in which the Lord is not regarded, nor the operations of his hand. This pleasure, produced by company, especially a crowd of both sexes mixed together, and depending for its continuance or liveliness on the combined effects of music, dancing, and refreshments*, evaporates in solitude, and dreads that communing with our hearts, which reason and the gospel represent both as a duty and a privilege. Besides, it fatigues the body, and harasses the mind; disqualifies for the service of God; is destroyed by the recollection of eternal concerns; and utterly forbids preparation for death. How then can parties formed for the express purpose of enjoying this pleasure, be lawful? How can they be consistent with duty and interest? It is a pleasure built upon the total absence of religion, and heightened in propor-

* Note III.

tion to the want of religious feelings. The indulgence in it will therefore plant thorns in a dying bed, and fill the soul with unutterable anguish in the prospect of judgment.

(3.) *Games of cards and dice*, constitute another source of youthful enjoyment. They are considered by multitudes as harmless amusements ; and yet they gradually and powerfully tempt those who use them as such, to the foul, nefarious practice of gambling. Besides, we must recollect that the issue of these games does not depend on human skill. On what, then ? it may be asked. On the superintending, particular providence of God, assuredly : for, saith the wise man, The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord*. To use the lot, then, or to resort to chance in any matter, is to refer the issue of that matter to God by a direct appeal. Thus the Jews were taught by God himself to consider this subject†. In what other light can it be viewed ? Why do we lay aside our own agency, if it be not to submit to the decision of a superior being ? Contingent events are the result of the divine determination, and the product of the divine agency, as well as other matters. Nothing happens by chance ; not even the most trifling occurrence : for, saith our Lord, “ Are not two sparrows sold

* Prov. xvi. 33. † Levit. xvi. 8. 10. Numb. xxvi. 55, 56. xxxiii. 54. Josh. 14 to 21 chap. &c.

for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered*." Hence games of chance are breaches of that commandment which says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain†." They are irreverent, because thoughtless, trifling appeals to divine providence; and even when used for amusement, without staking money, are as criminal as cursing and swearing: for in both cases God's holy name is profaned‡. They certainly produce no happiness, and ordinarily excite some of the worst feelings of our nature, as well as lead in the end to the most ruinous habits of life.

(4.) *Sports of the field* constitute the last source of youthful enjoyments which will be noticed. By these I mean chiefly the sports of the turf, as they are called, which collect a host of idlers and gamblers; cherish habits of dissipation and extravagance; waste precious time, for which an account must be rendered to God; and enfeeble the restraints of morality and religion.

These are some of the delusions of young people, in relation to their happiness. They thus let their hearts cheer them in the days of their youth,

*Matt. x. 29, 30. † Exod. xx. 7. ‡ Note IV.

and walk in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes. I proceed now to unfold, in the

Second place, the judgment of God, to which they are exposed. “ Know thou, says the wise man, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” Though the judgment here meant be, strictly speaking, that future trial which awaits all men in eternity, yet it may without violence be considered as including the righteous displeasure which God manifests in this life against the delusions of young people. This displeasure, if not averted by seasonable repentance, is the sure and certain prelude of future punishment. It ought, therefore, to be brought into view at all times ; and the more so in this case, because these delusions are considered as innocent. To determine whether they are or not, let us ascertain the effect they have on the religion,—the morality,—the usefulness,—and the happiness of young people. If this effect be injurious in all these particulars, we may safely conclude they are criminal, and must, without repentance, meet with eternal punishment.

1. What is the *religion* of those young people, who cherish the delusions mentioned? By religion is meant our obligation to serve God in soul and body, as our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer. It includes all the exercises of a gracious heart,

and all the diversified actions of a godly life. Repentance towards God, faith in the Lord Jesus, and holy obedience to the divine Law, as a rule of life, are its constituent requisites. Do those youth who seek their happiness in the polluted enjoyments, which have been unfolded in detail, practise these indispensable duties? Alas! they have no fear of God before their eyes; no sense of his presence impressed upon their minds; no desire to please him cherished in their hearts. If they do not openly deny his truth, they are lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God*. They delight themselves in such things as directly draw off the affections from the Lord. He is not in all their thoughts. They forget and neglect him, if they do not despise his ordinances. How can it be otherwise? Such a course of life as they lead, is, in all its characteristics, an irreligious one. The blow then, the deadly blow it gives to their religious principles, and habits, is a solemn, and awful mark of the divine displeasure. Religion is God's choicest gift to men, intended to enlighten, sanctify, and save them. They who neglect, or reject it, as long as they persevere in such conduct prove, that they are given up by him to a reprobate mind.

2. Not better is the influence of these delusions, on the morality of the young. This cannot exist in

* 2 Tim. iii. 4.

its genuine state without true religion—for true religion alone unfolds the exclusive standard of right and wrong. They who forsake this standard, wander in darkness, and exhibit the most wretched mistakes. Of this we have both a proof and illustration, in those youth who walk in the ways of their hearts, and in the sight of their eyes. Their views of human duty are circumscribed by selfish maxims. They indulge themselves in liberties of speech, which are inconsistent with strict propriety: And to enumerate no more particulars, they do not hesitate to gratify lascivious desires at every risk. The general looseness of their morals, on which it is not necessary for me to enlarge, evinces the displeasure of God. It is one of the marks of his righteous judgment, according to the scriptures, to give up men to their hearts' desire, to do that which is unseemly.

3. The *usefulness* of young people is impaired, if not ruined, by their course of life. Correct principles, and a correct conduct, are absolutely necessary to make any one useful. Correct principles pre-suppose the proper cultivation of our intellectual powers; and correct conduct can only proceed from the influence of true religion on the heart, so as to destroy its prevailing love of sin. When the scruples of conscience are overcome in young people; when their principles of morality

are corrupted, and the little sense of religion they possess is erased from their hearts, they become victims of depraved passions. They are initiated into scenes at which modesty blushes, and integrity revolts with horror. On altars dedicated to the prince of darkness, they offer incense to their own destruction. How, then, can they be useful? Their minds are not stored with useful knowledge, so that they cannot instruct others. Their lives are careless, dissipated, and sinful, so that they are no good examples to others. They only increase the aggregate of misery in society, by adding their stock to the mass of corruption which exists in it. Unless they reform, unless they alter their mode of living, they prepare for themselves a disreputable old age. This *uselessness* of young people who follow their hearts' desire, is a marked evidence of God's displeasure. To a manly, reflecting mind, a heavier temporal judgment cannot befall a person, than to be a mere cumberer of the ground.

4. Young people in these delusions do not find the happiness they seek. They cannot say truly, We are satisfied; we have experienced in any of these things, *that* which we need and desire. All their enjoyments leave behind them in their breasts an aching void. They are restless, uneasy, fretful under afflictions, and terrified at the prospect of death. Happiness is "that perfect and complete

good, which is suited to intelligent nature.*" It must therefore exist, independent of the world, and of the body : for this good cannot be found in the world, which is filled with changes, or in the body, which is subject to sickness and death. Young people, then, in their disappointed expectations about happiness, can clearly see the judgment of God. He thus pronounces his decision on their course of life, This your way is your folly. And he adds for their good, " Know, therefore, and see that it is an evil thing, and better that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee†."

But this judgment thus manifested here, will be consummated hereafter. They who find that their course of life impairs their religion, their morality, and happiness in this world, if they do not repent, cannot but look for fiery indignation and awful punishment in the world to come. For all these things, God will bring the young into judgment. Young people ought constantly to realize their responsibility to God. Before his bar they must appear on the last day, to give in their account for their reading, their conversation, their company, their enjoyments. They will be judged according to his holy word, which they have enjoyed, and which, in all the truths or duties connected with salvation is so

* Leighton. † Jer. ii. 19.

plain, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err essentially concerning them.

But does this word, it may be asked, condemn the course of life which has been unfolded? It does; if not in so many words, it does by the moral taste it produces and cherishes, and the line of conduct it recommends and enforces. What though we find nothing in it about the theatre, or parties of pleasure, or novels, and the like? Do not such commands as these, "Pray without ceasing* ; be not conformed to this world † ; pass the time of your sojourning here in fear ‡," absolutely interdict these things, by creating a disposition of mind which revolts from them? But we need not reason on the subject, or multiply words about it. It is capable of demonstration to all who believe in the necessity of religion and pure morals. The matter of fact is indubitable. I appeal to the experience and conscience of every young person within my hearing. Do the theatre, parties of pleasure, novels, and the company of the gay and thoughtless, promote religion in your hearts, and pure morals in your lives? Do these things make you fear God, love Jesus Christ, and delight in the law of God? On the contrary, do they not destroy your fear of God, your love of Christ, and your delight in the divine law? How then can they be proper? How can they be consistent with your pre-

* 1 Thess. v. 17. † Rom. xii. 2. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 17.

sent duty and eternal interest? We must either condemn them, or say that it is proper for us, and consistent, to do things which unfit us for serving God, and believing in Christ; things which produce a distaste to the worship of God, and disqualify for communion with Christ.

Thus the whole matter may be brought within a narrow compass. To walk in the ways of their heart, and in the sight of their eyes, as has been described, impairs the religion, contracts the morality, abridges the usefulness, and ruins the happiness of young people. Thus to walk, then, must be wrong; it must be criminal; or religion, morality, usefulness, and happiness, are matters of no moment. But they are matters which God commands us to seek after and cherish: therefore, these ways, if persevered in to death, must meet a righteous recompense in the eternal world. It is not for innocent enjoyments that they, who thus walk, will be judged; but for *wasted time*; for *dissipated faculties*; for *indulged lusts*; for *the abuse of speech*; for *the want of the fear of God*, and of *faith in Christ*, and *delight in the divine law*; for *cherished irreligion*; for *open immorality*; for *uselessness*;—for *these crimes* will they be judged. The recollection of their privileges and mercies enjoyed in this life, will enhance their misery throughout eternity.

Having thus exhibited the warning of the wise man at considerable length, I pass on to his exhortation.

II. "Therefore, remove sorrow from thine heart, and put away evil from thy flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." The tenour of the reasoning is this : since your present course of life affords no real happiness, and its issue will be everlasting sorrow ; since God here manifests his displeasure against these delusions which you cherish, by the effects they produce, and will bring you into judgment for them hereafter, forsake them, and remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. The wise man thus recommends true religion, as the only source of real happiness, as the only mean of escaping misery in this world, and torment in the world to come.

A remark or two is necessary in explanation of the exhortation he gives. In allusion to man's natural forgetfulness of God, he calls upon young persons to remember their Creator, i. e. he bids them cherish all those feelings, and manifest all that obedience which they owe to God. The word rendered Creator is

plural, Creators*, and directs the attention to the “ grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, “ and the communion of the Holy Ghost †.” The three persons of the blessed Trinity were concerned in our creation, for the Lord said ‘ let us make ‘ man †.’ Each of these persons young people are required to remember. They must remember the God who made them of dust, and breathed into them a living soul ; who has protected them in providence, and granted them all the temporal mercies they enjoy. They must remember the blessed Saviour, who has assumed our nature, and died in our stead, to redeem us from misery, and reconcile us to God. They must remember the Holy Spirit, whom Christ sends from the Father, to convince the world of sin, of righteousness and judgment, and to seal believers to the day of redemption §.

Thus to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, includes in it

* עֲוֹלָם. Stockius says the plural is here used to show the plurality of persons in the unity of essence, viz. the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ; for these three divine persons consulted together about the creation of man. Gen. i. 26.

† 2 Cor. 13. 14. † Gen. i. 26. § John 15. 26. xvi. 8. Eph. 4. 30.

1. An acknowledgment of the relation they sustain to God, as the creatures of his power, pensioners upon his bounty, and subjects of his government. He has an undoubted right to demand their obedience, and they are bound to honour him. He is their Father, and they should love him; their master, and they should fear him.

2. Faith in God, as their reconciled portion through Christ, as their Saviour. Sin has subjected us to God's displeasure. He might justly have cut us all off as cumberers of the ground; but he spares us, and offers us pardon, through his eternal and well beloved Son, the man that is Jehovah's fellow*. This Son he promised in paradise†, and sent in the fulness of time, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law‡. He now can be just, and yet justify the ungodly who believe in Christ§. Through Christ he is reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them||.

In him the wise man exhorts young people to believe, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no access to God out of Christ, and by living faith we become united to Christ. Be-

* Zech. xiii. 7. † Gen. iii. 15. ‡ Gal. iv. 4, 5.
§ Rom. iii. 26. || 2 Cor. v. 19.

lieve then with your whole heart, in the days of your youth, in him who is the great and only propitiation for sin. Surrender yourselves in soul and in body, to the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, God manifest in the flesh, and make him your all and in all, for time and eternity.

3. Obedience to the revealed will of God, as contained in the Scriptures. This constitutes the rule of our conduct, and the standard of our duty. It is indited by the Holy Spirit, testifies of the Saviour, and leads the sinner to God, the Father of all. This, young people ought to read and study, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God*; they ought to treasure up its contents in their memory, embrace its truths in sincerity, and regulate their lives by its precepts.

Thus to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, removes sorrow from their heart, and puts away evil from their flesh. Their religion and morality make them happy here, both in mind and body, and afford them the well grounded prospect of eternal happiness beyond the grave.

They are happy here. They have found the chief good they need, in an experimental acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ. Their passions

* 1 Thess. ii. 13.

are under the control of reason, and their reason is enlightened by the Spirit of God. They thus understand and follow after their real interest, the salvation of soul and body, for time and eternity. They store their minds with useful knowledge, and fortify their hearts by the grace of God. They may meet with misfortunes, with sickness, with afflictions; but they are supported. They may be called to encounter temptations, but they are enabled to overcome them. If their lives should be spared to old age, when evil days draw nigh, and years in which they shall say, we have no pleasure; even then they will find an interest in Christ, an overflowing fountain of good to their souls. The grace of God within them will triumph over every difficulty, and afford them that peace in believing, which the world by its smiles cannot give, nor by its frowns take away. Having fled to Christ as their refuge, they look to him for strength in trial, comfort in distress, and joy in death. Nor do they ever look in vain. He is to them a present help in every time of need. How happy then those young people, who in their youth remember their Creator !

They are happy in the prospect of eternal glory. They can contemplate death without alarm, and rejoice in hope of heaven. My mind here recollects with pleasure a recent instance in which the grace of God enabled a young and tender Female to

triumph over death and the grave*. She remembered her Creator in the days of her youth; and her Creator, in the days of her trial, came to her aid. She enjoyed peace in believing, and joy in the Holy Ghost, in the conflict she sustained with the last enemy. I design not to pronounce her eulogium, but I wish to exhibit her Saviour to view, through whose love she was comforted, and cheered with the good hope of the gospel which maketh not ashamed. She was in herself a poor sinful worm of the dust, and acknowledged this truth with the deepest impressions of humility. Her covenant God, however, put his comeliness on her as a vessel fitted to show forth the divine glory.

A fortnight before her death, to console her mother, she told her, 'when you see my body carried to the grave, only think that my soul is in heaven with my Redeemer.'

To a dear friend, hopefully acquainted with the truth, she said, 'Whenever I look at you, and compare your present state, with your former one, I cannot but feel how good God has been to you. You once thought your only happiness was to be found in the world. How thankful ought you to be, that God has been pleased in his infinite mercy to call you out of a

* Miss Eliza Van Wyck. For an account of this young lady, see the Christian's Magazine, for April, 1810.

world that lieth in wickedness. Continue to press forward; beware of drawing back. The most important advice I can give you, is, to go often to your Saviour; put all your dependence on him; trust not to self-righteousness, but to the righteousness of that dear Redeemer, who died for you, and on whose merits alone you must rest for salvation. View him stretched on the cross, and ask your heart if you can refuse to give yourself wholly up to him, who suffered so much for your sake. Difficulties and doubts proceed from unbelief; banish them from your mind, and trust to the promises: seek for companions those who love the Lord.'

A few days before her death, to two female relations, she said, 'I have put all my trust in the blessed Jesus. He has supported me hitherto, and *I know* he will support me to the very last, and will never leave, nor forsake me. I recommend to you *not to go much in the world*. You need not expect to find happiness there; it is vain to try. Endeavour to have the Saviour for your friend. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Don't put off the one thing needful to a dying hour, or a sick bed. You may then not have sufficient time, or strength granted you. Remember, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. Youth is the time to serve the Lord.'

In many other ways did she manifest the faithfulness of JEHOVAH her Saviour, and the power of his grace to support and comfort his dying people. Within a few minutes of her death, she articulated the following broken sentences. "Rejoice! I am happy; I am supported; I fear no evil! I shall not want; I am supported to the end; receive my spirit—come quickly."

Verily,

"Jesus can make a dying bed
 Feel soft as downy pillows are,
 While on his breast I lean my head,
 And breathe my life out sweetly there."

Who, on contemplating such a scene, does not exclaim with Balaam, Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his*.

Is this your wish, my young friends? Be ye then "followers of those who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises†." Realize that life is valuable, merely, as an entrance into eternity: and that every thing in life, is only valuable as it prepares us for heaven. Will the novels, the romances, and plays you have read; the idle words you have spoken; the dissipated, gay company in which you have delighted; the theatre, and parties of pleasure, you have diligently attended; the chance games and sinful sports in which you have indulged yourselves,

* Numb. xxii. 10.

† Heb. vi. 12.

either separately or conjointly answer this great end? In that awful moment, when heart and flesh shall fail you, will the recollection of these enjoyments support you? Will it cheer you in the prospect of that tremendous judgment which awaits you after death? Will walking in the sight of your eyes qualify you for appearing before your God? If not, why do you persevere in such a course of life? Is present gratification, which is transient, to be compared with future rest, which is eternal? Can that be called happiness which pours no light on the grave—which affords no hope of a heavenly inheritance?

“Oh!” said the dying saint of whom we have already spoken, to a friend, “Oh, that I could make every body feel the importance of preparing for death! Make your preparation now, whilst you have health and strength. Do not put it off to a dying hour. What should I do now, had I not an interest in Christ?” Solemn, impressive question! Young people, what will you do in your last moments, if you have not an interest in Christ? Will the world comfort you then? Will it soothe your consciences, or make your peace with God? Let the testimony of our departed friend on this subject have its due weight on your minds. On the borders of eternity, she warned her friends against the influence of the

world, as injurious to religion and to our best interests. Be directed by her advice, and live above the world. Neglect not the salvation of your souls any longer. No more forget God, lest he forget you in the end. Then, as you go down to the land of silence to mingle with the congregations of the dead, the piercing cry of despair will burst from your convulsed lips, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Oh! beware of trifling with Him who has the keys of death and of hell. Cast yourselves on his free and sovereign mercy, lest he dash you in pieces with his rod of iron. Escape for your lives from his righteous indignation. Flee to the city of refuge, that you may be safe from the overwhelming flood of vengeance which shall be poured on the ungodly. I speak to you as your friend and your brother; bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. Your welfare here; your eternal salvation hereafter, are the objects I desire. The truth has been told you: God is witness. "To him I commend you; and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*." *Amen.*

* Acts xx. 32.

NOTES.

NOTE I. [*Referred to in page 12.*]

EVEN the Novels of Miss Burney, the Romances of Mrs. Radcliffe, and the Plays of Shakspeare, cannot escape this censure, if tried by the Holy Scriptures. The remarks which Foster makes, in his Essay IV. Let. 7, 8, 9, on modern polite literature, most strikingly apply to this subject in every part.

The celebrated Dr. Goldsmith, who had himself written a novel, writes thus to his brother, respecting the education of a son: "Above all things, never let your son touch a romance or novel: these paint beauty in colours more charming than nature; and describe happiness that man never tastes. How delusive, how destructive are those pictures of consummate bliss! They teach the youthful mind to sigh after beauty and happiness which never existed; to despise the little good which fortune has mixed in our cup, by expecting more than she ever gave; and, in general, take the word of a man who has seen the world, and has studied human nature more by experience than precept; take my word for it, I say, that such books teach us very little of the world." —Life of Goldsmith, prefixed to his Miscellaneous Works.

The opinion expressed by Hannah Moore, in her *Strictures on Female education*, chap. vii. vol. 1. concerning abridgments, beauties, and compendiums, deserves the attention of the male, as well as female sex. For mere children, such works have their use; but young people, capable of exercising their faculties,

ought to be ashamed of these easy ways of acquiring knowledge; or, as they may more properly be called, these encouragements to ignorance and conceit.

NOTE II. [*Referred to in page 15.*]

IN the primitive Church, the theatre was considered a nursery of impurity; and attendance upon it, was censured by the first Council of Arles, Can. 5.; by the Council of Laodicea, Can. 54.; and the second Council of Carthage, Can. 11.—Caranza's *Summa Conciliorum*, ed. Duaci, 1679. Bingham, in his *Eccles. Antiqu.* vol. 7. p. 484—487. cites Cyprian, Tertullian, the Apostolical Constitutions, Chrysostom, Cyril, and Salvian, as expressing their own sentiments, and those of the Church, against the frequenters of the theatre. From Tertullian *de spectaculis*, cap. 26. he quotes the following story, which is here introduced, merely to show the opinion then entertained of the stage: "The Devil being asked by a Christian exorcist, in the case of a woman who was seized by him at the theatre, How he durst presume to possess a Christian? answered confidently, I have a right to do it, for I found her on my own ground." Consistent with the views of the primitive Church, have been those of most of the Reformed Churches. "In England," says Mr. Burder, in his *Sermon on amusements*, "a well-known act of parliament was made in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, denominating players rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars. And in the year 1580, a petition was presented to her Majesty, to suppress all play-houses in the city of London, which was accordingly effected; and to the honour of the corporation, theatres have never since been suffered within their jurisdiction."

The Reformed Church of France, chap. 14 of her discipline, declares it to be unlawful to go to comedies,

tragedies, interludes, farces, or other stage plays, acted in public or private; and that, because in all ages these have been forbidden among Christians, as bringing in a corruption of good manners.—Quick's Synodicon, vol. 1. p. 71.

The Church of Holland, in the Synod held at Dordrecht, 1578, exclude from the Lord's table Comedians, and those who attend Comedies. The church of Scotland, according to Title 12, book 3. § 3, of Stewart's, (of Perdivans,) Collections, &c. approves of the above mentioned canon of the French Church. And in the answer to the 139th Question of the Larger Westminster Catechism, stage plays are included among the articles forbidden in the seventh commandment. To these testimonies of the Church against the theatre, I add some of individuals. Archbishop Tillotson, Vol. 11. Ser. 214, says, Plays do most notoriously minister both to infidelity and vice. By the profaneness of them, they are apt to instill bad principles into the minds of men, and to lessen the awe and reverence which all men ought to have for God and religion; and by their lewdness, they teach vice, and are apt to infect the minds of men, and dispose them to lewd and dissolute practices. And therefore I do not see how any person pretending to sobriety and virtue, and especially to the pure and holy religion of our blessed Saviour, can, without great guilt, and open contradiction to his holy profession, be present at such lewd and immodest plays; much less frequent them as too many do, who yet would take it very ill to be shut out of the communion of Christians, as they would most certainly have been in the first and purest ages of Christianity. Bishop Collier, "a fierce and implacable Nonjuror," as Johnson calls him, a high Churchman, wrote a work professedly against the theatre. Miss Baille says, the moral tendency of fashionable comedy, is even

faulty ; that mockery of age, and domestic authority, so constantly held forth, has a very bad effect upon the younger part of an audience ; and that continual lying and deceit in the first character of the piece, which is necessary for conducting the plot, has a most pernicious one. Rosseau opposed the introduction of theatrical entertainments at Geneva, on the ground of their tendency to corrupt the people. Voltaire calls the language of English comedy, “ the language of debauchery, not of politeness.” Mr. Moralt, in his letters on the French and English nations, ascribes the corruption of manners in London to comedy, as its chief cause. Their comedy, he says, is like that of no other country ; it is the school in which both sexes familiarize themselves with vice, which is never represented there as vice, but as mere gaiety ! Diderot, in his observations upon dramatic poetry, says, the English have no comedies ; they have in their places satires, full indeed of gaiety and force, but without morals, and without taste,—Christian Observer, for April, 1805 ; Review of Burder’s Sermon on lawful amusements. See also Witherspoon’s Serious Inquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage ; and Styles’ Essay on the Character and Influence of the Stage on Morals and Happiness. These writers advance arguments against the morality of the stage, which never have, and never can be answered, as long as the Scriptures remain the only standard of morality, as well as religion. They prove what ought to make those who frequent the theatre in a Christian land to blush, that the wisest heathens condemned it for its immoral tendency. Experience justifies this conclusion, that we may unite light and darkness, fire and water, as readily as the theatre and the gospel. They are deadly and irreconcilable foes.—See Cases of Conscience, by Pike and Hayward, Case 10.

NOTE III. [*Referred to in page 18.*]

NEITHER music, dancing, nor refreshments, are here condemned. They are only noticed as essential supports of that *animal pleasure*, for the enjoyment of which, parties are expressly formed. Thus used, whatever may be said of them under other circumstances, they impair the moral taste, by exciting improper feelings, and making animal appetites the masters of our rational nature.

NOTE IV. [*Referred to in page 20.*]

TO understand the ground on which this opinion rests, a few remarks will be made on the Scriptural meaning of God's name, and the nature and extent of his providence.

I. God's name is used in Scripture to signify, (1.) Himself, Psalms xxxiv. 3. lxi. 5. (2.) His titles, Exod. iii. 13, 14. vi. 3. (3.) His word, Acts ix. 15. (4.) His worship, Malachi i. 6. comp. with 8. (5.) His perfections, Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6, 7. (6.) His works of creation and providence, Psalm viii. 1—9. (7.) His authority, Micah v. 4. (8.) His help, 1 Sam. xvii. 45. These passages prove that the name of God does not mean exclusively his titles, or what we mean by the word name, but every thing else by which he makes himself known. In this enlarged sense the "name of God," is used in the third commandment. It therefore includes his providence as well as his titles. Let us now see briefly,

II. What is providence? It is God's most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions. This definition, it will be at once perceived, excludes what is called the doctrine of a general providence, which is, "that the Creator established certain laws in the material and moral world, which uniformly and invariably take place, producing all the effects

he ever intended they should produce." These laws are the works of God, and therefore cannot possess inherent and independent powers. That which never would have existed, had it not been for the will of another, cannot possibly have the least power in its constitution to continue itself in existence. For God to produce a creature independent of himself for one moment, is to bestow on that creature necessary existence, which cannot be, as necessary existence belongs to God alone. Besides, if these laws produce all that harmony and order which we see in the universe, we ascribe to them consequences which an infinite intelligence alone can produce; and, therefore, to be consistent, must adopt their sentiments who say, every thing is a part of God; which is blank Atheism. They, therefore, who speak with understanding on this subject, must be convinced that these laws are nothing but God himself, managing and governing his works, directly, according to such a manner as he sees best. Unless they consider God a mere indolent spectator of the universe, they must grant he is every where present, as an active intelligent spirit, preserving and governing all things which he has made. Thus he is represented in Scripture as exercising a special providence, not only over great things, but over small things; such as sparrows, Matt. x. 29.; the young ravens, Ps. cxlvii. 9.; insects, Joel ii. 25.; the lilies of the field, Matt. vi. 26.; and the hair of our heads, Matt. x. 30.;—not only over necessary things, as the succession of day and night, the vicissitudes of the seasons, and the like, but also over contingent things, such as storms, Jer. li. 16.; snow, Psalms cxlvii. 16.; manslaughter, Exod. xxi. 13.; the *fall* of a sparrow, Matt. x. 29.; the *disposal* of the lot, Prov. xvi. 33.; the ram caught in the thicket by his horns, Gen. xxii. 13.; the arrow sent at a venture, which killed Ahab, 1 Kings xxii. 34.

These passages suffice to show how far the special pro-

vidence of God, according to the Scriptures, extends. They prove there is no such thing as chance, or accident, or fortune, in this world. These are words we often hear used, but they have really no meaning; or if they have, are merely "names for the unknown operations of providence; for it is certain, that in God's universe nothing comes to pass causelessly or in vain;" of course there is no chance in the dealing of cards, and in the throw of dice, any more than there is in the fall of a sparrow. The issue of these games depends not on skill, as it does in other games, but on the divine decision. We leave the matter to another agency besides our own: and this is God's.

If then the providence of God, is included in the Scriptural idea of the name of God, as has been shown, appeals to it for amusement in games of chance, are as improper as appeals to the titles of God in conversation, for the same purpose. That there is a similarity, according to the Scriptures, between the lot and an oath, is evident from this fact, that they are both stated as means to terminate controversy and strife, Heb. vi. 16. compared with Prov. xviii. 18. The lot then ought to be used with the same fear of God which ought to prevail in swearing; and the most important objects ought to be contemplated in the one case, as well as the other: for both are direct appeals to God. In this light the lot was viewed by the Jews. By lot it was determined which of the expiatory goats should be offered, and which dismissed, Lev. xvi. 8—10. By lot the land of Canaan was divided to the Hebrew tribes, and the Levites had their cities assigned, and their order of service specified, Numbers xxvi. 55, 56.; xxxiii. 54. and 34.; Joshua xiv. to xxi.; 1 Chron. vi. 54. 61. By lot Saul was marked out for the Hebrew kingdom, and his son Jonathan discovered to have tasted the honey, 1 Sam. x. 19—21. and xiv. 41—42.

Thus also it was viewed by the apostles, in choosing a successor to Judas by lot. The Heathen regarded the lot as sacred, as appears from Homer's *Iliad*, 3 book, l. 315—325. See Cowper's translation, l. 373—383. book 7. l. 175—183. Cowper's trans. 200—214. *Odyssey*, b. 10. 206. Cowper's trans. 251—253. These passages prove, that in Homer's day the disposal of the lot was considered to be the work of their gods.

The sacredness of the lot, as an appeal to God, is recognized in the answer to the 113 question of the Westminster Larger Catechism, in which the irreverent use of it is considered a breach of the third commandment: of course the use of it for mere amusement in games of chance, is condemned. " This doctrine concerning these games, says Durham, in his exposition of the ten commandments, was the doctrine of the ancients, who did vehemently inveigh against this sort of lottery.—See Cyprian de Aleatoribus, who fathereth it on Zabulus, and calleth it the snare of the devil, and compareth it with idolatry. So Ambrose de Tobia, p. 590." As games of chance or hazard, they were forbidden by the 42 and 43 canon of the Apostolical constitutions; by the 79 canon of the Council of Eliberis, and by the 50 canon of the sixth Council of Constantinople. Caranza's *Summa Conciliorum*, ed. Duaci. The Reformed Church of France, in the 29th canon of the 14th chapter of their discipline, interdict cards and dice, as games of hazard. In the Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1638, Sess. 23, 24. Art. 9. about " the entrie and conversation of ministers," carding and dicing are declared unlawful gaming. See Durham's Exposition of the ten commandments, on the third commandment; Christian's Magazine, Vol. I. p. 163—285—400.; and Cases of Conscience, by Pike and Hayward, Case 3d.

The decisions of Councils in the primitive Church,

and the Acts of different Reformed Churches, which have been quoted in this and one of the preceding Notes, show that the opinions advanced in the discourse on certain fashionable amusements, are not novel or singular. The proof of *the correctness* of these opinions, however, rests solely on the word of God, and the experience of Christians. Did not the standards of the Presbyterian Church agree with both, in the judgment of the author, he would at once forsake his connexion. He is a believer in the Scriptural warrant of creeds and their utility: and desires most sacredly, in his conduct as a Christian, and his ministrations as a servant of the Lord Jesus, to adhere to the spirit and letter of that one which he has embraced *ex animo*. This he considers the duty of every Presbyterian layman and minister, unless the standards of the Church are mere articles of peace, or any thing, or every thing, as suits our wayward fancy or caprice.

FINIS.

21 JUL 68

