

THE LIVING PULPIT,

OR

EIGHTEEN SERMONS

BY EMINENT LIVING DIVINES

OF

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

WITH

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE EDITOR,

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THE RULING PASSION.

A SERMON TO YOUNG MEN.

BY

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The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.—ECCLES. viii. 11.

In connection with

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.—MATT. xxii. 37.

THERE is scarcely any thing in relation to which men are so jealous as their own rights; and scarcely any question, which they scan with such severe scrutiny, as who shall be their rulers. Let some important post of civil authority be about to be filled, and you will hardly find a man in the community who is indifferent to the pending question; and not improbably there may be a tempest raised, that will make the very foundations of society rock. And so, too, men are eagle-eyed to discern the first symptoms of oppression. If rulers are disposed to be tyrants, their subjects quickly find it out; and even if they have not the courage to resist, or complain, they are still galled by the yoke, and would make an effort to throw it off, if they could. Liberty every man regards as his dearest possession; and

whoever discovers a disposition to trifle with it, need not marvel, if he is met with the spirit of resistance.

But it happens, a little strangely, that those who are so jealous of any external encroachment upon their rights, too often manifest little or no concern in respect to the more important dominion in their own bosoms. They will spare no pains to investigate the character of the candidate for some paltry office, the influence of which may only slightly affect them, while yet the world within may be completely subject to one tyrant or another, without their ever taking note of the fact that they are oppressed. In the hope of disturbing carelessness, and enlightening ignorance, on this subject, I design to address you on THE RULING PASSION—*its nature—its origin and growth—its influence.*

The general topic upon which I am to dwell obviously connects itself with each of the passages which I have cited. The first—"the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil"—is a declaration that mankind not only, on the whole, prefer the wrong, but that they choose it, and pursue it, with the utmost intensity of purpose. The latter—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"—is God's requisition upon the children of men, to give Him their supreme and perpetual homage. I have brought together the two passages, because one exhibits the ruling passion for evil—the other, the ruling passion for good; and both will necessarily be brought into view, in the contemplation of the general subject.

I. Our first inquiry respects the *nature* of the ruling passion. What is it that we designate by this appellation?

The ruling passion, in the most general sense, may be defined—*the concentrated energy of the soul*. I am aware that this is a legitimate subject for philosophical disquisition; and that, viewed in this light, much might be said upon it, that would be both true and useful; while yet the well-defined boundaries of human knowledge should not be passed. But the time, the place, every thing connected with the occasion, limits me to the more practical view. The definition that I have given, is perhaps as plain as the nature of the subject will admit; but be that as it may, every individual may know infallibly what it is, if he will make suitable observation upon his own experience.

The ruling passion may be considered in a more general, or a more restricted sense.

In the more general sense, it consists in the prevalence of a sinful or a holy temper; in other words, in that state of the soul which constitutes man either the enemy or the friend of God.

It is obvious, alike from Scripture and from experience, that man, in an unrenewed state, lives chiefly for his own gratification; that his chosen element is amidst the things that are seen and are temporal. This the Saviour expresses, by "loving darkness rather than light;" and the Apostle, by "minding earthly things;" and the wise man in our text, by "the hearts of the sons of men being fully set in them to do evil." And who need be told that all experience coincides with this record? While there

are many professing to be Christians, who belie their profession by an apparently supreme devotedness to the world, how manifest is it that the multitude who make no profession, are actual idolaters of the world in some form or other! Their thoughts, their affections, the combined energies of their souls, are employed upon, actually fastened to, the things that must perish with the using. It is by no means necessarily implied that they are profane, or dishonest, or immoral in any sense; or that they are destitute of naturally amiable and benevolent dispositions; or that they may not perform many acts that shall have an auspicious bearing upon the welfare of society, and even upon the interests of the church; but after all, they are lovers of the world more than lovers of God. Their ruling passion is towards the earth. They have no heart to relish, nor even an eye to discern, the things that are spiritual. Such is the condition of man—of every man in his unrenewed state.

But when the renovating act has once passed upon him, new objects of affection and pursuit rise before his mind, and its energies receive a new and correspondingly noble direction. From having had a heart fully set in him to do evil, his ruling desire now is to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and all his soul, and all his mind. True, he is yet a miserably imperfect being, and he often has occasion to lament that when he would do good evil is present with him; and sometimes, perhaps, he is in doubt whether he is not still in unbroken bondage to his lusts. But whatever may be his imperfections, or his apprehensions, or his conflicts, the current of his soul

is really moving towards God; his strongest desire is, that God may be glorified in him and by him. And this desire discovers itself in a new course of action. It may not, indeed, be new in every sense; it may not be new to the undiscerning eye of man; for it is quite possible that the external deportment of an unrenewed person, under the more general influences of Christianity, may be scarcely distinguishable from that of the true Christian; but it *is* new to the heart-searching eye of God, because it is prompted by a new principle, and directed to a new end.

I have said that the ruling passion, considered in a more general sense, is that sinful or holy temper which constitutes the moral state of man as the friend or enemy of God—in a more restricted sense, it is the particular form which that temper assumes—the channel through which the energies of the mind, whether working for good or evil, chiefly operate.

On this point I may be contented to refer you to the results of your own observation. Whether you look into the world, or into the church, or, I may add, into your own hearts, provided you will compare your experience with that of others, you will find a diversity in the ruling passion corresponding to the variety of human pursuits. All bad men are alike in general—that is, in being supremely devoted to their own selfish gratification; but they differ endlessly in respect to the form in which the evil tendency develops itself. In one, the ruling passion is the love of wealth—in another, the love of praise—in another, the love of pleasure—in all, the love of the world. And the same remark applies to *good*

men—while love to God and man is the great principle that presides over all their actions, and gives the general complexion to their character, even this principle discovers itself in a variety of forms—one may be more serious and devout, another more active and philanthropic; one may become absorbed in one field of benevolent operation, another in another; and the energies of each may be directed, possibly too exclusively, in his own particular channel; while yet the actions of all, when they come to be referred to the remoter cause, are found to be dictated by the same spirit. So much for the nature of the ruling passion.

II. Our second inquiry relates to its *origin and growth*. We shall still keep in view the distinction already recognised, considering it in a more general and a more restricted sense.

If we consider the ruling passion as consisting in the general temper of the soul, constituting the individual a sinner or a saint, we shall find, of course, that it has a different origin, as it partakes of a sinful or a holy character.

In the former case, it is evidently to be referred to man's original apostacy. That mankind are born with a propensity to evil, is proved by the same kind of evidence that proves their original propensity to eat and drink; for if the latter is developed a little earlier, the former discovers itself as soon as the nature of the case will admit—namely, with the first indications of moral agency. If there are any who choose to deny this fact, our appeal is to universal experience—even to those very cases which are brought to prove the opposite doctrine; for amidst

the utmost sweetness and loveliness that early childhood ever exhibits, if you watch narrowly, you will find the workings of an evil propensity—evidence that the spoiler has been there, sowing the seeds of moral death. For the reason of this state of things, we can go no farther back than Paul carries us, when he says, “As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death hath passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Any other theory of the origin and transmission of human depravity than this declaration clearly implies, is unphilosophical, and inconsistent with palpable facts. I say then, man derives his sinful nature, his ruling passion for evil, directly from the great ancestor of the race. In the shock of the apostacy the gold became dim, and the fine gold was changed.

And whence does the Christian derive *his* ruling passion for good? I have, in a measure, anticipated the answer under the preceding head—from the renovating, life-giving agency of the Holy Spirit. The Bible every where attributes this work to the Spirit, without, however, explaining minutely the manner in which it is performed. It is this to which the Prophet refers, when he says, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.” And again, “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” To this also the Saviour refers, when he says, “Except a man be born of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God;” and the Apostle also, when he speaks of being saved, “by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy

Ghost." The amount of all that we know on this subject is, that the Spirit of God operates in some mysterious way, by means of the truth, and in accordance with the laws of our moral nature, to the production of a new moral state of the soul, a new ruling passion, a strong relish for those spiritual objects which the individual once regarded with indifference or disgust. He is himself conscious of the change, from an inspection of his own inward exercises; and others take knowledge of him that he has been the subject of the change, as both his words and actions breathe a new and heavenly spirit. You may impute the change to something else than a divine agency; you may say that there is some mysterious power that resides in man's own will, by which spiritual life rises out of spiritual death; but the subject of the change repudiates such an intimation. He will tell you that he is a monument of divine grace, a living witness to God's mercy and power in the transforming work; and that *but* for this gracious interposition, his heart would still have been fully set in him to do evil.

But if such be the origin of the prevailing temper or habit of the soul, both for good and evil, whence originates the particular form which the good or evil temper assumes? In other words, whence originates the ruling passion, considered in a restricted sense?

Doubtless it is to be traced in most instances, primarily, to the original constitution of the mind—to the elements of the intellectual and moral nature, as they are supplied by the Creator Himself. No doubt there is a diversity in the original character

of men's minds, corresponding to the variety which we see in their external appearance; and hence we find that children of the same parents, educated by the same teachers, and subjected, so far as possible, to precisely the same training, not unfrequently become widely different in their characters; and *that*, irrespective of that radical change which may, or may not, have been wrought in them by the Spirit of God. Here, no doubt, in all ordinary cases, is the seed of the ruling passion; and the mother, if she is watchful, may not unfrequently detect its incipient growth, while the child is yet in the nursery. If you will write the history of the man, who, in a fit of revengeful passion, shed his brother's blood, and has had his own blood poured out as an offering to public justice—his mother, if she still survives to tell the story of his childhood, and if she could bring herself to speak out all that is lodged in her memory, would not improbably tell you that she saw that terrible passion in her son, while it was yet in embryo; and that nothing has happened to him that was not shadowed forth to her anxious spirit almost before he left the cradle. And so, on the other hand, if you will trace the history of some individual whose life has been but an unbroken succession of deeds of mercy, and whose name quickens the pulsations, and draws forth the tears, of the inmate of many a hovel, you will not improbably learn, that those who watched over his earliest years had often admired the beamings of a kindly and generous spirit in his infantile smiles. Not that there is any thing here to excuse vice; for these evil propensities belong to a moral agent, and he is bound to see

that they are eradicated, instead of being indulged. Nor is there any thing, on the other hand, of which the good man has occasion to glory; for the graces of nature, not less than the Christian virtues, are from above—the former are the production of a creating, the latter, of a new creating agency.

I have spoken of the origin of the ruling passion—let us now, for a moment, contemplate its *growth*. This is to be referred to the influence of habit and to the power of circumstances.

It is a law of our nature that the repetition of any act increases the facility with which it is performed; and hence, we find that that which is originally difficult soon becomes easy, and that which is, at first, indifferent, becomes, at no distant period, like a second nature. Notice the operations of this principle wherever you will, and you will always arrive at the same conclusion. I point you to the poor drunkard, who stands before you completely brutalized, though immortal; whose nearest friends cannot bear to look upon him, because he is the very personification of idiocy or loathsomeness. There was a time when he was first conscious of the existence of that deadly appetite, and when he began to indulge it, he dreamed not how fearfully strong it was destined to become; but each successive act of indulgence strengthened the propensity, till now, as you see, it holds him with a giant's grasp. Look, too, at the miser! The passion for accumulating and hoarding up may have originally had a prominence in his moral constitution; but it was not *so* prominent, but that, in the earlier part of his career, he could sometimes show himself public-spirited, and perhaps even

devise liberal things. By long continued indulgence, however, this sordid passion has gained the complete mastery over him, so that he is as deaf as an adder to the claims of charity, and even to the cries of absolute distress. And the same principle is illustrated in the growth of a habit of philanthropy. Wilberforce was originally possessed of warm and generous sensibilities; but it was the fact of those sensibilities being always kept awake—the fact of his devoting his life to the cause of the negro's freedom—that made him tower into such a glorious example of benevolence as the world has rarely seen. And if we consider the ruling passion in the more general sense, as denoting the sinful or holy nature, it is by this same influence—the influence of repetition, that the sinner becomes more and more a sinner, the saint more and more a saint. Possibly, to the eye of man, there may be no very perceptible change, either in the one case or the other; but to the Omniscient eye the moral state of the soul is changing continually; not an action is performed, not a volition exerted, not a thought cherished, for good or evil, but it has some bearing upon the permanent state of the soul—that which emphatically constitutes its character.

The other influence, to which is to be referred the growth of the ruling passion, is that of circumstances. It is a familiar but true remark, that men's characters are formed, in a great degree, by circumstances; and this effect is produced chiefly through the development of the ruling passion. True, as we have already seen, this passion grows immediately by successive acts of indulgence, but then there is the

remoter influence of circumstances, in which these acts of indulgence usually have their origin ; and where the favourable circumstances do not exist of themselves, the ruling passion not unfrequently creates them, and then acts itself out by means of facilities of its own devising ; and, on the other hand, circumstances not unfrequently exert an influence to neutralize, even to change, the ruling passion. Let a child, in the first developments of its moral nature, betray a prevailing inclination to some particular form of vice, and then let it be placed in a condition which furnishes little or no temptation to that species of indulgence, and it is quite likely that some other propensity, originally of less strength than that, may gain the controlling power of the soul, and may keep it till the end of life. There is a tradition that Robespierre was originally of a gentle and sympathetic turn ; and that it was owing to his infidel and bloody training that those horrible passions, which finally made him the terror of all history, gained such a malignant ascendancy in his bosom. But whether this tradition be correct or not, it admits of no question that circumstances often decide what passion is to be in the ascendant ; and that they sometimes decide in favour of one which, in its earliest actings, had betrayed no indications of uncommon strength.

III. I pass now to the third and last general topic, viz : the *influence* of the ruling passion.

And my first remark, in illustration of this, is, that this passion has the mastery of the whole intellectual, moral and physical man.

It has the *intellectual* faculties completely under

its dominion. It has its own ends to accomplish, and it employs these faculties as servants to aid in their accomplishment. See how this remark is illustrated in particular cases. Mark that individual, whose heart is supremely set upon the honour that cometh from men, and observe how his intellectual powers are all laid under contribution for the attainment of it. His perception and judgment are always in a wakeful state, that he may be able to avoid every thing that is adverse, to avail himself of every thing that is favourable, to his particular object. His memory is continually tasked, that he may take advantage of the lessons that are furnished by the past—perhaps by his own past experience, whether for good or evil. His reasoning faculty, his power of invention, is put into vigorous exercise, that he may, if possible, devise some new facilities for securing to himself the plaudits of his fellow men. And when you have noticed how completely the whole intellectual man is brought into subjection, where the ruling passion is for the honour that cometh from man, look at another individual, and see how the same thing is accomplished, where the ruling passion is for the honour that cometh from God only. What that devoted Christian is striving after, is a crown of immortal glory; and which of his intellectual faculties, think you, finds a dispensation from the glorious work on which his heart is supremely set? Is it the perceptive faculty? But the eye of his mind is continually open to behold the truth, not only in its reality, but in its excellence and glory. Is it the judgment? But without this in constant exercise, how is he to ascertain what is true and

right; in other words, what he is to believe, and what he is to do? Is it the memory? But it is the memory that supplies him with his materials for gratitude and humiliation, for meditation and devotion. Is it the reasoning faculty? But it is by means of this that he is constantly growing in spiritual knowledge, and without it he could never be more than a babe in Christ. Believe me, the ruling passion for the heavenly crown allows no one of the faculties of the mind to remain unoccupied. I do not mean that they are occupied to the extent that they might be or ought to be, for that would be to make no allowance for an only partially sanctified state; but I mean that they all act *prevailingly* under the influence of the controlling desire of the renovated heart—the desire to glorify God in the attainment of immortal glory.

But the ruling passion extends its dominion to the *moral* man, as truly as to the intellectual; in other words, it controls all the subordinate passions, including also the animal appetites, together with the higher principle of conscience.

Observe, first, the influence which it exerts in neutralizing, or keeping in check, those passions or appetites which, if their operation were not restrained, would be found to conflict with it. If you were to judge of the miser by the coarse fare upon which he subsists, and the miserable tattered garments in which he clothes himself, you would say that he had no taste to distinguish between the coarsest and most delicious food; and that, as for his clothing, he would as soon appear in rags as in robes. But the truth is, he has, just like other men,

his own natural preference for at least decent food and clothing, and possibly he may have had originally strong sensual or ostentatious tendencies; but the ruling passion for hoarding up is keeping these other tendencies in check, so that you would scarcely know that they belonged to his original constitution. And you might arrive at a similar conclusion in respect to the devoted Christian. If you were to judge of him by the moderation which he discovers in respect to all worldly enjoyments, you might conclude that he had naturally little or no relish for them; whereas he may naturally possess a very strong relish for them; but his ruling passion for spiritual and heavenly enjoyments has so far prevailed, that it has brought him to look upon them with comparative indifference. No matter what form this passion may take, it will always show itself mighty to keep the other passions in subjection.

Nay, it does more than this; it exerts an influence of a yet more positive kind, in rendering the other passions and appetites even subservient to its own ends. Let the love of fame, for instance, be supreme in the bosom, and see how it will employ the love of money in aid of its own gratification; for great wealth confers a kind of distinction that ambition often greatly covets. Or let the love of God be supreme, and see how the naturally benevolent dispositions and sympathies, even the admiration of whatever is graceful, or beautiful, or sublime in nature, are all brought into exercise in aid of the homage that is due to the Almighty Parent. In every case, indeed, in which there is not an absolute contrariety between the ruling passion and the sub-

ordinate principles of our moral nature, the former bends the latter to its purposes, constituting them, according to its own character, a good or evil ministration.

Moreover, the ruling passion acts with mighty power upon the *conscience*—that principle of man's nature which confers upon him his highest dignity. And it does this in two ways—as it gives complexion to the testimony which the conscience renders, and as it affects the character of the conscience itself.

I may appeal to the experience of every one for the fact, that conscience has a mighty influence in rendering man happy or miserable; and whether the one effect or the other is to be produced, depends upon its decisions in regard, either to particular actions, or the general moral state of the soul. As the ruling passion is, indeed, nothing less than the moral state of the soul, from which also the particular actions of the life take their complexion, it is obvious that this must supply the materials from which the decisions of conscience are formed; and that, as this has a good or evil direction, supposing conscience to perform its legitimate office, the soul is the seat of peace and joy on the one hand, or of tumult and terror on the other. Who is that wretched being, who is holding a communion of agony with himself, in some solitude which man's eye does not pierce? Ah! it is a man, who, in obedience to the strongest impulse of his nature, has murdered his fellow, or done some other desperate deed, which at present is known only to himself; and there is not a single circumstance that would seem to indicate the least danger of exposure; and yet conscience mocks all

his efforts to be at rest, by filling his ear with sounds concerning the terrible future. And who is he that feels and evinces such a heavenly tranquillity, amidst the vicissitudes of life—that is not only patient, but even joyful in tribulation? Why, it is a man who knows no desire so strong as that of glorifying God, and benefiting his fellow creatures; and as he travels on from day to day, in his beneficent and upward course, he is cheered continually by the whisper of an approving conscience, and tormenting fears find no lodgment in his bosom. In each case, this mighty inward agent has been moved to diffuse terror or peace through the soul, by the ruling passion.

But this is not all; for the ruling passion affects the character of the conscience itself. What if the heart of an individual be fully set in him to do evil—do you believe that the conscience will be in no danger of sustaining an injury from such an influence? When the ruling passion first begins to operate in a course of sinful indulgence, conscience of course remonstrates; and as these remonstrances give pain, the mind is put upon devising some means of relief, without yielding up the favourite indulgence. And, generally, it does this by at first palliating, and afterwards excusing altogether the course upon which it is bent, calling evil good and good evil, putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. And this process, especially when long continued, is found to act upon the terrors of remorse like a charm, and conscience at length becomes so torpid, that the ruling passion can act with the fury of a whirlwind, and not awaken it. The conscience is not dead, after all, but it has become diseased, lethargic, insen-

sible. And, then, on the other hand, what if the individual be under the controlling influence of a principle of love to God and man—do you imagine that there will be no effect exerted upon the conscience by the operation of *this* principle? I tell you there will be a mighty effect. While the conscience will bear testimony in favour of the ruling passion, and of the course of action to which it prompts, the ruling passion will, in turn, enlighten, and quicken, and purify the conscience. So we find it in actual experience. The farther the Christian advances in the spiritual life, the longer he has yielded obedience to the impulses of his regenerate nature, the keener his discernment becomes for the nicest shades of both good and evil. He walks in a region of spiritual light, and he is in little danger of mistaking the character of the objects which appear in it. He is in intimate communion with the Lord of the conscience, and by such intercourse surely the conscience must be elevated and improved.

I only add, under this article, that the power of the ruling passion extends to the *physical* nature. I have already intimated that it extends to all the animal appetites, unless indeed it may chance itself to be identified with one of them; and then it will in some way exercise control over the rest, either by keeping them in check, so that they shall not interfere with itself, or else by making them minister to its own gratification. It extends also to the whole body—the hands, the feet, the lips, move in obedience to its dictates. It extends not unfrequently even to the bodily health, for where it hap-

pens to be identified with any one of the animal propensities, it takes but little time for it to make perfect shipwreck of the body. And even where it is seated more directly in the mind—where, for instance, it is ambition, or covetousness, or revenge, it not unfrequently acts with a consuming energy upon the bodily constitution; while, on the other hand, where it takes a virtuous and benevolent character, operating in kindly affections and philanthropic deeds, it ministers to the general health of the body, and even verifies the declaration of the wise man concerning Wisdom, that “length of days is in her right hand.”

A second general thought, illustrative of the influence of the ruling passion, is, that it decides both the character and the destiny.

It decides the *character*, inasmuch as it makes the man what he is; for though the original materials, of which the character is formed, are supplied by the Creator, yet they are worked into one form or another, according to the direction which the ruling passion may happen to take. It is the ruling passion for evil that constitutes the sinner—it is the ruling passion for good that constitutes the saint; and conversion is nothing else than a change of the ruling passion from evil to good. If we consider virtue and vice as operating through particular channels, then we may say that it is the ruling passion that constitutes the traitor and the tyrant on the one hand, the patriot and the philanthropist on the other. That this *must* decide the character in view of God, who searches the heart, is self-evident; for as it constitutes man what he really is, so Omniscience cannot

but see things just as they are. And it decides, the character also in the view of men. In all ordinary cases, it is so manifest as to preclude all just reason for doubt; and even where there is a studied and constant effort to conceal it, it will be almost sure to work itself out through innumerable channels. Those even who attempt to practise the greatest duplicity—such are the arrangements of Providence—generally pass on the whole for nothing more than they are worth; for though it may never have occurred to you to inquire what the ruling passion is, it is from your observation of the operation of that passion, in their daily conduct, that you form your estimate of their character.

And if it decides the character, it decides the destiny, of course; for man's destiny is nothing more than the condition in which his character places him. In the present life, it must be acknowledged, that a man's external circumstances are, to some extent, independent of his character; and he who lives only to curse society, and treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, may be surrounded by the splendours and luxuries of life; may have every thing at his command to minister to a sensual or ambitious spirit. But the truth is, there is an illusion about this; there is not the happiness here that there would seem to be; and perhaps there are as many in these circumstances who find thorns in their pillows, as there are in the humbler walks of life. But if a man's earthly condition is to be estimated by the amount of happiness which he finds in it, then, as a general rule, the character decides the destiny even here; for there is that in virtue that will find sources of enjoyment

in adversity; there is that in vice that will transmute the richest temporal blessings into a curse. And if this connection between character and destiny is manifest even in this life, much more will it be so in the future. Nothing less than this, surely, can be conveyed by the language of the apostle—"They that sow to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and they that sow to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting;" and by that declaration of the Saviour, which He makes as Judge of the world, "These," *i. e.* the wicked, "shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." The ruling passion then constitutes the character; the character decides the destiny; the destiny beyond the grave never changes. Who can estimate the influence of the ruling passion, when it is to decide the condition of both soul and body for ever?

The power of the ruling passion may further be seen in the influence which it exerts upon other minds—upon a community—upon the world.

There are various channels through which men exert an influence upon each other, and upon society at large. There is persuasion, here addressed to the private ear of a friend, and there, moving and melting an immense assembly. There is example, which, though it operates silently as the dew, and by an influence not unfrequently unperceived by the individual who is the subject of it, yet often accomplishes its ends, where all other influences would fail. There is pecuniary contribution, which can assist largely in causing order and beauty to come forth where there was desolation, or in causing desolation to take the

place of order and beauty. There is civil polity and military prowess, by which the destinies of states and nations are often settled. There is the press, all powerful to bless, all powerful to curse. There is prayer, that takes hold even of the Almighty arm. Now all these are but the instruments by which the ruling passion operates for the accomplishment of its purposes. It does not, indeed, always work directly; and it may sometimes seem to be operating in one direction, when it is really operating in another; as, for instance, the love of fame may possibly make a man appear exceedingly humble, or self-denied, or benevolent, when in his heart he is an utter stranger to all these qualities. But, either directly or indirectly, the ruling passion exerts an influence upon the whole tenor of the life; and when an individual finishes his earthly course, if you could get at the complete history of his ruling passion, you would have the record of whatever he had done for the benefit or the injury of his race.

Would you see what the ruling passion has been able to accomplish in some memorable instances? Look, then, at Napoleon. His ruling passion was the lust of dominion. And it nerved his arm till his arm became a rod of iron. It hardened his heart till his heart became a rock of adamant. It constructed yokes for the nations, as if they had been but cattle. He moved his hand, and a mighty city was swept off as with the besom of destruction; he moved it again, and an immense army was struggling in smoke and blood; and again, and the great ones of the earth came bending to him to take the chain. His career marked a new epoch in history. His influ-

ence was like the whirlwind, except that the whirlwind is the thing of a moment, but his influence will last for ever. Look at Washington. His ruling passion was that of a patriot—it was the desire to see his country free, and good, and great; and under its influence, he became the very personification of wisdom, and valour, and magnanimity; and while he broke the chain that bound us, bequeathing to us our inheritance in these glorious institutions, he set an example to the world, which has done more than any thing else to render the throne of the tyrant, at this hour, an insecure and uncertain thing, and which is destined to tell with mighty power on the ultimate civil regeneration of the world. And, finally, look at Paul, whose ruling passion was pre-eminently a desire to glorify his Master, and save the souls of his fellow men. How intrepid it rendered him in danger, how patient in suffering, how untiring in labour, how glorious in death! And who shall tell how much he achieved for the benefit of the church and the world? It was through his influence especially that Christianity darted abroad among the nations like the beams of the morning; that light came out of darkness, and life out of death, where darkness and death had for ages held their undisputed empire. And wherever, to this hour, Christianity has set up her dominion, it is not too much to say that the hand of Paul has in some sense been in it; for it is only the carrying forward of the work which he had the honour so gloriously to begin. Had he been constituted with the same powers that he actually possessed, and had his ruling passion been for blood and conquest—instead of

being remembered in the thanksgivings of earth, and the yet higher thanksgivings of Heaven, his name might have appeared only on some dark page of history, as the name of a scourge and a destroyer.

I only add, in illustration of this point, that the ruling passion is for ever growing stronger. It may indeed be changed from one direction to another—considered in the more extended sense, it always *is* changed in every case of genuine conversion; and considered in the more particular sense, it is sometimes changed, independently of conversion; but it still remains true that, so long as it holds the ascendancy in the soul, it is, on the whole, always increasing in strength—the only even seeming exception to this remark arising from the decay of the faculties in which it may happen to be seated. Its operation in certain forms may indeed be temporarily suspended, through the influence of circumstances; but let the circumstances change, and if the ruling passion be not changed, it will be found to have gathered fresh strength from the check that has, for a time, been imposed upon it. I have marvelled sometimes to see how strong it has been in adversity, and even in death. I have seen the drunkard turning himself into a beast, when his own wife lay in her dying agony. I have known the gambler turn away from his mother's new made grave, to his accustomed haunts of delirious revelry. I have known the miser's very death dream to be about gold; and he has seemed to dread death chiefly because it must separate him from his earthly treasures. And even where the terrors of adversity, or the glooms of the last hour, may, for a moment, silence

the sinner's ruling passion, unless God's Spirit interpose to change it, it will certainly re-appear, and act with more than its former energy.

And this leads me to say that the ruling passion will grow stronger in the next world. Admit, if you will, that it may be modified in respect to its particular character; modified by the new circumstances and objects by which it is surrounded. Be it so, that the miser may no longer care for his gold, nor the sensualist for his cups, nor the ambitious man for his laurels; and, on the other hand, we *know* there will be no objects in the abodes of the blessed to awaken or to demand the exercise of a spirit of compassion; nevertheless, the concentrated energy of the soul, for good or evil, will remain unchanged—the sinner will be reaching a more dreadful stature in sin, the saint a more glorious stature in holiness, through all the ages of an eternal existence.

But who, after all, can say that the ruling passion of the sinner *may* not exist in the next world, in precisely the same form that it does in this, with this terrible difference, however, that there shall be no object to minister to it? Suppose the craving appetite for sensual indulgence, the burning thirst for power, the sordid desire for wealth, to have gathered a thousand fold deeper intensity than the voluptuary, the ambitious man, the miser, ever felt on earth; and suppose each to be shut out from all the means of gratification; and suppose the ungratified passion to be for ever growing stronger as the ages of eternity roll away—Oh! tell me, ye who have known something here of the bitterness of cherishing desires that could not be met, tell me whether

any thing beyond this is necessary to complete the idea of hell.

Oh how terribly, how gloriously, this thought, that the ruling passion is to grow stronger for ever, bears upon the future! How it magnifies, beyond any measure that our conceptions can reach, the misery of the lost—the happiness of the saved!

Fix your eye upon a man whose outward demonstrations are such, that you cannot even doubt that his ruling passion is for evil. Possibly, he may appear decent enough in his ordinary intercourse; but whoever knows him well, knows that he is revengeful—that it is in his heart to pursue the man who he imagines has injured him, even to the death; knows that he is profane—that he will, even in cool blood, insult the majesty, and defy the vengeance, of Heaven. If you could see him at certain times, when his passions are wrought up into a tempest, the mixture of rage and blasphemy that you would witness, would make you turn from him with shuddering, as from an incarnate fiend. All this, while he is yet in the body, and subject to the numerous restraints incident to the present state of existence. Keep your eye upon him a little while, and you shall find him a lost spirit; and now mark how that ruling passion for evil, which before seemed so strong, has gathered a degree of strength that mocks at the imbecility of all its previous operations. Mark off a million of ages from his existence, and see how you find the ruling passion then. You may talk of a giant's power, but that conveys no idea of the actual reality. You may collect every image of overpowering strength, and of unqualified

horror; you may combine the darkness of midnight with the fury of the storm, and let the flashing of the lightning, and the rolling of the thunder, be the terrible accompaniment, and still you will have nothing that will more than faintly shadow forth the might and the misery seated in that sinner's bosom. And who has thoughts far reaching enough to overtake eternity? And yet eternity, eternity is the field on which the ruling passion is to have its perpetual development! I know not all the ingredients in the cup of trembling, which is put into the hands of the wicked in the next world; but it is enough for me to know, that the ruling passion for evil, whose operations sometimes terrify me here on earth, will not only be an everlasting inmate of the bosom, but will wax more fierce, and strong, and terrible, for ever.

Now, look at the man whose ruling passion is for good, and take the measure, if you can, of the happiness which he enjoys, of the good which he accomplishes, in its progressive and eternal development. As you see him here, bearing afflictions with undisturbed tranquillity, encountering difficulties with an overcoming faith, traversing the dark valley with an unfaltering step, you feel that the upward tendencies of his spirit are strong; and you are not afraid to see him die, because you are satisfied that his is the good man's death. But, even in all this, you have seen the ruling passion of only an imperfect Christian. Wait a little, till he has passed the heavenly portals, and you may contemplate that of a glorified saint. Lay every thing else, that may enter into the idea of future bliss, entirely out of view—

I am sure you will not doubt that here, in the saint's own bosom, and at the first moment after he has entered Heaven, is enough to constitute the eternal weight of glory. But, here again, look ye down through the vista of future centuries, fasten upon the remotest point to which even your imagination can reach, and the ruling passion for doing good and glorifying God, shall be acting with an energy that is the result of the steady growth of all the millions of ages that have intervened. And that shall be the starting point for a new course of development that shall make all that has preceded appear feeble and infantile. Saint in heaven, I lose myself in the contemplation of thy destiny! Be thou where thou wilt in God's dominions, that ruling passion of thy soul, ever active and ever growing, will keep thee entranced with the glories of Heaven.

Oh that I could write, as with the point of a diamond, on the memories and hearts of all our young men, the great practical lessons which this subject suggests to *them*; that I could show them how intimately it connects itself with all their responsibilities and prospects. Many of you, I doubt not, have already set your affections on the things that are above, and are running for the heavenly prize; but others of you, I have reason to fear, are making haste for the accomplishment of your own ruin. You are dreaming that the present is the time for indulgence, and that the future will be the time for repentance; that it matters little what you do now, in the days of your youth, as there will be time enough to retrieve your errors in the graver period of your maturity. As to

the probability of your ever seeing that period, I leave it to your own reflection, after you have walked through any burying ground you please, and noticed how large a proportion of the grave stones mark the departure of the young; but the point which I wish to urge upon you is, that you are, imperceptibly to yourselves, forming a habit of indifference to religion; that each successive act of indulgence, or even procrastination, lessens your power to resist temptation, and increases the probability that you will never repent; and that, when the anticipated period for giving your hearts to God shall come, you may find yourselves so entirely under the dominion of your own lusts, as to be discouraged even from any attempt to escape. I say, then, your own dignity, your own safety, your own immortality, protests against this habit of delay; and if you open your eyes you will see "Danger," "Danger," written in letters of fire upon every unhallowed object to which your affections incline. But you are not merely to be happy or miserable yourselves—you are to exert a mighty influence in rendering others so; and that influence will operate in the one direction or the other, according to the character of your own ruling passion. Particularly your country's interests are, to a great extent, bound up in you; and the wise and far-seeing, at this moment, have their eyes upon you, as they would discern what are the signs of the times. Nay, there is an imploring voice that comes up from the depths of the future—the voice of unborn generations, reminding you that you are the depositories of *their* interests, and that the period is rapidly

passing away in which you can earn their grateful benedictions.

What, then, is to be done? I answer, see to it, first, that your own ruling passion be right—that it be for truth and goodness, for conscience and for God. If the great work of making it right is yet to be performed, come penitently, and confidently, and obediently, and bow down to the Holy Ghost, and you shall receive the clean heart at his hands. And then go abroad and try to change the ruling passion of the world. Labour, with all your might, in dependance on God's grace, to give to men's thoughts and affections an upward direction. Thus you will not only save yourselves, but be your country's benefactors through all successive generations; and when the ransomed shall all be gathered home, and shall be joining, under the influence of the ruling passion of Heaven, in a common song to Him who hath redeemed them, how ecstatic will be your joy to recognise among them, not one, but many, whose ruling passion, through your instrumentality, has been changed from sin to holiness, and whose eternal destiny has undergone a corresponding change from wo to bliss—from hell to Heaven!