

Edwin A. M. N.C.

Wicked men ensnared by themselves.

A

SERMON

PREACHED, DECEMBER 16, 1825, IN THE
SECOND PARISH OF WEST SPRINGFIELD,

AT THE

INTERMENT

OF

Samuel Leonard,

AND

MRS. HARRIET LEONARD,

HIS WIFE;

THE FORMER OF WHOM MURDERED THE LATTER, AND THEN COMMITTED
SUICIDE. WITH AN

APPENDIX

CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF THE HORRID TRANSACTION.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE,
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WEST SPRINGFIELD.

SECOND EDITION.

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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS, to wit :

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BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the twenty eighth day of December, A. D. 1825, in the fiftieth year of the Independence of the United States of America, **ROBERT RUSSELL**, of the said District, has deposited in this Office the title of a book the right whereof he claims as proprietor in the words following, *to wit :*

Wicked men ensnared by themselves. A sermon preached, December 16, 1825, in the second Parish of West Springfield, at the Interment of Samuel Leonard, and Mrs. Harriet Leonard, his wife ; the former of whom murdered the latter, and then committed suicide, with an Appendix containing an account of the horrid transaction. By William B Sprague. Pastor of the first Church in West Springfield.

In conformity to the Act of the Congress of the United States, entitled "An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the Copies of Maps, Charts and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned:" and also to an Act entitled "An Act supplementary to an Act, entitled, An Act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned ; and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving and etching historical and other prints."

JNO. W. DAVIS, *Clerk of the
District of Massachusetts*

Sermon.

PSALM ix. 16.

THE WICKED IS SNARED IN THE WORK OF HIS OWN HANDS.

WE have often assembled, my friends, to perform the last sad office for our fellow mortals ; but never did we meet, in circumstances so appalling, as those which mark the present occasion. The event, which has brought us to these solemnities, has caused the ears of all, who have heard of it, to tingle, and circulated a chill of horror through the community. It is not without reluctance, that I stand here to day, to attempt to guide your thoughts to some improvement of this awful dispensation ; but, inasmuch as I have consented to address you, I must be permitted to say, that I shall feel constrained, as a minister of Christ, to disregard, in a great degree, the dictates of private feeling. It is delightful to a christian minister, to be able to pour consolation into the hearts of

the bereaved, by pointing them to the path, by which their friends have ascended to glory; and in all ordinary cases, it is considered our privilege, so far to regard the sacredness of surviving friendship, as to avoid adverting, even indirectly, to the errors and crimes of the departed. Gladly would I be the minister of consolation to this circle of mourners, whose hearts, I well know, are rived with agony; but to attempt to mitigate their anguish, by palliating the crime which has occasioned it, would be as useless to them, as it would be unworthy of me; and I doubt not that they will do me the justice to believe, that it is with the sincerest sympathy in their affliction, that I attempt to discharge this painful duty. I wish not to heap useless reproaches upon the memory of the man, who has been guilty of this unnatural deed: that would not aid us at all to an improvement of it;—but my design is, simply to impress upon you the lessons, which it so loudly inculcates, that this awful instance of the wrath of man, may be made subservient to the praise of God.

The psalm from which our text is taken, was probably designed to celebrate the victories of David over the surrounding nations, after he was exalted King in Zion. The first part of

it consists of expressions of thanksgiving, for what God had already done for him ; the latter part contains a prayer, that he might have still further occasion to praise God, for his own deliverances, and the confusion of his enemies. In the verse which contains our text, he triumphs in the assurance, that there is a God who judges in the earth, and that the constitution of his providence is such, that wicked men will finally fall under the weight of their own opposition to the cause of truth and righteousness. *The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth ;* THE WICKED IS SNARED IN THE WORK OF HIS OWN HANDS.

The term *wicked*, as it is generally used in scripture, is of extensive application. It includes not only those, who are abandoned to open vice, but all, who are not the subjects of evangelical holiness ; and in this sense, it is the counterpart of the term *righteous*. The word, however, is sometimes used in a limited sense, to denote such, as having made great progress in sin, openly and fearlessly insult the authority of God. It is in this latter sense, chiefly, that I shall consider it in the following discourse. And I shall endeavor to present before you an analysis of the text, by considering,

first, *some of the means, by which a pre-eminently depraved character is formed*; and by shewing, secondly, that *wicked men, in their efforts to injure others, and oppose religion, actually ensnare themselves.*

I. I am, first, to consider *some of the means by which a pre-eminently depraved character is formed.* On this article, upon which much might be said, the time will permit me only to select two or three points, which are most prominent, and most obviously suggested by the occasion.

1. And, in the first place, I mention *profanation of the sabbath, and especially, neglect of the public worship of God.*

That God has appointed one day in seven, to be devoted exclusively to his service; and that he has instituted public worship, as part of the appropriate duty of that day, will not be questioned by any, who admit the claims of the Bible to Divine inspiration. If, then, public worship be a Divine institution, it is the duty of every one, who has the opportunity, to attend upon it; and he, who, voluntarily, and without sufficient reason, declines attendance, is guilty of casting contempt upon God's authority. Let no one say, that he has a right

to decide this matter for himself; and that he is not responsible for the course which he may adopt. I do not say, that he is accountable to his fellow men; but he is accountable at a higher tribunal, than human authority can constitute. There is an obligation resting upon him—whether he acknowledge it or not—which results from a direct command of God; a command, as intelligibly communicated, as any other. If, then, you persist in saying that you have a right to turn your back upon the public worship of God; I answer that it is precisely the same right that you have, to set the Majesty of Heaven at defiance, or to destroy your own soul.

When, therefore, we see an individual frequently excusing himself from attendance at the sanctuary, on insufficient grounds, there is too much reason to apprehend that he is becoming indifferent to the authority of God. But when absence from public worship becomes habitual, and year after year passes away, and he rarely, if ever, visits the house of the Lord, we may usually calculate, with considerable confidence, that that man will ere long be found sitting in the seat of the scoffer. For it is worthy of remark, that this very dis-

position to turn his back upon the worship of God, is the germe of a thoroughly vicious habit. It indicates a state of feeling in the highest degree hostile to impressions of religion, and in the highest degree favorable to the influence of temptation. And what is the effect, which this complete and voluntary separation from the means of grace, without the intervention of a miracle, must have upon such a heart? What can you expect from the man, who never comes within the influence of a preached gospel; who never breathes the atmosphere of prayer; who deprecates, rather than welcomes, the return of the sabbath? Will you say that it is possible that such a man may spend his sabbaths profitably at home? Follow him, then, and see how his sabbaths are actually spent, and tell me whether the result does not contradict such a suggestion. You will find him, perhaps, wasting in sleep those sacred hours, as if they were given only to be a blank in his existence; perhaps, opposing the religious improvement of his family, and endeavoring to hedge up their path to Heaven; perhaps, reading licentious or infidel books, thus arming himself for an encounter with truth and piety, and treasuring up poison to infuse into

the hearts of the young. Is it not obvious, that such a course must soon result, in the formation of a character, of the blackest hue ? Besides its natural tendency to impair the energies of conscience, it is well fitted to paralyze the principle of shame ; and this double influence cannot long operate, before the flood gates of vice will fly open, and the last restraint against a thoroughly depraved character, be removed.

On this subject, my hearers, I confidently appeal to facts. I ask the tenants of your jails and state prisons, whether, in the great majority of instances, one of the earliest steps in their career, was not a neglect of the public worship of God. I appeal to the records of public execution for evidence, that almost every criminal begins, in the same way, his education for the scaffold. I call upon those wretched outcasts, who go up and down the world, the scourge of society, and yet do not come within the sweep of public justice, to say, whether this is not one part of the process, by which *their* characters have been formed. Could you hear the honest report in these several cases, and see how the profanation of the sabbath, and the neglect of the sanctuary, constituted the elements of subsequent character, I doubt not that the result

would furnish an argument for reverencing these institutions, which it would not be easy to resist. Guard, then, against the beginning of this evil. Beware how you too readily admit excuses in favor of your absence from the house of God. By the value which you place upon character, usefulness, salvation, I exhort you to *remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

2. Another means, by which men often arrive at an extreme degree of depravity, is *the indulgence of angry and malignant passion.*

I am aware that some are constituted with a stronger tendency to irritation, than others ; but this is only a reason, why they should exercise more watchfulness and restraint. The sentiment which we sometimes hear, that our Maker, in the very constitution of our nature, has established the dominion of passion over us, is as unreasonable, as it is impious. He has given us no passions, which, with proper care we may not keep in subjection ; and he permits us to be exposed to no temptations, which, in the use of the appointed means, we may not resist. But whenever passion is allowed habitually to have the ascendancy, the result will almost certainly be a sad depravation

of moral character. This is evident from the fact, that the very existence of these violent feelings, without reference to the conduct which may spring from them, is sin ; even if such feelings were kept locked up in the heart, and were manifested neither in words nor actions, this very commotion within—these angry and malicious desires, could not fail to excite the displeasure of the Searcher of hearts. But it rarely happens, that such feelings exist, without being acted out in conversation and conduct. How common is it to hear the man under their influence, venting himself in blasphemy, and then, perhaps, pleading his anger, in excuse for his profaneness ; thus alledging one sin, in justification of another. How common to hear the victim of passion uttering imprecations against his nearest friend, and outraging every tie of natural affection. How often, too, has an ungoverned temper nerved the arm for a desperate act, which has sent an immortal soul, in the twinkling of an eye, to its last account. Here, then, you perceive, there is a two fold influence exerted, in hardening the heart ; for while these unhallowed feelings serve to benumb the moral sensibility, the effect is greatly heightened, by the frequent re-

petition of open crime, whether in word or deed, to which these feelings give rise. Hence we find, that there are no persons so much dreaded, as those who have long been accustomed to yield to violent passion. They are dreaded, not merely, because their feelings are liable, at any time, to be wrought into a tempest, and to discharge themselves in curses or in blows, but because an habitually ungoverned temper is usually presumed to indicate, either a partial, or entire disregard to moral obligation.

Are you tempted, then, to indulge anger or malice towards any of your fellow men? Resist the temptation, as you would resist the murderer of your soul. If you yield, in one instance, you will more readily yield, in the next; and before you are aware of it, you may have formed a habit, which will make you the scourge and dread of the community. What may be the particular result of your throwing the reins upon the neck of passion, it is impossible to predict. It may be, that you will soon be left to some rash act, which will blast all your hopes, and make the hearts of your friends bleed. You may be left to challenge the vengeance of God, till he shall actually come out in vengeance against you. You may even mur-

der the wife of your bosom, and plunge a dagger into your own heart, and rush into the presence of your judge, crimsoned with guilt, and stained with blood. Will you plead as an apology for such acts, that you were under the influence of passion? That, instead of constituting an apology, is the very root of the evil. So the world will regard it, and so God will regard it, when you stand speechless at his bar. I say again, then, be armed, at every point, against this enemy of your peace—this enemy of your soul.

3. Another means, which is often very efficacious in the formation of a habit of gross wickedness, is, *resisting the influences of the Holy Spirit.*

The spirit of God, by an influence more or less powerful, no doubt, finds access to every heart; but all are not the subjects of his *saving* operations. Sometimes he speaks to the conscience of the sinner, in a voice of thunder, and, for a season, breaks up his delusions, by bringing him to the work of self communion, and arraying before him the terrors of the judgment. But even this constitutes no certain evidence, that he is to be the subject of a renewing influence; for many a

sinner has relapsed, from this point, into his lethargy, and remained as dead in trespasses and sins as ever. But though the spirit may be grieved away, there is an important influence exerted notwithstanding ; the furnace which did not melt the heart, has hardened it to adamant. It is part of the economy of Providence, that those things which, when rightly improved, are the richest blessings, become, by perversion, the occasion of the greatest evil ; and this is not more true of any thing, than of the influences of the spirit. I appeal to your own observation, whether those, who have once earnestly enquired, under an awakening influence, ‘ what they should do to be saved,’ and have cast off their impressions, and rushed back to thoughtlessness, are not the very persons, generally, who reach the highest eminence in guilt ; who are able, with the least remorse, to scoff at all that is sacred ; and whose lives furnish the most melancholy testimony, that they are given up to a reprobate mind.

Here again, my friends, I stop to exhort you to beware of the beginning of *this* evil. And I do it the rather, because I know that the spirit of God is at work among you ; and perhaps, there

may be those here, who are, at this moment, hesitating, whether they shall cherish his influences, or go back to the beggarly elements of the world.* Yield not to the deceitful voice which may whisper in your ear, that there will be a more convenient season. I give you no false alarm, when I tell you that, if you return to the world, from the point which you have now gained, your heart will presently become proof against warnings, which now make you tremble ; and though you may hitherto have been a decent moralist, not improbably, you may hereafter be an impious scoffer. He, whose self-mangled body was just committed to the grave, once felt oppressed by the burden of his guilt, and earnestly enquired of a minister† in this neighborhood, ‘ what he should do to be saved’ ; but he put to flight his serious convictions, and we have an affecting comment upon his presumption in the solemnities of this day. It is the voice of God, awakened sinner, that speaks through this dispensation, and warns you not to delay the work of repentance, another hour.

* For several weeks past, there has been an unusual attention to religion, in the parish in which this discourse was preached.

† Rev. Mr. Osgood.

4. I observe, once more, that there is nothing, which is more likely to constitute the foundation, or to accelerate the progress of a grossly depraved habit, than *a belief in the doctrine of universal salvation*.

There is no idea so terrible, as that of a punishment, such as the Bible describes to be the portion of the wicked, in a future world. It is this, which, in a great degree, prevents depraved man from acting out the native madness of the heart. No doubt it has a powerful influence even upon christians; but in respect to those, who are destitute of a principle of holy love, it imposes one of the chief restraints against a life of open transgression: We find this principle operating, with no small efficacy, even upon the minds of heathen; but where it has been quickened and directed by revelation, it exerts a proportionably greater energy.

If it be true, then, that the dread of a future retribution is one of the most efficient principles, in the prevention of crime, it is manifest, that they, who would root out this sentiment from the mind, level a deadly blow at the best interests of society. Only let a wicked man believe, that all distinctions of character will be overlooked, in a future world, and that the good

and the bad will share alike, in the rewards of eternity, and no exhibition of depravity whatever, from such a man, furnishes any reasonable ground of surprise. The highest principle, by which you can expect that he will be governed, is expediency. His only inquiry will be, what, on the whole, will most promote his present gratification ; and even the answer to this inquiry will be suggested by passion and appetite, rather than by sober reason. Suppose, then, that he cast his eye covetously upon your property ;—if he really believe that an act of theft will no more be punished, in a future world, than an act of charity, what is there, provided he can evade the vigilance of human law, to keep him from his purpose. The truth is, that the creed of the atheist does not so effectually undermine the foundations of morality, as this ; for while the atheist hopes and professes to believe, that man will not exist in a future state, he is obliged, upon his own principles, to admit the possibility, not only of a future existence, but of an interminable existence in misery. He knows no other god than chance ; and to this he ascribes every thing. How then can he know, that the same chance, which has begun his existence here, may not

continue it forever ; that the same chance, which dooms him, in the present life, to a *degree* of suffering, may not, hereafter, place him in circumstances, in which he will experience nothing *but* suffering. But the creed of the universalist, though it avoids the fundamental article of atheism—a probable non-existence, does not, like atheism, admit even the possibility of an eternal and just retribution. It not only makes provision to save the most hardened wretch, but it lays him under the necessity of being saved ; it does not even give him the privilege of choice. Better, I verily believe, for society, that the wicked man should read over the door of the tomb, **DEATH, AN ETERNAL SLEEP, THAN UNIVERSAL AND UNCONDITIONAL SALVATION.**

Why is it that the doctrine, of which I am speaking, makes so conspicuous a figure, in the annals of suicide ? It is because the universalist reasons, in the manner which might be expected, from his own principles. Why not suffer a little pain, in order to stop the vital current, when, the moment the work is done, the glories of heaven are bursting upon the soul ? If it were possible that such an act should awaken the displeasure of Him, who gave life, it is not possible, on this principle, that that dis-

pleasure should ever be expressed; for that would be inconsistent with the idea, that all beyond the grave is happiness. But surely, a God, who desires so much the happiness of his creatures, that he can save the most abandoned of them, in their sins, will not be offended, if, by a self-destroying act, they shorten a little the path to Heaven; especially, if they are destined here to a heavy burden of affliction. And this doctrine, I venture to say, furnishes as fair a warrant, and opens as bright a path, to the murderer as the suicide; for if death be the gate of glory to all, the man who sheds your blood, be your character what it may, confers upon you the highest favor; and the shedding of *his* blood, by the hand of justice, instead of being a punishment, is a premium upon murder. If you will punish a criminal, on this principle, try to detain him in this world as long as you can; but do not make him a thousand fold happier than yourselves, by sending him instantly to glory.

Will it be said, in reply to all this, that the obligation to a holy life, is to be traced back to the immutable distinction between right and wrong; and that the heart is to be won, by the loveliness of virtue? I acknowledge,

indeed, that the fear of punishment is not the *immediate* spring of Christian obedience ; the grand principle, which swells the heart, and sways the conduct of the Christian, is the love of God ; but point me to an instance, in which a sinner was ever reclaimed, and had a principle of divine love implanted in his heart, who was yet fully convinced that there is no future retribution. What, upon this principle, is the amount of the argument, by which you would persuade a sinner to become holy ? Precisely this :—You are a wicked man, and have wandered from God, and from duty. Now, there is a loveliness in virtue—a pleasure in doing right, of which you have no conception :—therefore, though it must be acknowledged, that the course which you are pursuing, will terminate as happily as that, which we recommend, we exhort you to break off your iniquities, and turn to the Lord. How naturally would a man of strong vicious propensities reply, ‘virtue may seem lovely to *you*, but *I* find my pleasure in a different course ; and, therefore, I shall pursue it. If all are to be equally happy at last, let each one judge for himself what is present good.’ And the reply would be unanswerable.

But, the universalist cuts himself off from an appeal to the immutable distinction between right and wrong, as a ground of obligation to virtue, by actually confounding that distinction. For he cannot deny, that God regards things, according to their real character ; and that his views must be in consistency with his conduct. If, then, virtue and vice share alike, under his government, where is the evidence that he does not regard them with equal approbation ? Does any one say, that the wicked have their punishment in the present life ? I answer, that this does not relieve the difficulty ; for the righteous suffer here, as truly as the wicked ; and sometimes they are even the greater sufferers. But do you tell me that the remorse, which attends the commission of a bad deed, is its punishment ? Then it follows, that the more wicked a man becomes, the less he is punished ; and that the most obdurate transgressor of all, may entirely escape punishment ; for who does not know, that the feeling of remorse usually subsides, in the same proportion, that a vicious habit gains strength ; and that, beyond a certain point in wickedness, it ceases altogether.

It has not been my purpose, on this occasion, to attempt a formal refutation of the doctrine of which I have been speaking: my only design has been, briefly to illustrate its tendency, by shewing you that it sweeps away every barrier to crime, and when reduced to practice, forms a thoroughly depraved character. And if such be its practical tendency, it would seem, that no other refutation of it could be needed. But there is a consideration suggested by this occasion, which I must be pardoned for alluding to, which seems to me to supply an argument against this doctrine, which is irresistible. I appeal, then, to the believer in universal salvation, if there be one present, whether there be not something within him, which recognizes a difference between the deserts and prospects of the deliberate murderer, and the innocent victim whose blood he spills. Do you believe in your heart, that the Governor of the world sits an indifferent spectator of such murderous deeds? My argument is here exclusively with your conscience; and to that principle I appeal, when I ask, whether the voice of blood inhumanly spilt, does not cry to Heaven for vengeance.

I know not whether I address an individual, who has even begun to cherish the delusive

hope of being saved, without respect to character ; but if there be such an one present, let him speedily retrace his steps, or he will soon be in the broadest part of the path of death. The belief of this doctrine will, not only, in all probability, ensure his destruction, by lulling him into a fatal security, but will render his destruction many fold more aggravated, by urging him forward, in the vain expectation of impunity, to the commission of gross crime. Here then, at the commencement of his career, let him sit down, and deliberately count the cost. Let him not venture a single step in the dark. If he *will* be a universalist, let him resolve, that he will not shrink from yielding himself a victim to the irregular and criminal impulse of passion. Let him give notice to his friends around him that he is about to embrace a creed, which will whiten into virtues the blackest crimes ; and which will make it a matter of expediency with him, whether he shall suffer them to live unmolested, or with an assassin's hand, wield against them the weapons of death. Let him become reconciled to the thought of falling into the hands of the living God, through his own murderous instrumentality. But if, upon a full and rational estimate of all this, it seems to

much for him to consent to, then let him be-ware how he receives a doctrine, the practical influence of which is so often seen in such a result.

II. I pass to the second division of the discourse, in which I am to shew, that *the wicked, in their attempts to injure others, and oppose religion, actually ensnare themselves.*

I. The wicked ensnare themselves at the commencement of a habit of wickedness ; inas-much as *they begin a course, which terminates, in respect to their own character, very differ-ently from what they intend.*

It is proverbial, that no one ever becomes a great sinner at once ; it is usually from a small beginning, and by almost imperceptible degrees, that a habit of confirmed wickedness is formed. Ask the veteran in sin, whether, when he first yielded to temptation, he expected ever to reach that eminence in guilt, which he has at-tained, and he will tell you, if he is honest, that nothing was farther from his thoughts ; and on the other hand, ask the stripling in vice, whether he intends ever openly to set at defi-ance the authority of God ; and he will revolt at the suggestion. But the truth is, that, in every such case, there is a deception. It is part of the nature of sin, that it is deceitful ;

and he, who yields himself to it, must expect to be deceived. When the first step is taken in a career of wickedness, there is, often, no doubt, a resolution formed, that it shall be the last ; but wait a little, and you will see it followed by another, and another, till in a short time, the whole distance will be passed over, between exemplary morality, and downright profligacy. There is also, perhaps, an intention to yield to only a single vice ; but the victim of one will soon find that he is the victim of more ; and he will ere long know that he has given himself up to the possession of an unclean spirit, whose name is LEGION. Who does not perceive, that, in that vicious act, which proved to be the first of a succession, that has resulted in forming an abandoned character, there was a snare ? You thought not on what dangerous ground you were treading—you were snared in the work of your own hands.

Let no young person, then, imagine, that he may safely dally with temptation. Far more safely, may you play with the deadly viper, or receive burning coals into your bosom. No matter how pure may be your principles, or how correct, your practice, or how much re-

spected, your character, if you once begin to tamper with vice, the probability is, that you are undone. Oh, how often has the fond parent, whose heart had thrilled with joy, in prospect of the usefulness of some promising child, in a few years, found all his hopes blighted, and witnessed, in that child, a monument of the ruinous tendency of vicious indulgence.

2. The wicked ensnare themselves, inasmuch as *their conduct brings evils upon them, in the PRESENT life, which they do not anticipate.*

Mankind, in the indulgence of every vice, unless profane swearing be an exception, propose to themselves some advantage—the gratification of some passion or appetite; and they always contrive to blind themselves to the real consequences of their conduct, so far, at least, that the good shall seem to preponderate above the evil. But all experience proves, that they are deceived. God has established an indissoluble connection between sin and punishment; and though, what we see of it in the present world, is only a shadow of the retribution to come, it is enough to shew us what, in this respect, is the constitution of Divine providence. The thief, the highway robber, the assassin, does not intend to suffer the penalty of human

law ; he thinks to hide himself from the eye of justice, and, perhaps, to forfeit neither his life, nor his reputation. And, hence, the place usually chosen, as the theatre of such atrocious deeds, is a solitude ; the time, the silent hour of midnight ; the circumstances, such as seem most favorable to concealment. But suppose the mystery of iniquity never to be revealed to any human being, does it follow, think you, that there is no punishment in the present life ? Far from it. If you could follow the wretch to his retirement, and look into the secret chambers of his soul, no doubt, you would often see the never dying worm at its work ; when all was calm without, you would find tumult and agony within. But it is not the common order of providence, that gross transgressors should escape the penalty of human law. Not unfrequently, years have elapsed, after the commission of a crime, and the perpetrator has lulled himself into security, in respect to his detection, when some unexpected event, strongly marked by the finger of Providence, has drawn the wretch from his concealment, and branded him with the infamy of an incendiary, or an assassin. Who will not say, that that wicked man fell into his own snare ? He imagined, perhaps,

while he was performing the deed, that he was safe ; and the confidence of his safety increased, with each month and year after it ; but, at length, he is surprised by the hand of justice, and carried first to an earthly tribunal, and then to the prison, or the gallows.

But beside the evils, which the wicked experience in this life, from the power of conscience, and the operations of human law, there are others, which may be considered as the legitimate offspring of vice, upon which they make as little calculation. Look at the drunkard. Before his destructive habit was formed; he regarded his character as sacred ; he husbanded his property with commendable thrift ; he loved his friends with ardent affection : he had a family, who looked up to him with confidence, as their head, and rejoiced in his presence and smiles. But what a disastrous change has this habit produced ? His property is sacrificed to his criminal appetite, on the one hand, and his foolish bargains, on the other. His character is stained with the deepest hue of disgrace. In the domestic circle, his presence inspires mortification or terror ; instead of recognizing in him the husband or the father, they witness only the most disgusting features of

the brute. Did that man, think you, count the cost, when he first passed the limits of sobriety? Did he make a sober estimate of the wreck of property, and the wreck of character, and the wreck of comfort, which a habit of intemperance would involve? Had he done this, he would probably never have been a drunkard. At first, the poison circulated silently in his veins; but, at length, it reached the seat of thought and feeling, and made him a madman. It was sweeter than honey to his taste, but it was a consuming fire in his system. Though others may have partaken of his guilt, by administering to him the deadly draught, still he was snared in the work of his own hands.

3. Equally true is it, that the wicked ensnare themselves, inasmuch as *their conduct will bring upon them evils, in a FUTURE life, which they do not, at present, anticipate.*

I do not mean, that the wicked, of course, believe the doctrine of universal salvation; but they do contrive, in some way or other, practically to nullify the threatenings of God. If they do not positively believe that there is to be no future punishment, they secretly flatter themselves that there *may* be none; or if any, that it will be inconsiderable in its nature, or

limited in its duration. But when they come to wake up in the eternal world, all these delusions will be at an end. They will then know, that the threatenings of God were not without meaning. In the guilty course which they have pursued, they will perceive, that they were treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. On the forbidden ground of sin, where they once imagined themselves to be walking so securely, they will find that they were ensnared to their eternal destruction. How will they reprobate their own guilty infatuation, while they give vent to their agony, in the wailings of despair? How will their hearts die within them, when, surveying the miseries of their doom, they connect with those miseries the thought of eternity? Whither will they turn their despairing eyes for help, to what refuge in the universe can they fly, when all above, beneath, around, is one unbroken scene of horror—one perpetual exhibition of the wrath of God.

And what is true of all wicked men, is especially true of him, who rushes into eternity by an act of suicide. His object, in committing such an act, must be, to obtain some imaginary good, or, at least, to exchange his situation for one, which he supposes will be less intolerable.

But, in every point of view, this is delusion. Suppose he has become disgusted with the world, and weary of its cares and trials, and thinks to improve his condition, by becoming an inhabitant of another world—all that he suffered here, he will find to be joy unspeakable, compared with the full cup, which is wrung out to him in eternity. Or suppose he has committed an offence, which forfeits his life to the laws of his country, and he anticipates his doom, by becoming his own executioner—what has he done for himself, but declined the little reprieve, in which he might have implored the mercy of God, and in a manner, which must terribly aggravate his condemnation, taken a dark leap into the world of despair. Or suppose that he deliberately commits this fearful act, on the ground of a belief in universal salvation, not fearing the consequences of standing before his judge, stained with his own blood—will he not feel that he was snared in the work of his own hands, when he comes to know, that that act, which he supposed would introduce him to the joys of heaven, has actually placed him beyond the reach of mercy ; that he has opened the door, with his own hand, and passed deliberately into the world of torment.

A few words, with particular reference to this melancholy dispensation, will conclude the discourse.

And here, I must acknowledge, that I am at loss in what manner to utter my feelings ; for the occasion is so new to us all, and so fraught with horror, that it seems more natural to pause' in silent amazement, than to say a word concerning the bloody transaction. Of the man, I could wish to say nothing ; as I have already remarked, I take no delight in accumulating reproaches upon his memory ; and for all that I would have said, his very name should have slumbered in forgetfulness, if I had not felt constrained, by a sense of duty, to hold him up, as a warning to the living. Of the woman, though I had no personal knowledge of her, I rejoice to be informed, that much can be said that is praiseworthy ; and especially that she lived in the exercise, and in the evidence of a Christian hope. I am told that she was one of a little assembly, to which it was my privilege to preach the gospel, a few hours before the murderous deed. Oh, had I known that, at that very hour, there was a malignant breast revolving the purpose of pouring out the blood of one of my hearers, that there was an immortal soul before

me, within a single step of the world of retribution, sure I am that my message would have been delivered, with far more of earnestness and solemnity. It proved to be the last sermon which she ever heard : God grant that it may have been a comforting sermon to her soul. She has gone into the presence of her Judge, and we trust, has been welcomed to a mansion in glory. If she has safely reached heaven, it is now no matter to her, though it was a bloody path, by which she ascended, and though it was opened for her, by a cruel hand, which was pledged only to offices of affection.

Ye, mourning friends, it would not be strange, if, under the weight of this overwhelming visitation, you should exclaim, 'my trouble is greater than I can bear.' You cannot look around you, without perceiving that you have the sympathy of a thousand hearts ; but the bitterest ingredients in your cup, I well know that it is beyond the power of human sympathy to extract. Happy I am to be able to point you to an all-sufficient source of consolation in the gospel of Christ. Weary and heavy laden mourner, lay down thy burden at a Saviour's feet. Be still, and know that He, who has permitted this event, is Jehovah. Let this

dark page in the history of your life, while it contains the record of the keenest anguish you ever knew, testify also to your humility and submission, under the rod of God. When the mysteries of providence shall be unfolded in a future world, may you be found among those, to whom they shall be an occasion of eternal rejoicing !

And what shall I say to this group of children, so early, so suddenly, so unnaturally, cast upon the world, amidst the clustering sorrows of orphanage ? What better can I say to you, than to bid you remember your mother's counsels and instructions, and embalm them in your hearts, as her dying legacy ? It was not your privilege to minister to her, in her last moments, nor was it her's, to pour her dying benedictions upon you, and breathe out her life in a prayer for your salvation. But could she have spoken out her heart, at that awful moment, she would have told you to beware of temptation, to love your God and Saviour, and to devote yourselves to religion in the morning of life. I charge you, then, by all the tenderness of a departed mother's love, and by all the tragical circumstances of her death, to *remember your Creator in the days of your youth* : and may the bles-

sing of the orphan's God, dear children, rest upon you !

And now, my hearers, it only remains, that I exhort you seriously to lay to heart this awful dispensation. Think not that you have discharged your duty, by mingling in these solemnities, and yielding yourselves, for an hour, to that impression of horror, which the occasion so naturally excites. And think not that you will have filled up what remains of duty, when you shall have gone away, and told what you have seen, and deprecated the desperate deed. Your business is, not with the man, who has, ere this, received his sentence, at the bar of God, but with your own heart ; in applying the awful warning, and endeavoring to make it subservient to your salvation. And if there be any here, who are now awakened, in some measure, to a sense of guilt, God forbid that, in wondering at the wickedness of another, they should forget their own. Rather contemplate, in this mirror of human depravity, the image of your own hearts ; for so long as you remain under the dominion of sin, you are cherishing the very principle, which reigns in the heart of the assassin and the suicide. Learn, too, the importance of a spiritual renovation by divine grace ;

for the bosom, that harbors a spirit of rebellion against God, has, within itself, the elements of hell. Especially, regard this as a warning to escape, without delay, from the coming wrath ; for while you are lingering, the spirit may take his departure from your soul, and you too may be left to the mercy of your own guilty passions, and your case may hereafter be pointed at, as a warning to others, not to trifle with the spirit of God. Gracious God, grant that, while we may never be guilty of shedding our own blood, or that of our fellow men, our consciences may be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus ; that thus, through his merits, we may triumph over death, and reign with him forever !

APPENDIX.

AS many incorrect and contradictory reports, relative to the unhappy affair, which occasioned the preceding discourse, have gone forth, it has been thought desirable, that an authentic statement of the principal facts, should be laid before the public. The following narrative is collected, partly, from the testimony, on which the verdict of the jury was formed, and partly, from members of the family, and other intimate acquaintances, to whom the history of both the deceased persons was well known.

Samuel Leonard was the son of Mr. Aribiert, and Mrs. Experience Leonard, and was born at West Springfield, (second parish,) December 30, 1788. At the age of sixteen, he went from home, to learn the trade of a joiner; but before his apprenticeship expired, he left his master, and went to Pittsfield, where he remained about two years. At twenty-one, he went to Springfield, to work at his trade, in the United States Armory, and continued there, except an interval of about two years, till the close of his life. He was married March 28, 1812, to Miss Harriet Cumstock, the lamented victim of his cruelty and violence. His family resided at Springfield until 1820, when he removed them to the place where he committed the fatal deed. During their residence at Springfield, and soon after his marriage, he treated his wife with great severity, insomuch that she told an intimate friend several years ago, that before they had been married two months, his conduct towards her was such, that if circumstances had permitted, she would gladly

have been separated from him forever. While at Springfield, *she* became the subject of permanent religious impressions ; and *he* was so much affected, for a short season, by a sense of his sinfulness, that, in one instance, he fell upon his knees, in her presence, and implored divine mercy. But this state of feeling was very transient ; he not only succeeded, by a violent effort, in putting to flight his own impressions, but became a determined opposer of *her* religious comfort and improvement. After changing their residence his cruelty towards her increased ; and he manifested a bitter hostility towards his neighbours, chiefly, it is supposed, because he perceived they were *her* friends. He strongly opposed her attendance on public worship ; and would often snatch the Bible from her hands, and cast it across the room, with great violence, in token of his displeasure. The same opposition he manifested to the religious education of his children ; and if he saw them reading the Bible, or any other serious book, he would often profanely rebuke them, and bid them substitute a universalist magazine, for which he was a subscriber. During all this time, he was, as might be expected, evidently an unhappy man. In three instances, at least, he took laudanum, with the avowed purpose of destroying his life ; and according to his own statement, he repeatedly went to his barn with a rope, for the same purpose ; but whether his courage failed ; or he was prevented from executing his design ; in some other way, does not appear.

But though he had repeatedly threatened to commit suicide, and had treated his wife with great barbarity, there is no sufficient evidence, that he ever formed the purpose of taking *her* life, until within about a week, previous to the horrid deed. At that time, without any apparent cause, unless it were the increasing interest which she manifested in religion, his anger towards her seemed to rise into fury, and then it was, that he announced to her his desperate determination. The thought was so shocking, that, at first, she was incredulous ; but her apprehension of danger constantly

increased, and the five succeeding nights, she passed in wakeful and dreary solicitude. At the end of that time, she became so thoroughly convinced, that there was a dreadful meaning in his threatenings, that she resolved, notwithstanding her children must be left behind, to seek a different residence. On the morning previous to the fatal deed (December 13) he rose, at an early hour, and went to Springfield, where he remained at his work, till about eleven o'clock, when he observed to some one, that he felt so unhappy, that he could work no longer ; and then went from the armory into the town, where he remained till some time in the afternoon. A part of this time he spent at a tavern, where he drank, in quick succession, three glasses of ardent spirit ; not improbably, with a view to nerve himself, for the barbarous act, which he evidently intended to have performed the succeeding evening. He returned to his family about three o'clock, and while they were at tea, repeated his former threats to his wife, telling her that he would soon put an end to her trouble. Soon after sunset, she left the house, with a view to attend a religious meeting, not far distant, and with the expectation of consulting some of her friends, in respect to the means of bringing about a final separation from her husband. Perceiving that she was gone, he called her, when she was at some distance from the house, and in a menacing manner, commanded her to return ; but she heeded not his threats, and intended never again to place herself in his power. At the close of the religious service, she went to the house of one of *his* brothers, a respectable man, who, with his family, had always befriended her, though at the expense of incurring the bitter enmity of her husband. Previous to her leaving home for the meeting, he carried his axe, contrary to his usual practice, into the house ; and in the course of the evening, put a razor into his pocket, and gave his pocket book to his eldest daughter, telling her, that, in case he was taken away (for he had trouble enough to kill any body) she might take from it a five-dollar note, and then give the pocket book to Dr. H.

During the evening, he went several times to the window, evidently watching the return of his wife, with a view, no doubt, to perform the fatal act, soon after she should return. In the morning, he arose, as usual, but refused to take any breakfast ; and upon being asked by his daughter, whether he was going that day to the shop (at Springfield) replied, that he should go there no more. After the family had taken breakfast, he sent one of his daughters, eight years of age, to the house of his brother, to request her mother to come home, to attend to one of the children, who was sick, and, as he said, though contrary to truth, was growing worse. The mother, supposing that her return would be at the hazard of her life, declined going ; and told the child, that some other person must be procured, to attend to her sick sister. When the child communicated the reply to her father, he immediately went to the house himself, and with an appearance of good nature, which he had rarely exhibited, renewed the request that his wife would return, and administer some medicine, which the physician had left for their daughter. Alas, it was but too successful an effort to conceal his murderous purpose, and to lure her to the spot, where the fatal deed was to be done. But though she followed him to the house, it was with the intention of returning to his brother's in the course of the day. Immediately after she came home, he directed his eldest daughter to go to school ; and as he passed out of the room where his wife was, he shut the door with great violence, and was heard to say, 'there, I have got her now.' Mrs. L. soon after, commenced preparation for washing some clothes, with a view to leaving the family. While she was engaged at her wash-tub, with her head inclined over it, he entered the door with an axe, levelled it at her head, and by one tremendous blow, brought her to the floor. She screamed ; he repeated the blow, once or twice, after she had fallen ; and she struggled no more. He then stepped back to the door, and threw out the axe ; and immediately took off his cravat, drew a razor from his pocket, and cut his own throat from

one ear to the other. He fell ; struggled, for a few moments, and all was still. His daughter of eleven years of age, lay upon the bed, and witnessed the whole transaction. As soon as she was able to rise, (she was under the operation of an emetic) she caught a little brother, three years old, and an infant sister, and ran to the house of her uncle, where her mother had lodged, the night before, to give the alarm. In an instant, the awful news flew through the neighborhood ; but, as there was an apprehension, that the child might possibly be mistaken, in respect to the statement concerning her father, and that he might still be alive, waiting an opportunity to execute his threatening, that he would kill the first person, who should attempt any interference in respect to his treatment of his wife, it was thought scarcely safe, for some minutes, to approach the dwelling ; but some persons soon ventured to open the door, and found that the child had made but too faithful a report of what had taken place. Immediately, a scene of anguish ensued, the very thought of which, makes the heart sick. On the floor, lay, reeking in her blood, the murdered wife ; while the guilty author of the deed, who had fallen by the violence of his own hand, lay, at a little distance, in a similar condition. In a few minutes, a group of broken hearted orphans, and soon after, parents, brothers, sisters, were present, some wringing their hands, others fainting, in agony, at the bloody spectacle. During the day, the house was thronged by hundreds, who came to see the strange work, which had been done ; and as they looked, alternately, at the remains of the murdered woman, and of the wretch, who had done the deed, every heart seemed, now to bleed with pity, and now to burn with indignation. An inquest was held upon the bodies, and the verdict of the jury was *wilful murder and suicide*. The news carried gloom, as it spread ; and every one seemed to feel, as if the sun never went down on a more horrid transaction.

The character of Leonard was evidently formed, under the influences, which are described, in the first part of the

preceding discourse. He had, for a long time, habitually neglected the public worship of God; had given full license to a most violent temper; had evidently grieved away the Holy Spirit; and for several years, had avowed his belief in the doctrine of universal salvation.* He was never addict-

* It is understood, that it has been confidently asserted by some, *sinc the death* of Leonard, that he was not a *universalist*, but an *atheist*. That common report had given him the former character, for a long time previous to his death, it is presumed, will not be questioned. That his reading had been, for several years, confined, almost exclusively, to a *universalist magazine*, and that he had commanded his children to read it also, in place of the Bible, one would suppose, were facts hardly reconcilable with his belief in any other system. If it be admitted that he were an atheist in principle, does not the zeal for universalism, which this conduct exhibits, taken in connection with his character, prove that he considered the latter system a more powerful engine than the former, against the cause of truth and piety. But, if the facts already stated, do not sufficiently establish his creed, the writer of this narrative holds himself ready to prove, by more than two or three competent witnesses, that he has repeatedly and explicitly *declared himself* a universalist; and if any will have it, that he became an atheist towards the close of life, he moreover pledges himself to produce sufficient testimony, that he made the above declaration, within about five weeks previous to his death. Whether there is any evidence that he ever uttered himself in favor of atheistical sentiments, the writer has no knowledge; but he is not at all disposed to question the alledged fact, as he considers it perfectly reconcilable with his general belief in universal salvation. That he might have had some moments of fearful misgiving, in respect to the truth of his creed, there is no doubt;—probably every universalist has the same;—and how natural, at such a moment, when the dread alternative of annihilation or retribution presented itself, that he should have eagerly grasped at the former; for much as “the soul shrinks back upon herself, and startles at” annihilation, the prospect of it is no doubt much less dreadful, than the prospect of eternal misery. But whether it be right to call that man an atheist, who habitually calls himself a universalist, who only summons atheism to his aid to drive away the fear of hell, when universalism will not sustain him in the hope of heaven;—whether or not this be right, judge ye.

ed to gross intemperance ; though he occasionally drank to excess so far, as to throw him into a phrenzy of passion, and make him an object of dread to his associates. He was profane in his language, almost beyond example ; when under the influence of passion, his very breath was blasphemy. But with all these odious qualities, he was active, industrious, and so far as is known, perfectly honest in his intercourse with the world. Notwithstanding the charge of an increasing family, for which he made ample provision, he accumulated, by his own exertions, property, to the amount of several thousand dollars. All, it is believed, who have been concerned with him in pecuniary transactions, will testify, that he promptly and faithfully fulfilled his engagements. It is not uncommon to hear persons, especially on a dying bed, endeavoring to console themselves, in the prospect of a retribution, on the ground, as the common saying is, that *they have wronged nobody* ; but where is the man, who will deliberately venture his hope upon a foundation, which is here seen to be consistent with murder and suicide.

It seems to be generally admitted, that Mrs. Leonard was an amiable, discreet and serious woman. It is not pretended that she never, under the influence of extreme provocation, uttered expressions, which might better have been withheld : to suppose the contrary, would be to attribute to her an entire exemption from human infirmity ; but there is the testimony of those, who knew her best, to prove that she sustained her almost unprecedented trials, with exemplary patience and submission. It had long been her wish to make a public profession of religion ; but so violent was the opposition of her husband to any such measure, that he has threatened to murder either of the clergymen of the parish, who should attempt to enter his dwelling. From the testimony of her children, it appears that she availed herself of every opportunity to impress their minds with religious truth, and taught them, by her own example, to look to God in prayer. Had Providence placed her in more favored circumstances, there is every reason to believe, that she would have been extensively useful.

The deceased have left seven children, the eldest aged thirteen years, the youngest thirteen months.* May the ear that hears them, bless them; may some kind hand be stretched out, to guide them through the perilous scenes of childhood and youth; and may many hearts breathe forth to heaven the prayer, that, as their father and mother have left them, the Lord will take them up.

The funeral was attended by an immense concourse, on Friday succeeding the day, on which the murder was committed. The body of Leonard was removed about one o'clock P. M. to a burial ground, near his late residence, attended by very few, except the near relatives. Immediately after, a long procession was formed, and followed the remains of Mrs. L. to the meeting house, where the funeral service was performed. So great was the multitude, that the meeting house was found altogether inadequate to their accommodation; in consequence of which, the service was performed from one of the windows in the gallery, the frame of glass having been removed; and though the house was filled, far the greater part of the audience stood upon the ground. A scene of deeper solemnity has, perhaps, rarely been witnessed. Hardly a countenance could be seen, in which might not be traced the lines of horror. The body of the murdered woman was buried, at the close of the service, in a distant grave yard; and who, that visits the spot, and thinks over the tragical scene, but must bedew that grave with tears. If her spirit has ascended to heaven, as we confidently trust, well may it be said of her, *'Here is one that has come out of great tribulation.'*

* The youngest child has died since the death of its parents.