

THE

WORKS

OF

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WITH

MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE.

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SERMON XVI.

MARK v. 19.

GO HOME TO THY FRIENDS, AND TELL THEM HOW GREAT THINGS
THE LORD HATH DONE FOR THEE.

THE poor man, to whom this was said, had been cured by Jesus of a most fearful disorder, and so affected was he with gratitude, that he instantly resolved to attach himself to his benefactor, and spend with him the remainder of his life. "No," said our Lord, "rather go home to thy family and friends in Decapolis, and tell them what great things God hath done for thee." We are told that he obeyed, and began to proclaim openly, in his native country, and among his domestic friends, the compassion and kindness of Jesus.

I wish, at this time, my friends, to call your attention not so much to our public advantages as to our private, personal, and social blessings. If we would awaken our sensibility to the innumerable blessings of our condition, we must not take too wide a range; we must limit our vision to some near and definite objects, lest, taking too extensive a survey, we should view everything indistinctly, and remember nothing with precision, in the boundlessness of God's benevolence.

There is a class of blessings, which, because we have so long enjoyed them; we are tempted to forget that we pos-

sess, and to regard as the constant and immutable laws of our condition, rather than as favors no less extraordinary than they are unmerited; I mean the peculiar circumstances of our social and domestic life; circumstances to which no man can say that he has especially contributed, for they are the result of God's good providence, watching over former events and early habits, rather than of any foresight and judgment of our own. I am the more induced to make these the subject of our grateful review, because, from their silent, unobtrusive, and permanent nature, they are not apt, at any one time, to make a peculiarly forcible impression; and they are in danger of being overlooked, because they are so uniform and quiet, except by a mind tenderly and piously alive to the goodness of God. The truth is, that we are very much in the habit of keeping ourselves in ignorance of the real sources of our happiness. The unexpected events of life, and, much more, those on which we calculate, are far from being those which constitute its real enjoyment. Even events of public good-fortune, which call forth the most frequent and audible acknowledgments, are, really, not those which contribute most to our personal well-being; and much less do we depend, for our most valuable happiness, on what we call fortunate occurrences, or upon the multiplication of our public amusements, or the excitement, the novelty, the ecstasy, which we make so essential to our pleasures, and for which we are always looking out with impatience. It is not the number of the great, dazzling, affecting, and much talked of pleasures, which makes up the better part of our substantial happiness; but it is the delicate, unseen, quiet, and ordinary comforts of social and domestic life, for the loss of which, all, that the world has dignified with the name of pleasure, would

not compensate us. Let any man inquire, for a single day, what it is which has employed and satisfied him, and which really makes him love life, and he will find that the sources of his happiness lie within a very narrow compass. He will find that he depends almost entirely on the agreeable circumstances which God has made to lie all around him, and which fill no place in the record of public events. Indeed, we may say of human happiness what Paul quotes for a more sacred purpose, "It is not hidden from thee; neither is it far off; it is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us? neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us? but it is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart."

In the first place, there is an extraordinary degree of tranquillity and security always attending our social condition, which constitutes much of its value. Repose, it is true, is not always a blessing; certainly not where it is the repose of desolation, of insensibility, or the threatening stillness which precedes the whirlwind. But, where it is the result, as ours is, of peculiar habits and local circumstances, of which almost the whole world may be envious, and for which, at this moment, millions are praying, it deserves to be most gratefully acknowledged. It is this singular tranquillity, which gives to our external and intellectual advantages unspeakable worth. There are other countries, in which much more wealth is accumulated, but where the proprietor trembles, while he casts up his treasure, and grasps it the closer, not so much from avarice as fear. There are countries, where you may find more numerous refinements, society more intellectual, polished, and advanced; but where do you find minds so entirely at

ease, where communication so unshackled by apprehension, where opinion so little fettered by custom or power, and man so much the master of his pleasures, his means, his language, and even his thoughts? Our social intercourse is nowhere disturbed with apprehension. We enjoy what we have, almost without forethought, not because we know not but we may be despoiled of it to-morrow, but because we have a sentiment of its duration. The noise of war has been rolling continually at what seems an indefinite distance, and, instead of disturbing, it has rather, like the thunder of an evening cloud that has passed over, contributed to our deeper repose. We hear of the disasters of other nations, and we sometimes tremble for them with benevolent apprehensions and hopes; but it is not because we have a child or a friend exposed to the dreadful hazards of battle; it is not because we are doubtful whether the event may not have decided the fate of our property, our liberty, or our comfort; but because we feel a natural interest in their sufferings, which cannot and ought not to be extinguished. We seem to feel a permanency in everything around us, and a security which we hardly know how to explain. Whence, then, this peace and order? To whom are we indebted for them? Can any man say that he has essentially contributed to their continuance? If we ascribe them to our peculiar habits and manners and government, we must acknowledge the good providence of God, directing the circumstances which have established this security. Go hence, and tell thy friends, who it is that hath preserved peace in thy borders, and learn to trust, not in thyself, but in Him.

Our social and domestic condition is, secondly, distinguished by a diffusion of competence and of the means of pros-

perity, in which every man has a share. Where do we find families, or individuals, who do not, in some comfortable degree, partake of all the essential comforts which wealth can procure? Who is driven out of society because he is too poor to partake, in some form, of its pleasures? Every morning's sun, as it rises, brings to every man a provision for the day, or lights him to the means of procuring it. How much may be retrenched from every station in society, before poverty can be even perceptible; and how much more, before we should hear the cry of want! Who among us returns in the evening to his family, to have his heart broken by the cries of his children clinging to his knees for bread? Whose sleep is disturbed by the thin phantoms of to-morrow's difficulties? So general is our prosperity, that, if we would find distress, we must look for it; it does not obtrude itself upon our notice. The miseries, which really exist, do not throng upon us so fast that the hand of charity is exhausted before it can effectually relieve them. We see frequent changes from luxury to mediocrity; but how faint and rare is the cry of real and incurable wretchedness! Contrivances for comfort meet us at every door we enter. Everywhere the table is spread, and the cup is filled; everywhere we find men ascending from convenience to comfort, to neatness, to elegance, to luxury, to profusion. No one is cast out because he is unable to support his place in this continually ascending feast of abundance. The wants, that are felt, are rather the cravings of appetites that have been pampered, or of ambition too much excited, than of real poverty. In the prodigious extent of an unoccupied country behind us, there seems to be left a common fund for every man's exigences. The reduced and the unfortunate change their residence, and, if we hear of them

again, it is only to hear of their prosperity. We look around for the poor, and we meet with, here and there, the infirm, the diseased, the aged, the imprudent, and the profligate foreigner; but for native, irremediable want we search in vain. Instead of poverty, we find, indeed, discontent, envy, avarice, overreaching, and profuseness; and we are told of disappointments and bankruptcies; but these are the miseries of abundance, not of indigence.

If you would know your own happiness, contrast with it the condition of those parts of the world, where the reduced and humbled man of wealth and of rank looks round, in vain, for the means of employment; where the poor are deprived of all the real comforts of society, and compressed into manufactories, mines, hospitals, and prisons, or driven into armies, and left to perish unsought, unwept, unremembered; and then go home, for you have a home, and to your friends, for even these your poverty will gain you, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you. Truly, the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage.

A third characteristic of our social condition is the general diffusion of the means of obtaining knowledge, from which results that intellectual cultivation which is better than wealth, and which gives the highest interest to social life. In this region of our country, if we look round for the ignorant, we shall find them, indeed, without trouble; but, if we look for those who are condemned, by disadvantages of birth and situation, to unavoidable ignorance, we shall search in vain. Here no man, who feels the intimations of his intellectual life, and begins to pant after knowledge and truth, need waste away in hopeless obscurity, shut out from the means of knowledge, and secluded

from the society of the intelligent. What is peculiar in our society is, that nothing debars any one from reaching, if he pleases, the highest degree of intellectual improvement; nothing forbids his sharing in any refinement or excellence, which he is capable of enjoying. Such is the equality of conditions among us that the intelligent and the unintelligent mingle everywhere together; every man gives and receives according to his gifts, and each shares in the peculiar improvements of all. We have no monopoly of information; the rich and the poor, the mechanic and the merchant, the ignorant and the learned, the idle, the inquisitive, and the laborious student, may all go and drink at the same springs; and there is kept in continual circulation a fund of intellectual riches, which every man may use, and to which he is not debarred from contributing.

The actual amount of intellectual wealth, and the enjoyment derived from it in general society, may be very much surpassed, as it undoubtedly is, in other countries. But here nothing restrains the eagerness of curiosity, nothing frowns upon the free exercise of the powers, in conversation, in writing, and in speaking; and how much is there continually within our reach, to refine, to soften, to elevate, and to delight us! From how much weariness are we thus relieved! How many vacant hours are thus employed! How many sorrows soothed, and spirits elevated! How many minds lifted out of the dust! How much sensuality is thus wiped away, and how much is added to the value of human life! Those, who know how much the love of knowledge tends to correct the follies of society, to purify its pleasures, to preserve from vicious amusements, and to fill up the vacant spaces, of active life, will feel grateful for the state of society, where no man need be ashamed to

appear well informed, nor is any man obliged to bear the mortifying burden of his ignorance longer than he chooses.

Closely connected with these great advantages of our intellectual condition, and, indeed, forming the most valuable part of them, are the blessings of our religion. I cannot express to you the sense which I have of the value of that influence on society, which yet flows from our ancient habits of thinking on this most interesting subject. I am ready to exclaim, with the ardent Zecharias: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel! for he hath visited and redeemed his people, according to the mercy promised to our fathers, in that he hath granted unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, may serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life." When you consider, my Christian hearers, of what importance is a sense of religion to the good order and purity of our social intercourse, you will thank God that so much of it has been imperceptibly retained among us. For it is this, which will give to society a degree of security, and impart to it a confidence, of which no other sentiment or principle can supply the place; and, where this exists, free, pure, rational, conscientious, and devout, it gives to the character a tone of dignity and freedom, which no accomplishment can bestow. When you think how easy it is, nay, how common it has been, to make religion the bane and terror of social life, the destroyer of everything kind and generous, the source of the most depressing superstition, bitter jealousy, and malignant passions, your hearts ought to be filled with gratitude at the circumstances of New England. What are we, or what were our fathers, that we should enjoy a toleration the most perfect, which nothing but the bad passions of individuals can disturb; a

freedom of worship and of opinion, which smiles at the powerless impositions of men; and a general liberality of thinking, which has an unobserved influence upon many who do not acknowledge it; and that, with all this, notwithstanding the growth of our luxury, and the temptations of our good-fortune, we should yet retain so much respect for the institutions of the gospel, and so much sense of its indispensable value to society? When I think of all these peculiarities of our religious condition, and ask how they have arisen, I can find no other answer than that the good providence of God alone has preserved to us such an inheritance of blessings.

Let me lead you, last of all, back to your families, and refresh you with the sight of the blessings of your domestic life. Indeed, if I were to search for a spot, where you could best observe the effect of the blessings we have already enumerated, and best feel the peculiar happiness of your social condition, I should only open the door to your own firesides, and place you in the circle of your children and your friends. There it is, indeed, that you ought to enjoy the united influences of all the other advantages we have mentioned. If you are not happy there, the fault is not in your circumstances, but in your dispositions. For, when we consider the enviable state of the domestic relations among us, of husband and wife, of parents and children, we are at a loss to suggest any improvement, except in the use of these advantages. Notwithstanding the rapid encroachment of luxury, it has not yet so corrupted our modes of life, under the pretence of refining them, that parents are daily separated from their children. You may, at any time, collect them around you, refresh yourselves with their innocence, watch their

budding talents and virtues, and enjoy their happiness. The intercourse between you and your offspring is not disturbed by any foolish customs and formalities; no rights of primogeniture enter; to kindle jealousies and coldness. As they grow up successively, they gradually pass into your companions, your friends, and, at last, your counsellors; perhaps your stay and consolation. So abundant are the means of living that your children are not driven, unprovided for, from the paternal roof, to seek elsewhere a precarious support. No officer of despotism bursts open your doors, to drag the reluctant youth to be sacrificed on the field of battle; nor does every mail bring you intelligence, which makes your heart bleed, of some new exposures or new sufferings which they are called to endure. So various and accessible are our means of education, also, that parents may always have some new pleasures in expectation from the improvement of their children. Soon they become qualified to partake of your own intellectual pursuits. Their curiosity keeps yours awake, their improvement rewards you; and the domestic circle, every day, brightens with new accessions in intelligence and pleasure. Thus they grow up with you at home; and here, at least, this blessed name yet expresses a reality, a substantial good, a sanctuary, a refuge from the troubles of life, the very centre of our national happiness. And when the fear and love of God dwell under your roofs, when his worship purifies and makes holy these domestic enjoyments, when your prayers, as they ascend, morning and evening, draw closer the sacred ties of parent and child, brother and sister, — but I need not dwell on the minutiae of your blessings, I need not paint what your hearts, if they are rightly attempered, will represent to you with more vivid-

ness and reality. Go home, then, for you have a home, and tell your children what great things God has done for us.

This recital of our blessings, however grateful it may be to the mind, is yet attended with two considerations which press upon our attention. The first is, how little have we ourselves contributed to these advantages! They seem, in truth, to be the gifts of Providence alone; for we can hardly trace them to any positive causes. When we reflect upon our social and domestic lot, one thing is always evident, that, if all the good, we find, can be traced to the care of a most gracious Providence, all the evil, to which we are exposed, may be traced directly to those passions which the most favorable state of society cannot always suppress, to those corruptions which grow, alas! and ripen under the very sunshine of our prosperity. The other consideration, which may make us all tremble, is, how long shall this state of prosperity last? Has God given us a pledge of uninterrupted security and good-fortune? or does not its continuance depend much upon ourselves? If the cup of our prosperity intoxicate us, will it not fall, at last, from our hands, and be dashed in pieces?

My friends, let us think, before we part, of the duties which our very happiness imposes upon us. Ought we not, first of all, most gratefully and humbly to adore the distinguishing goodness of God? Perhaps we have hitherto overlooked the real foundation of our happiness; perhaps, if we have been sensible of the good, we have not thought of the Author. We have entered this garden of God, and carelessly cropped the flowers with which it is filled, and thought them planted only for our gratification. This is not the condition on which any of God's gifts are bestowed.

Our common prosperity, is, indeed, unexampled, but it is not out of the reach of injury. While it lasts, it is the duty of every man, to contribute what he can to preserve it. If you would advance the glory of your age, and make it worthy of being remembered by those who shall come after you, beware of the encroachments of luxury. Nothing will so much tend to make you insensible to the best gifts of Providence, and callous to the purest pleasures of life, as the love of noisy and frivolous distinctions, the pursuit of vicious pleasures, and the tyranny of fashion. Consider whether you do not contribute to the corruptions of the age, by an immoderate pursuit of amusement. Consider how easily the minds of those, who are coming into life, are enfeebled and deluded by the doubtful examples of those whom they are taught to consider as giving the tone to the manners of the age.

To preserve our social pleasures in any good degree of purity, nothing will so much contribute as the cultivating a taste for domestic life and the quiet and affectionate pleasures which it affords. In such a state of society as ours, also, there is danger, lest the love of money, or of merely sensual pleasures, should overwhelm the rising generation. To obviate these evils, it is much to be desired, that the love of literature and of intellectual pursuits should be greatly encouraged; for, though the passion for knowledge is no proof of a principle of virtue, it is often a security against the vices and temptations of the world. Everything, which you contribute to the institutions of sound learning, and to promote a correct and pious education, you contribute to the peace, the purity, and the glory of the age.

Once more, my friends, what a treasure of felicity you

have in keeping! And by you it is to be bequeathed to those who are to be your successors, in a long posterity. Let your thoughts run on a few years in prospect, and can you endure to see those whom you have brought into life, whom you have trained up to fill your places, and whose destiny you now influence, can you endure to see them spoiling this rich inheritance, and then reproaching your memories? Can you look, without remorse, and see them taking their places in society, depraved by your example, lost to virtue, to peace, and to heaven?

Do not think you have discharged your obligations, when you have laid up for them a perishable inheritance on earth, when you have given them a customary education, and set them up in life. Oh, no! God, who watches over our employment of his gifts, demands of you, not only that you dedicate your children to him, but that you implant in them his fear and love, that you furnish them with the only sure sources of happiness, by your lessons of piety, by your example at home and in public, and by your prayers with them and for them. Without this you may leave them the wealth of the world, and it will only curse them; you may leave them the rank, the glory, the reputation of their fathers, and it will only render them the decorated victims of the indignation of Heaven. Consider, then, what obligations to others your privileges impose upon you. Walk within your houses with a perfect heart. Make them the nurseries of godliness. Resolve, that, from this day, you will not neglect this most solemn of your duties; and then, with a grateful heart, tell your friends what great things God has done for you.

SERMON XVII.

HEBREWS III. 1.

WHEREFORE, HOLY BRETHREN, PARTAKERS OF THE HEAVENLY CALLING, CONSIDER THE APOSTLE AND HIGH PRIEST OF OUR PROFESSION, CHRIST JESUS.

WHEN we rise from the contemplation of the character of Jesus, it is with a mixture of transport and of despair; of transport at finding that such immaculate excellence was embodied and exhibited in a human form, and despair lest it should be impossible to imitate it in the present mixed condition of human life. I know not how any man can take up any one of the Gospels and read it through, without feeling that there is something supernatural about the character of Jesus, without catching, at intervals, a glimpse of that divinity which seems to encircle him, or perceiving the truth and nature of the Centurion's exclamation, when he heard the last expression which escaped from the lips of the dying Savior, "Truly, this was the Son of God."

The moral character of Jesus is distinguished from that of every other teacher upon record by this peculiar circumstance, that it united excellences which are usually thought irreconcilable, or which are very rarely found conjoined in any individual. Endowed, as he was, with power which was calculated to impress beholders with the most reverential awe, he united with this a familiarity