

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD UNIVERSAL.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED AT

Oakland College, Mississippi,

APRIL 1, 1835,

IT BEING

The day previous to the Annual Commencement.

BY JOEL PARKER,

PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN NEW ORLEANS.

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1835.

OAKLAND COLLEGE, (Miss.) April 28, 1835.

Rev. Joel Parker,

Dear Sir—The Trustees of Oakland College believing that the annual Sermon preached by yourself, on the first instant, contains just and clear views on a subject of great importance, and that its wider diffusion would be highly useful, voted unanimously to request a copy of the same for publication. Allow me to express the hope that you will not decline a compliance with this request.

Your sincere friend and brother,
JER. CHAMBERLAIN.

NEW-ORLEANS, May 5, 1835.

To Jer. Chamberlain, D. D. President of Oakland College, (Miss.)

Rev. and Dear Sir—Allow me, through you to present to the Trustees of Oakland College, my sense of obligation to them for the consideration with which they have been pleased to treat me in requesting a copy of the annual sermon for publication.

It is cheerfully submitted, though not without some sacrifice of feeling. For this, however I shall be amply compensated if the discourse shall in a small degree subserve the interests of sound learning and pure religion, or if it shall only be instrumental in drawing the attention of my personal friends towards the interesting and promising institution over which you have the honor to preside. In revising, some slight alterations have been made, but nothing has been either added or subtracted which materially affects the sense.

With great respect

And christian affection,

I remain yours,

JOEL PARKER.

S E R M O N .

Psalms 127: 1.

Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh, but in vain.

This text expresses the sentiments of an enlightened piety on the subject of a Divine Providence.

The writer is speaking in strong metaphor of the dependence of men upon God in the up-building and protection of a family. The objects upon which his mind siezes for a metaphorical representation of this dependence, however, clearly evince the conviction in his own mind, that the providence of God is concerned in the ordinary actions of men. Two very common transactions are referred to as combining both human and divine agency. He does not allude to any particular builders or watchmen as under a supernatural control. His statement is plainly applicable to all the ordinary businesses of life.

If in passing through the streets of a populous city, you witness the progress of newly rising dwellings; if you hear the reverberating strokes, and behold the busy movements of the operatives; if you see order and beauty rising amid apparent confusion, yet you may be well assured that the providence of God is so concerned with the work, that, unless he design its completion the laborers build in vain. If you meet with watchmen pacing their accustomed round, and hear their responsive strokes breaking the silence of midnight, you may have the most perfect assurance that the watchman waketh but in vain, and the city is insecure, unless God design its protection.

Our theme is the doctrine of a universal providence.

For the sake of following closely the spirit of our text, we propose to discuss the subject under the following

PROPOSITION.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS CONCERNED IN THE
ORDINARY TRANSACTIONS OF MEN.

In investigating this subject, it is no part of my purpose to inquire into the nature of those influences, by which a universal providence is maintained. My object is accomplished if the fact be substantiated, that all the ordinary transactions of men involve also God's designs, and, are controlled by some kind of influence, which, either directly or indirectly, immediately or remotely, emanates from God.

When the idea of a Creator of all things is received, it is exceedingly natural to suppose that he would exercise a constant providence concerning the things which he has made. There is a manifest absurdity in admitting the existence of an all-wise Creator, who knew perfectly all the properties and tendencies of the things which he made, and still maintaining that he will not condescend so to govern them as to secure the fulfilment of his designs.

From this one view of the subject, the doctrine of an universal providence seems to me to be one of the clearest truths of natural religion. Yet a careful discussion of the subject is important both as a means of counteracting a wide spread scepticism, and for the purpose of matching an important truth into its proper place in the system of revealed religion. Worldly men generally disbelieve in a providence that pervades all time and extends to all events. Unsanctified minds seize upon the works of God and the laws of nature, or, in other words, upon the uniformity of God's providential arrangements and dispensations, and hold them up as a sort of screen to shield themselves from his presence, that God may not be in all their thoughts. A large portion of the church also have the habit of referring extraordinary events to the providence of God, and of

supposing that every thing else can be accounted for by a sort of deifying of what are termed the laws of nature. Indeed, nothing more distinctly partitions between those neophytes of the church who have pitched the truth into their minds in disconnected fragments, on the one hand; and those mature christians, on the other, who embrace the system of truth as a symmetrical body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, than their different views of divine providence.

The former class do indeed believe in a providence, but their views of its extent are feeble and inadequate.

Enlightened christians believe that God is with equal certainty controlling the minutest and most common, not less than the largest and most extraordinary changes.

To the former class the providence of God is occasional. They think of it as they do of the interposition of a machinist in the repairment of his worn mechanism or in its readjustment for the purpose of correcting unavoidable variations; but to the latter, God is visible in every thing. The heavens declare his glory, the firmament showeth his handy work. Winds and waves, and flames of fire are his angels, doing his pleasure. The dews are shaken down from his hand. "He scattereth his hoar frost like ashes." Worlds roll and sparrows fall, and every hair of their head is numbered by providence. And throughout universal nature, in matter and in mind, notwithstanding the intervention of second causes, every thing is referred to the providence of the almighty and every where present God.

Correct views on this subject are manifestly of great moment to the church. They exercise a sobering, balancing power in the speculations of systematic theology. They impose upon the mind a sense of the Divine presence and thus impart richness to religious sentiment; and they operate with great power as motives to practical piety.

In attempting to evince the truth of the proposition,

that the providence of God is concerned in the ordinary transactions of men, I shall,

1st. *Construct an argument upon some generally admitted truths, and*

2dly. *Adduce direct testimony from the Sacred Scriptures.*

We may assume it as true that the providence of God is concerned in forming eventful periods in the world's history.

Perhaps none can be found who believe in the existence of an all-wise and benevolent Deity, who do not at the same time admit a controlling providence in such periods as embrace the ultimate dispersion of the Jewish people and the subversion of the Roman empire; or such as embosom the reformation, the planting of the puritans in this western world, and the American revolution. In the history of mankind there are great crises on which the influence of past ages turns as on a pivot, and pours upon the future rich blessings, or inundates it with terrible disasters. Sometimes the bad influences which have been accumulating for centuries, and smoldering with a noisome and dark combustion, have been suddenly consumed, and the fires of their destruction, like a beacon light, have shown coming generations the way to heaven. At other times, the apparently valuable institutions of the past have been unexpectedly consolidated, and shot up a colossal pillar of darkness, in whose gloomy penumbra the nations have groped and stumbled, and fallen into hell.

All admit that these eventful periods were under the control of an all-wise providence. To deny it would be to assert that God has abandoned all the interests of this world to the most blind fortuitousness.

But, it is manifest that such periods receive their character from thousands of the ordinary transactions of men. Indeed, if you analyze the whole history, and contemplate the conduct of each human agent apart, you will see that all the individual transactions were ordinary, and that that which gives to the whole long period a peculiar character is the extraordinary combi-

nation of things which taken separately could scarcely awaken surprise. Let it not be forgotten, that, while we look back upon periods of history which seem to us the most wonderful demonstrations of the wisdom of Providence, yet to the actors in these scenes they were the clearest developments of the laws of mind, and every thing was seen in the common connexions of cause and effect. They no more thought of a Divine agency's being concerned peculiarly in their doings than you thought of it in forming the purpose to give your attention to this discourse.

Moreover, such an eventful period is introduced by a train of preceding events. These are some large and others minute, some extraordinary and others common; but they all depend upon one another and are interwoven in one tissue. Only let it be granted, then, that the providence of God is concerned in forming the character of eventful periods, and the conclusion is irresistible that Providence was concerned in the thousand ordinary transactions of men, which, in their combination, created such a period, and, in the innumerable similar events which led to it.

With equal readiness is it admitted that important individual transactions are under the control of a Divine Providence.

The timely approach of a detachment to the field of Waterloo bears with it the political and moral destinies of the old world. All who allow any thing like a providence will admit that the God who governs the nations must have given some direction to a change of such immense moment. Who does not know that the arrival, the juncture, the position of the armies and thousands of the ordinary actions of men conspired to the result? The state of mind of so many officers and soldiers; their previous habits; their health and spirits, their courage and depression; the state of the nations, the history of former victories and defeats, and millions of minute actions, in which men were no more conscious of a Divine control than you are in hearing this

moment, were all combined to produce that fierce onset and stern struggle, which resulted in treading down one of the finest armies that was ever embattled, and in ultimately leading captive a man, the sound of whose name, but a short time previous, was sufficient to shake every throne on earth.

Now, is it not obvious, that the providential control of such a large and complex event necessarily involved a particular Providence? Must not the ordinary transactions of men, transactions as common in their character as the labor of mechanics in erecting a building or the employment of a city watchman, have been subject to the superintendence and control of Providence?

We may find an illustration by far more striking than the one which we have just dwelt upon, as well as more sacred by contemplating that great transaction on which was suspended the atonement for the sins of a lost world. Indeed, to the christian, that crucifixion scene furnishes the most wonderful exhibition of all the main articles of his faith. And as Christ crucified is the grand central orb of christianity, holding all the great truths of religion within the sphere of its attraction, so it pours a glorious sun-light upon them all, and shows them to us with a clearness which cannot be resisted.

Yet no truth is brought more clearly to view in that transaction than the doctrine of a universal providence. That day had been the burden of prophecy for thousands of years. For forty centuries had bleeding victims and smoking altars foretold the sacrifice of Christ. The scriptures could not be broken. The Messiah came in the fulness of time. He must needs suffer and enter into his glory.

He must be betrayed, accused, forsaken, mocked, buffeted and crucified. Yet the treachery of Judas, the malice of corrupt ecclesiastics, the madness of the mob, the abandonment and denial on the part of friends, the vacillancy of Pilate and the sturdy cruelty of the soldiers were all important parts in that awful tragedy.

Who can say that one incident could be abstracted from all that combination of terrible things without impairing the influence, and diminishing the glory, the tenderness, the pathos and awful power of that amazing transaction? But to allow that a Divine Providence was concerned in it as a complex whole, is a palpable admission of the fact that Providence was concerned in the parts which made up the whole; in the details of the conduct of individuals, in the betrayal by Judas, the denial by Peter, the vehement accusations of Scribes and Pharisees, the sentence by Pilate, the plating of the thorns, the driving of the nails, and the piercing with the spear. Yet here is no violation of the ordinary laws of mind.

Men acted naturally—conducted themselves in the same manner as human nature would do again, in a collection of similar individuals under similar circumstances. Who can dwell upon this scene and not exclaim in the language of the Apostles in their prayer, "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast annointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and people of Israel were gathered together to do whatsoever thy hand and counsel had before determined to be done." But if God's hand and counsel had determined previously to the event whatever they performed, how plain an instance was it of the providence of God's being concerned in the ordinary transactions of men.

It is generally admitted, also, that God exercises a Providence in the formation of distinguished characters.

None who believe in the christian religion deny that Paul was raised up to propagate christianity, or, that Washington was born to deliver his country. Yet, it is obvious that an extraordinary character cannot be formed without a control of actions which are in themselves of the most common cast and hue.

One man produced a light in natural philosophy which has been ever since, and which must be to the end of time, as a sun to shed the beams of truth upon universal

nature. Who can doubt that an individual of such consequence to the human race was raised up, and that his character was formed, under a superintending Providence ?

A poet, who has never been accused of being over much devout, has said,

“Nature and all her works lay hid in night,
God said, ‘Let Newton be,’ and all was light.”

Yet, it is easy to perceive, that there were no miraculous agencies employed in the formation of his character. In his childhood his health was so precarious that it was scarcely expected he should attain to mature years.—How easily might a slight indiscretion of his nurse have extinguished that light ! What small incidents might have changed his career, and placed him in a workshop or a counting-house ! Yet, if it be granted that his character was formed under a superintending Providence it must also be admitted that his friends, his parents, his school-fellows, and thousands of others who influenced *them* were controlled by the same all-wise and all-per-vading Power.

Indeed, it is evident, from what we know of cause and effect, and of the universality of the laws of causation, that there are no insulated phenomena in the universe. Every thing exerts an influence upon what is around it and after it. God cannot control one thing without controlling every thing. It all lies in his mind as a complex whole. If he purpose the existence of the system, he purposes the existence of its parts. If his Providence be concerned in forming the extraordinary periods of the world’s history, in the occurrence of the most important events, and in the raising up of distinguished and influential individuals, it must also be concerned in the ordinary transactions of men. “Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it ; except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain.”

In confirmation of our conclusion from this argument, we adduce,

II. *The testimony of God himself in his Holy Word.*

As this kind of proof is sure, the testimony of one that cannot lie, we shall bring forward but two passages from the sacred scriptures. The first is found in the gospel according to Luke. It is contained in the sixth and seventh verses of the twelfth chapter, and is as follows: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." These words were uttered by our Saviour in connexion with a warning given to his disciples not to be afraid of their persecutors.

The position assumed is, that beings of the smallest consequence, the sparrows, five of which were sold for two farthings, were under the particular care of Providence—not one of them could fall to the ground without his permission, and things the most minute conceivable were subjects of similar attention. And the conclusion drawn from this statement was, that the Providence of God was so concerned with respect to them, and all the conduct of men, that the least interest could not be jeoparded any farther than infinite wisdom should permit.

If this be not an asserting of the doctrine of a universal Providence we see not how language can express the idea.

The other passage is found in the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, in the first chapter and eleventh verse:—"Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." This declaration is as explicit as possible. There is nothing in the connexion to limit the meaning of the phrase "all things," but the whole passage stands as a manifest exhibition of a certain trait of the Divine character. He is the God who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. Now, without attempting to decide by what means God worketh all things, whether it be by a constant agency, or, by previous arrangements and a general control, one thing at least is plainly taught

in this passage. It is at least taught that God has by *some* means rendered certain the accomplishment of his purposes, and that these purposes respect every thing which actually comes to pass.

No event can occur which shall disappoint the omniscient and all-controlling Deity. No enterprize can succeed unless he choose.

The most common transactions are subject to the superintendence of an all-wise and all-powerful Providence. "Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain."

From these views may be deduced several lessons of instruction.

I. *Motives to piety may be derived from all the treatment which we receive from men.*

We readily recognise our obligations to exercise a devout and holy gratitude to God for the interposition of his Spirit.

If we have been induced to turn from the paths of sin and embrace Christ, it was because grace abounded towards us.

" 'Twas the same love which spread the feast,
That sweetly forced us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin."

But we have received blessings at the hands of our fellow men as the result of the same grace. Our children and friends have exercised towards us the spirit of Christian affection, and cooperated with us in the church of Christ, sharing the burdens and sweetening the toil of every labor of love. For this assistance and kindness, as well as for the housing of their souls and ours in the ark of safety we are solemnly bound to give thanks to God. If he had not touched their hearts, and in his sovereign good pleasure turned them to himself, they had been still in the snares of sin, "in the bonds of iniquity."

But not less clearly are we called to the exercise of

gratitude for the favors which worldly men show to us, or to the institutions of Christ. Divine Providence is as plainly the author of such mercies as Divine grace is of spiritual blessings. Ancient Israel was bound to give thanks to God when a heathen king favored the rebuilding of their temple, because that Providence which is universal controlled him, and secured the blessing. The king's heart was in the hand of the Lord.

So, if a servant be faithful and study our comfort, and place before us food for our refreshment, we are as manifestly called upon to exercise gratitude towards God, as we should have been if he had commissioned an angel from heaven every day to convey to us the same supplies. The fact that Providence operates by a uniform system is no reason why we should be unmindful of our obligations.

Calamities coming upon us through human agency also demand submission to God on the same principle. The violence of men, when it breaks forth against us, is as really a chastisement from God as are the visitations of disease or any of the possible forms of suffering. The Providence of God is concerned in the ordinary transactions of men. If wicked men, therefore, inflict injuries upon us, however unjust it may be in them, it should be remembered that they cannot advance one step farther, nor add one pang more, than God deems it wise to permit them for our chastisement. How such a consideration can calm a deeply injured spirit, and soften it into patient meekness.

It was from a full view of this universal Providence that the psalmist could pray, "Deliver my soul from the wicked which is thy sword." On the same principle he meekly replied to his friends who proposed to take summary vengeance upon Shimei: "Let him alone and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him." Surely he did not mean to assert that God had commanded his insolent enemy to conduct himself thus wickedly towards his sovereign. But he recognised the universal providence of God, and considered this bitter treatment as an intended chastisement from the Lord.

If we thus regard the Providence of God as universal we cannot avoid the conviction of the Divine presence. We shall learn to feel that every occurrence affecting our interest, happiness, character, has some connexion with the purposes of our Maker. We shall feel ourselves surrounded by him. Passing events will be to us developments of his wisdom. Blessings will be his voice of gentleness calling for gratitude. Evils will be his frowning chastisements, demanding submission, reformation and holy living. We shall walk with God.

II. *Dependence on God furnishes no reason against the discharge of duty.*

The Providence of God is concerned with the ordinary transactions of men. There is, therefore, as much previous certainty with regard to all a man's doings, as there is with respect to the performance or non-performance of his highest duties.

If you place before yourself two specified courses of conduct, one of which is right and the other wrong, the fact that you are dependent—that you are influenced in whatever you do, is no reason for preferring the wrong course. If you say, I am dependent on a peculiar kind of influence—on the Holy Spirit to lead me to the discharge of duty, this is readily granted; but we have shown that your dependence is universal also—that the purposes of God are accomplished alike in either case. And, certainly, it requires no extraordinary metaphysical acumen to perceive that it is not the peculiar nature of the influence by which you are induced to pursue a given career, that embarrasses your mind on the subject of obligation, but it is the previous certainty which exists relative to your subsequent conduct. But this certainty exists in regard to all that you shall ever do. It is, therefore, as philosophical to plead that you may not take the wrong course, because, it may not be certain that you *are to do it*, as it is to plead that you need not take the right course because it is not certain that you are to do that.

If the futuration of events throws a difficulty in the

way of doing right, it throws the same difficulty in the way of doing wrong.

A voluminous and celebrated writer against the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty saw so clearly that all the difficulties which he had urged against foreordination attended equally the Divine prescience, that he endeavored to prove that God is ignorant of all those things, the decree of which would embarrass the doctrine of human responsibility. Since alluding to this strange theological dogma, I cannot pass it without briefly stating some objections to it.

1. The same writer maintains that God knows nothing *as future* or *as past*, but that with him, "all that is *past* and all that is *present*, and all that is *future* to man, exists in one infinite, indivisible, and eternal *now*." This is a plain admission that God is not ignorant of any thing yet to come, or else it imposes the necessity of maintaining that he always will be ignorant of many things which his creatures will well understand.

2. If God must needs be ignorant of an action involving moral responsibility, lest it should conflict with human accountableness, then he must be ignorant of nearly all that men shall do in future, since they do very few things which do not involve their accountability.

3. It is not possible that God should know whether it were wise for him to be ignorant of a given thing's coming to pass, till he first knew what the thing was.

4. The idea that God chooses to remain ignorant of any thing which shall actually occur is revolting. We instinctively shrink from it as an assault upon his perfections.

5. It relieves us from no difficulty if it were true. The writer admits that God *can* know future events *as certain*. The certainty of future actions, exists, therefore, and embarrasses free agency, as much if you suppose God to be ignorant of them, as though he were acquainted with them. But since all events and interests are under the control of an infinitely wise Providence, and, since all occurrences were *alike* previously certain, dependence

ought not to be urged against an instant discharge of duty, till you are prepared to urge it against the commission of sin.

III. *The doctrine of personal election to eternal life is true.*

It is involved in the proposition which we have established. If God exercise a Providence in regard to common actions, that Providence itself necessarily affects the question of eternal salvation in reference to individuals. A shipwrecked mariner, in the hour of distress, made a solemn vow to God to seek salvation through Christ if delivered from that one perilous tempest. The winds abated their rage, the ship evaded the fatal rocks, and the man safely reached the haven.

The deliverance affected his heart, the remembered vow deepened the feeling,—he turned to God and rejoiced in his mercy.

Is it to be supposed that life was preserved by Providence—in short, that the coming on of the tempest, the vow, and the deliverance, were all under the control of Providence, without whom a sparrow cannot fall, and that no regard was had to the result? Can not a band of mechanics erect a building, nor a watchman successfully keep his vigil in the city, without the purposes of God being involved in it? And shall such great interests as the salvation of the soul be left to a blind contingency? Has that God who does nothing in vain made an atonement for the sins of the world, and sent forth reforming influences without understanding the number of souls, and knowing the individuals, too, whom he will reclaim and sanctify and save? The Saviour came on no uncertain errand. “All that the Father giveth me (says he,) shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

IV. *No interest can be secured without God.*

Would you advance the general interests of the church of Christ? The loftiest enterprise, the boldest undertakings, and the most vigorous endeavours will be fruitless, unless the blessing of the God of Providence be with you. You may exercise a wisdom the most politic, and

a judgment the most profound, and make use of the most extraordinary skill and tact in awakening an interest in the minds of men, and yet without the favoring influence of the Divine Spirit the kingdom of Christ will not be advanced; the church will not put on her beautiful garments, and assume that order and power which shall make her as "an army in banners." Erect the most superb temple; let its architectural grandeur and beautiful symmetry impress and charm every passer by; adorn it with every thing that can captivate the eye and please the taste, still the worshippers will not feel one new throb of spiritual life unless the Holy One shall breathe upon the assembly.

Yea, without God's favour, the services of the sanctuary may be adapted to awaken the sweetest and deepest emotions, and may pour a flood of sun-light upon the intellect, and assail the heart with the overmastering appeals of the gospel in vain.

Fill your churches with the soul-entrancing power of music; let the ambassadors of Christ come forth in the "golden robes of Cicero," and speak with the deep intelligence and burning zeal of Paul, and though multitudes may listen, be pierced, thrilled, melted by the power of truth, still, unless God attend all with his blessing, not one new stone is laid in the spiritual temple, and nothing is added to the polish and beauty of those which have already been placed there by the master builder. "Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it."

So we may seek to build up institutions of learning, and without an acknowledgement of dependence on God and a seeking the favor of Providence, we have no right to presume upon success. The experiment has been made in several instances in this country within the last fifty years of conducting institutions for public education without an acknowledgement of the christian religion, and the results are known. It is believed that not one of our colleges which has been careful to neglect revealed religion can be said to be truly prosperous. Christi-

anity must not be barely tolerated in our universities. She must sit a queen in the halls of education, and with her own hand lead our youth along the paths of elegant learning. Then a sense of responsibility shall rest upon the young gentlemen who resort to these seminaries of instruction—then sound wisdom will be inculcated, and noble principles will be developed, and through the Divine blessing our colleges will be fountains of pure truth to irrigate and fertilize the whole land.

I can not withhold an expression of my satisfaction, nor refrain from congratulating the trustees, and faculty and patrons of this institution, in view of the basis on which this college is founded.

You are free from all entanglements with the state, above the jarrings of party politics, and far removed from those minglings of sectarian interests in which all parties are tempted to compromit the interests of true piety, that the balance of power may be duly preserved. You rest on the favor of Providence for the supplies of your temporal necessities, for the gathering of the youth and for success in sending them forth as models of correct deportment and accomplished scholarship. And can you need, do you desire a better source on which to depend? You have funds in the hands of your friends; every step of this institution in the path of well-doing, will press upon a spring which unlocks the heart of philanthropy and pours munificent gifts at her feet. Every struggle with poverty excites the sympathy of a thousand hearts; every supplicating tone and look which is directed towards the mercy-seat of God by this institution, draws around her our feeble churches uniting in one importunate prayer, that she may ever feel that "except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it."

Thus, too, may we seek the improvement of our own powers, and unless God prosper us, all is in vain. We know how confident pride of intellect renders men on this subject. It is doubtless true that men often do succeed in the cultivation of their minds, as they do in other

things, without recognizing the Providence that gives them their success. But certain it is, that they have no right to expect it, and no reason to hope that their acquisitions will prove a real blessing when made. Men may range through the world of literature and mete out the heavens, and explore and penetrate the earth; they may travel through ages of history, and in the workings of an adventurous imagination they may visit unseen worlds, or sound the depths of the ocean, or descend into "subterranean vaults which are made light by gems, with diamond fruits and waters of million hues, and filled with a soft and delicious music instead of air." And yet of what avail will be all this, if the mind be unbalanced and unhappy, like that of the wretched Byron, when his soul was dark as his own black vision, as he saw that

"The bright sun was extinguished, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;
Morn came, and went, and came, and brought no day."

If we would make such an improvement of our faculties that the heart and the intellect will be benefited together, it must not be forgotten that "except the Lord build the house they labour in vain that build it."

In the same manner may it be seen that the salvation of the soul will not be secured without God. If you be yet unconverted you have no evidence that the Providence of God or the interposition of the Divine Spirit shall ever favor your conversion as much in future as they have done in times that are past. That Sovereign Providence may speedily cut short your days; then preparation for heaven is plainly impossible. It may remove you beyond the reach of the gospel. It may associate you with such a circle of companions as shall draw the bands of bad influence with mighty power around your soul, and leave it ensnared beyond recovery in the meshes of deception. It may abandon you to habits of

sin, which have silently bound you, hand and foot, as with chains of iron and bands of brass. The Holy Spirit may leave you forever. And oh, how sad and fearful the condition, to be in the hands of a justly offended Sovereign, without any present disposition to turn to him, and without any, the least, evidence that you shall ever be induced to accept offered mercy. Dependent each moment for existence—for the continuance of your earthly probation—for the ordering of circumstances—for the gifts of his Spirit. Thus is your precious soul, if yet unreconciled to God, in a state of the most fearful and absolute uncertainty. If it be saved at last, it must be speedily turned to God; built up in Divine knowledge and all its interests secured against insidious and numerous foes. Yet “except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it.”

There is but one course which can be deemed safe for the lost and perishing, and that is to sink at the feet of Sovereign mercy, trusting in the blood of atonement for pardon, and confiding in that God by whom the hairs of your head are all numbered.