

THE CHRISTIAN FATHER'S PRESENT TO HIS CHILDREN

by John Angell James, 1825

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PREFACE

As a *Christian*, the author of the following volume believes that there is a state of everlasting happiness prepared beyond the grave for those, and those only, who are partakers of pure and undefiled religion. And, as a *parent*, he will freely confess, his supreme solicitude is, that his children, by a patient continuance in well doing, might seek for glory, honor, immortality--and finally possess themselves of eternal life. He is not insensible to the worth of temporal advantages; he is neither cynic nor ascetic. He appreciates the true value of wealth, learning, science, and reputation--which he desires, in such measure as God shall see fit to bestow, both for himself and his children. He has conquered the world--but does not despise it; he resists its yoke as a master--but values its ministrations as a servant.

Still, however, he views the present state of earthly affairs as a 'splendid pageant'--the fashion of which passes away to give place to the glory which shall never be moved. "He looks not at the things which are seen—but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal—but the things which are not seen are eternal." It is on this ground that he attaches so much importance to a *true religious* education. To those, if such there should be, who imagine that he is too anxious about this matter, and has said too much about it, he has simply to reply, that "he believes, therefore has he spoken." **The man who does not make the eternal welfare of his children the supreme end of all his conduct towards them, may profess to believe as a Christian—but certainly acts as an Atheist!** Besides, if *this* end be secured, the most likely step is taken for accomplishing every other; as "godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come."

With these views, the Author has embodied in the following volume his own parental wishes, objects, and pursuits. Much that is here written, has been the subject of his personal converse with his children, and should God spare his life, will still continue to be the topics of his instruction.

What is beneficial to his own family, the author thought might be no less useful to others--and this was another reason which induced him to publish. The multiplication of books of this kind, even if they make small pretensions to classic elegance of composition, is to be looked upon as a benefit, provided they contain sound scriptural sentiments, and an obvious tendency to produce right moral impressions. Books are sometimes read merely because they are new; it is desirable therefore, to gratify this appetite for novelty, when at the same time we can strengthen and build up the moral character by a supply of wholesome and nutritious spiritual food. Nor is it always necessary that new books should

contain new topics, or new modes of illustration, anymore than it is necessary that there should be a perpetual change in the kinds of food, in order to attain to bodily strength. Whatever varieties may be introduced by the wisdom that is sensual, bread will still remain the staff of life. So there are some primitive truths and subjects, which, whatever novelties and curiosities may be introduced for the gratification of religious taste, must still be repeated--as essential to the formation of religious character.

The author has not selected the sermonic form of discussion, because some of his topics did not admit of it; and also because sermons are perhaps the least inviting species of reading to young people. Letters would not have been liable to these objections; but, upon the whole, he preferred the form of chapters, in which the style of direct address is preserved. The advantage of this style is obvious; it not only keeps up the reader's interest—but, as every parent who presents this volume to his children adopts the advice as his own, such young people, by an easy effort of the imagination, lose sight of the author, and read the language of their own father. If anything is necessary to secure this effect, beyond the simple act of presenting this book, it might be immediately obtained by an inscription to the child, written by the parents own hand upon the fly-leaf.

The author scarcely need say that this work is not intended for young people below the age of **fourteen**. In the composition of the book, a seeming difficulty sometimes occurs; what is just touched upon in one place, is more expanded in others; and some subjects are intentionally repeated. To give additional interest to the volume, numerous extracts, and some anecdotes are introduced, which tend to relieve the dullness of didactic composition, and prevent the tedium of unvarying monotony.

In the references which the author has given to books, both in the chapter on that subject and in marginal notes, he does not wish to be considered as laying down, much less limiting, for young people a perfect course of reading; but as simply directing them to some works, which, among others, ought by no means to be neglected.

Once more let it be stated, and stated with all possible emphasis, that the **chief design of this work** is to form the pious character of its readers, and to implant those virtues which shall live, and flourish, and dignify, and delight--infinite ages, after every object that is dear to avarice or pride, to learning or science, to taste or ambition--shall have perished in the conflagration of the universe!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

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An Address to Christian Parents

My Dear Friends—

It is a situation of tremendous responsibility to be a parent—for the manner in which you discharge the duties of this relation, you must give an account in that dreadful day when the secrets of all hearts shall be judged by Jesus Christ. With every babe that God entrusts to your care, he in effect sends the solemn injunction—"Take this child, and bring it up for me"—and at the final audit, will inquire in what manner you have obeyed the command. It will not then be sufficient to plead the strength of your affection, nor the ceaseless efforts to which it gave rise; for if these efforts were not directed to a right end, if all your solicitude was lavished upon inferior objects, you will receive the rebuke of Him that sits upon the throne.

It is of infinite importance that you should **contemplate your children in their true character**. They are **animal** beings, and therefore it is highly proper that you should use every effort to provide them with suitable food, clothing, habitations—and everything else that can conduce to the comfort of their present existence. They are **social** beings, and it is important that you should qualify them to enjoy the comforts, and discharge the duties of social life. They are **rational** beings, and it is your duty to furnish them with every possible advantage for the culture of their minds.

But if you look no further than this, you leave out of sight the grandest and most important relations in which they can be seen, and will of course neglect the most important of your duties towards them—for they are **IMMORTAL** beings—the stamp of eternity is upon them—everlasting ages are before them! They are like the rest of the human race—depraved, guilty, and condemned creatures; and consequently in danger of eternal misery. Yet are they, through the mercy of God, and the mediation of Christ, creatures capable of attaining to glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life. Looking upon them in this light (and this is the light in which you profess to contemplate them)—what should be your chief concern concerning them, and what your conduct towards them?

Recognizing in your children beings placed in this world in a state of probation, and **hastening to eternal happiness or torment**, will you be contented to seek for them anything short of eternal salvation? Even a Deist, who has any belief of a future state of reward and punishment, does not act consistently, unless he is supremely desirous of the everlasting welfare of his children. None but an avowed Atheist can, with the least propriety, fix his aim lower for his children than the possession of a happy immortality.

But, in the case of a Christian parent, it is in the highest degree inconsistent, absurd, cruel, and wicked ever to lose sight of this in the arrangements which he makes for his family, or in the manner of conducting himself towards them. Do you really believe in the **ruin** of the human race by sin—and their **recovery** by Christ? In the existence of such states as **heaven** and **hell**? In the necessity of a life of faith and holiness—in order to escape the one and secure the other? Then act up to these solemn convictions, not only in reference to your own salvation—but to the salvation of your children. Let a supreme concern for their immortal interests be at the bottom of all your conduct, and be interwoven with all your parental habits. Let them have, in the fullest sense of the term, a CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. Act so towards them and for them, as that you shall be able to say to them, however they may turn out—"I take you to record that I am clear of your blood."

But my principal object in this address is to point out what appear to me to be **the most prevailing OBSTACLES to success in the religious education of children.**

That, in many cases, the means employed by Christian parents for their children's spiritual welfare are unsuccessful, is a melancholy fact, established by abundant, and, I fear, accumulating evidence. I am not now speaking of those families (and are there indeed such?) where scarcely the semblance of domestic piety or instruction is to be found, where no family altar is seen, no family prayer is heard, no parental admonition is delivered! What! this cruel, wicked, ruinous neglect of their children's immortal interests in the families of professors! Monstrous inconsistency! shocking dereliction of principle! No wonder that their children go astray! This is easily accounted for. Some of the most profligate young people that I know, have issued from such households. Their prejudices against true religion, and their enmity to its forms, are greater than those of the children of avowed worldlings. Inconsistent, hypocritical, negligent professors of religion, frequently excite in their sons and daughters an unconquerable aversion and disgust against true piety, which seems to produce in them a determination to place themselves at the furthest possible remove from its influence.

But I am now speaking of the **failure of a religious education**, where it has been, in some measure, carried on; instances of which are by no means infrequent. Too often do we hear the echo of David's sorrowful complaint, uttered by the distressed and disappointed Christian father, "Although my house be not so with God." Too often do we see the child of many prayers and many hopes forgetting the instructions he has received, and running with the multitude to do evil. Far be it from me to add affliction to affliction, by saying that this is to be traced, in every case, to parental neglect. I would not thus, as it were, pour vinegar upon the bleeding wounds with which filial impiety has lacerated many a father's mind. I would not thus cause the wretched parent to exclaim—

"Reproach has broken my heart, already half-broken by my child's misconduct." I know that **in many cases no blame whatever could be thrown on the parent**; and that it was the depravity of the child alone, which nothing could subdue but the power of the Holy Spirit, that led to the melancholy result. The best possible scheme of Christian education, most judiciously directed, and most perseveringly maintained, has, in some cases, totally failed. God is a sovereign, and He has mercy on whom He will have mercy. Still, however, there is in the 'use of means' a tendency in a religious education to secure the desired result; and God usually does bless, with His saving influence, such efforts. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." This is certainly true, as a general rule, though there are many exceptions to it.

I shall now lay before you the principal obstacles to the success of religious education, as they strike my mind.

First—It is frequently too negligently and capriciously maintained, even where it is not totally omitted.

It is obvious, that, if at all attended to, it should be attended to with anxious EARNESTNESS, systematic ORDER, and perpetual REGULARITY. It should not be maintained as a dull form, an unpleasant drudgery—but as a matter of deep and delightful interest. The heart of the parent should be entirely and obviously engaged. A part of every returning Sabbath should be spent by him in the instruction of his filial charge; and his concern should be embodied, more or less, with the whole habit of parental conduct. The father may lead the usual devotions at the family altar; the mother may join with him in teaching their children catechism, hymns, and scripture; but, if this be unattended by serious admonition, visible anxiety, and strenuous effort to lead their children to think seriously on true religion, as a matter of infinite importance—little good can be expected. **A cold, formal, capricious system of religious instruction, is rather likely to create prejudice against true religion—than bias in its favor.**

Then again, a religious education should be CONSISTENT—it should **extend to everything that is likely to assist in the formation of character.** It should not be merely instruction—but a complete whole. It should select the schools, the companions, the amusements, the books of youth; for if it does nothing more than merely teach a form of sound words to the understanding and to the memory—while the impression of the heart and the formation of the character are neglected—very little is to be expected from such efforts. A handful of seed, scattered now and then upon the ground, without order or perseverance, might as rationally be expected to produce a good crop—as that a mere lukewarm, capricious, religious education, should be followed by true piety. If the parent be not visibly in earnest, it cannot be expected that the child will be so.

True religion, by every Christian parent, is theoretically acknowledged to be the most important thing in the world; but if in practice the father appears a thousand times more anxious for the son to be a good scholar than a real Christian, and the mother more solicitous for the daughter to be a good dancer or musician than a child of God, they may teach what they like in the way of good doctrine—but they are not to look for genuine piety as the result. Genuine piety can only be expected where it is really taught and inculcated, as the one thing needful.

Secondly—The relaxation of domestic discipline is another obstacle in the way of a successful religious education.

A parent is invested by God with a degree of authority over his children, which he cannot neglect to use, without being guilty of trampling under foot the institutions of heaven. Every family is a community, the government of which is strictly authoritarian—though not tyrannical. Every father is a sovereign—though not an oppressor. He is a law giver—and not merely a counselor. And his will should be law—not merely advice. He is to command, to restrain, to punish—and children are required to obey. He is, if necessary, to threaten, to rebuke, to chastise—and they are to submit with reverence. He is to decide what books shall be read, what companions invited, what engagements formed, and how time is to be spent. If he sees anything wrong, he is not to interpose merely with the timid, feeble, ineffectual protest of Eli—"Why do you thus, my sons?" but with the firm though mild prohibition. He must rule his own house—and by the whole of his conduct make his children feel that **obedience** is his due and his demand.

The **lack of discipline**, wherever it exists—is followed by confusion and domestic anarchy. Everything goes wrong in the absence of this. A gardener may sow the choicest seeds; but if he neglects to pluck up weeds, and prune wild overgrowth, he must not expect to see his flowers grow, or his garden flourish. And so a parent may deliver the best instructions; but if he does not, by discipline, eradicate evil tempers, correct bad habits, repress wicked corruptions, nothing excellent can be looked for. He may be a good prophet and a good priest; but if he be not also a good KING—all else is vain! When once a man breaks his scepter—or lends it to his children as a plaything—he may give up his hopes of success from a religious education.

I have seen the evil resulting from a **lack of discipline** in innumerable families, both among my brethren in the ministry and others. Frightful instances of disorder and immorality are now present to my mind, which I could almost wish to forget. The misfortune, in many families is, that **discipline is unsteady and capricious**—sometimes carried even to tyranny itself—at others relaxed into a total suspension of law; so that the children are at one time trembling like

slaves—at others revolting like rebels; at one time groaning beneath an iron yoke—at others rioting in a state of lawlessness. This is a most mischievous system, and its effects are generally, just what might be expected.

In some cases discipline commences too late—in others it ceases too early. A father's magisterial office is coexistent with his parental relation. A child, as soon as he can reason, should be made to feel that obedience is due to parents; for if he grows up to boyhood before he is subject to the mild rule of paternal authority, he will, very probably, like an untamed bullock, resist the yoke. On the other hand—as long as children continue beneath the parental roof, they are to be subject to the rules of domestic discipline. Many parents greatly err in abdicating the throne in favor of a son or daughter, because the child is becoming a man or a woman. It is truly pitiable to see a boy or girl of fifteen, just returned from school, allowed to sow the seeds of revolt in the domestic community, and to act in opposition to parental authority, until the too compliant father gives the reins of government into the children's hands—or else by his conduct declares his children to be in a state of independence.

There need not be any **contest for power**—for where a child has been accustomed to obey, even from an infant, the yoke of obedience will generally be light and easy. If not, and a rebellious temper begins to show itself early, a judicious father should be on his guard, and allow no encroachments on his authority; while, at the same time, the increased power of his authority, like the increased pressure of the atmosphere, should be felt without being seen—and this will make it irresistible.

Thirdly—undue severity, in the other extreme, is as injurious as unlimited indulgence.

If injudicious fondness has slain its tens of thousands—unnecessary harshness has destroyed its thousands! By an authority which cannot err, we are told that the cords of love are the bands of a man. There is an irresistible power in love. The human mind is so constituted as to yield readily to the influence of kindness. Men are more easily led to their duty—than driven to it. A child, says an eastern proverb, may lead the elephant by a single hair.

Love seems so essential an element of parental character that there is something shockingly revolting—not only in a cruel—not only in an unkind or severe—but even in a cold-hearted father. Study the parental character as it is exhibited in that most exquisitely touching moral picture—the parable of the Prodigal Son. When a father governs entirely by cold, bare, harsh authority—by mere commands, prohibitions and threats—by frowns, untempered with smiles; when the 'friend' is never blended with the 'law-giver', nor authority modified with love; when his conduct produces only a servile fear in the hearts of his children,

instead of a spontaneous affection; when he is served from a dread of the effects of disobedience rather than from a sense of the pleasure of obedience; when he is rather dreaded in the family circle as a frowning spectre, than hailed as the guardian angel of its joys; when even accidents raise a storm, or faults produce a hurricane of passion in his bosom; when offenders are driven to equivocation or lying, with the hope of averting by concealment those severe corrections which disclosure always entails; when unnecessary interruptions are made to innocent enjoyments; when, in fact, nothing of the 'father'—but everything of the 'tyrant' is seen—can we expect true religion to grow in such a soil as this? We may as rationally as we may look for the tenderest hot-house plant to thrive amid the rigors of an arctic frost!

It is useless for such a father to teach true religion; he chills the soul of his pupils; he hardens their hearts against impression; he prepares them to rush with eager haste to their ruin as soon as they have thrown off the yoke of his bondage; and to employ their liberty, as affording the means of unbridled gratification. Like a company of African slaves, they are at first tortured by their thralldom, and by that very bondage, trained up to convert their sudden emancipation into a means of destruction.

Let parents, then, in all their conduct, blend the 'law-giver' and the 'friend'—temper authority with kindness—and realize in their measure that representation of Deity which Dr. Watts has given us, where he says, "Sweet majesty and dreadful love—sit smiling on his brow."

In short, let them so act, that their children shall be convinced that their law is holy, and their commandment is holy, and just, and good—and that to be so governed is to be blessed.

Fourthly—The inconsistent conduct of parents themselves, is a frequent and powerful obstacle to success in religious education.

Example has been affirmed to be omnipotent, and its power, like that of gravitation, to be in proportion to the nearness of the attracting body. What, then, must be the influence of parental example? Now, as I am speaking of pious parents, it is of course assumed that they do exhibit, in some measure, the reality of true religion; but may not the reality often be seen, where much of the beauty of true godliness is obscured, just as the sun is beheld when his effulgence is quenched in a mist; or as a lovely prospect is seen through the haze, which veils the beauty of the scene, though it does not altogether conceal its extent.

True religion may be seen in dim outline by the children, in their parents' conduct—but it may be attended with so many minor inconsistencies, such a

mist of imperfections, that it presents little to conciliate their regard, or raise their esteem. There is so much worldly-mindedness, so much conformity to fashionable follies, so much irregularity of domestic piety, such frequent sallies of unchristian temper, such inconsolable grief and querulous complaint under the trials of life, such frequent animosities towards their fellow Christians, observable in the conduct of some Christians—that their children see true religion to the greatest possible disadvantage, and the consequence is, that it either lowers their standard of piety, or inspires a disgust towards it altogether.

Parents, as you would wish your instructions and admonitions to your family to be successful—**enforce them by the power of a holy example.** It is not enough for you to be generally pious—but you should be wholly pious; not only to be real disciples—but eminent ones; not only sincere Christians—but consistent ones. Your standard of true religion should be very high. To some parents I would give this advice, "Say less about religion to your children—or else manifest more of its influence. Leave off family prayer—or else leave off family sins." Beware how you act—for all your actions are seen at home. Never talk of true religion but with reverence. Do not be forward to speak of the faults of your fellow Christians, and when the subject is introduced, let it be in a spirit of charity towards the offender, and of decided abhorrence of the fault. Many parents have done irreparable injury to their children's minds by a proneness to find out, to talk of, and almost to rejoice over the inconsistencies of professing Christians. Never cavil at, nor find fault with the religious exercises of the minister you attend; but rather commend his discourses, in order that your children may listen to them with greater attention. Direct their views to the most eminent Christians, and point out to them the loveliness of exemplary piety. In short, seeing that your example may be expected so much to aid or to frustrate your efforts for the conversion of your children, consider "what manner of people ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness."

Fifthly—Another obstacle to the success of religious instruction is sometimes found in the wild conduct of an elder branch of the family, especially in the case of a dissipated son.

The elder branches of a family are found, in general, to have considerable influence over the rest, and oftentimes to give the tone of morals to the others; they are looked up to by their younger brothers and sisters; they bring companions, books, amusements into the house; and thus form the character of their juniors. It is of great consequence therefore that parents should pay particular attention to their elder children; and if unhappily the habits of these should be decidedly unfriendly to the religious improvement of the rest, they should be removed, if possible, from the family. One profligate son may lead all his brothers astray. I have seen this, in some cases, most painfully verified. A parent may feel unwilling to send from home a wicked child, under the

apprehension that he will grow worse and worse; but kindness to him in this way is cruelty to the others. Wickedness is contagious, especially when the diseased person is a brother.

Sixthly—Bad companions out of the house counteract all the influence of religious instruction delivered at home.

A Christian parent should ever be on the alert to watch the associations which his children are inclined to form. On this subject I have said much to the young themselves in the following work; but it is a subject which equally concerns the parent. One ill-chosen friend of your child, may undo all the good you are the means of doing at home. It is impossible for you to be sufficiently vigilant on this point. From their very infancy encourage them to look up to you as the selectors of their companions; impress them with the necessity of this, and form in them a habit of consulting you at all times. Never encourage an association which is not likely to have a decidedly friendly influence on their religious character. This caution was never more necessary than in the present age. Young people are brought very much together by the religious institutions which are now formed, and altogether there is a great probability that in such a circle, suitable companions will be found, yet it is too much even for charity to believe that all the active young friends of Sunday Schools, Juvenile Missionary Societies, etc., are fit companions for our sons and our daughters.

Seventhly—The schisms which sometimes arise in our churches, and embitter the minds of Christians against each other, have a very unfriendly influence upon the minds of the young.

They see so much that is opposite to the spirit and genius of Christianity in both parties, and enter so deeply into the views and feelings of one of them, that either their attention is drawn off from the essentials of true religion—or their prejudices raised against them. I look upon this as one of the most painful and mischievous consequences of ecclesiastical contentions.

Eighthly—The neglect of young people by our churches and their pastors, is another impediment to the success of domestic religious instruction.

This, however, does not so much appertain to parents in their separate capacity, as in their relation as members of a Christian society, and even in this relation it belongs less to them, than to their pastors. There is a blank yet to be filled up in reference to the treatment of the young who are not in church communion. We need something that shall recognize the young, interest them, attract them, guard them.

Ninthly—The spirit of filial independence, which is sanctioned by the habits, if not by the opinions of the age, is another hindrance, and the last which I shall mention, to the good effect contemplated and desired by a religious education.

The disposition, which is but too apparent in this age to enlarge the privileges of the children by diminishing the prerogative of their parents, is neither for the comfort of the latter, nor for the well-being of the former. **Rebellion against parental authority** can never be in any case a blessing, and all wise parents, together with all wise youth, will unite in supporting that just parental authority, which, however the precocious manhood of some might feel it to be an oppression, the more natural and slowly approaching maturity of others will acknowledge to be a blessing. Children who find the parental yoke a burden, are not very likely to look upon the yoke of Christ as a benefit.

Such, my dear friends, as they appear to my mind, are the principal obstacles to the success of those efforts which are carried on by many for the religious education of their children. Seriously consider them; and, having looked at them, endeavor to avoid them. Survey them as the mariner does the flame of the lighthouse, for the purpose of avoiding the rock on which it is placed. Recognize your children, as every Christian parent should do, not only as animal, rational, social beings—but as immortal creatures, lost sinners—being invited to eternal life through the mediation of Christ. And while you neglect not any one means that can promote their comfort, reputation, and usefulness in this world—concentrate your chief solicitude, and employ your noblest energies, in a scriptural, judicious, persevering scheme of true religious education. "You fathers, provoke not your children to wrath—but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE ANXIETY OF A CHRISTIAN PARENT FOR THE SPIRITUAL WELFARE OF HIS CHILDREN

My Dear Children—

Never did I pass a more truly solemn or interesting moment than that in which my first-born child was put into my arms, and when I felt that I was a father. A new solicitude was then produced in my bosom, which every succeeding day has tended to confirm and strengthen. I looked up to heaven and breathed over my babe the petition of Abraham for his son—"O! that Ishmael might live before

you!" Recognizing, in the little helpless being which had been introduced into our world, a creature born for eternity, and who, when the sun shall be extinguished, would be still soaring in heaven—or sinking in hell, I returned to the closet of private devotion, and solemnly dedicated the child to the God who had given me the precious blessing; and earnestly prayed that whatever might be his lot in this world—he might be a partaker of true piety, and numbered with the saints in glory everlasting.

During the days of your infancy I and your godly mother watched you, with all the fondness of a parent's heart. We have smiled upon you when you were slumbering in healthful repose; we have wept over you when tossed with feverish restlessness and pain; we have been the delighted spectators of your childish playfulness; we have witnessed with pleasure the development of your intellectual powers, and have often listened, with somewhat of pride, to the commendations bestowed upon your person and attainments. But amid all, one deep solicitude took hold of our minds, which nothing could either divert or abate; and that was, a deep concern for your spiritual welfare—for your religious character.

You cannot doubt, my children, that your parents love you. In all your recollections, we have a witness to this. We have, as you know, done everything to promote your welfare; and, so far as was compatible with this object, your pleasure also. We have never denied you a gratification which our duty and ability allowed us to impart; and if at any time we have been severe in reproof, even this was 'a dreadful form of love'. We have spared no expense in your education—in short, love, an intense love, of which you can at present form no adequate conception, has been the secret spring of all our conduct towards you; and, as the strongest proof and purest effort of our affection, we wish you to be partakers of true piety. Did we not cherish this concern, we would feel that amid every other expression of regard, we were acting towards you a most cruel and unnatural part.

Genuine love desires and seeks for the objects on which it is fixed the greatest benefits of which they are capable; and as you have a capacity to serve, and enjoy, and glorify God by true religion, how can we love you in reality, if we do not covet for you this high and holy distinction? We would feel that our love had exhausted itself upon trifles, and had let go objects of immense, infinite, eternal consequence—if it were not to concentrate all its prayers, desires, and efforts in your personal true religion.

Almost every parent has some one object, which he desires, above all others, on behalf of his children. Some are anxious that their offspring may shine as warriors; others, that theirs may be surrounded with the milder radiance of literary, scientific, and commercial fame. **Our supreme ambition for you is,**

that whatever situation you occupy, you may adorn it with the beauties of holiness, and discharge its duties under the influence of Christian principles. Much as we desire your respectability in life (and we will not conceal our hope that you will occupy no base place in society), yet we would rather see you in the most obscure, and even menial situation, provided you were partakers of true piety, than behold you on the loftiest pinnacle of the temple of fame, the objects of universal admiration—if, at the same time, your hearts were destitute of the fear of God. We might, indeed, in the latter case, be tempted to watch your ascending progress, and hear the plaudits with which your elevation was followed, with something of a parent's vanity; but, when we retired from the dazzling scene to the seat of serious reflection, the spell would be instantly broken, and we would sorrowfully exclaim—"Alas my son, what is all this, in the absence of true religion—but soaring high, to have the greater fall!"

You must be aware, my dear children, that all our conduct towards you has been conducted upon these principles. Before you were capable of receiving instruction, we presented ceaseless prayer to God for your personal piety. As soon as reason dawned, we poured the light of religious instruction upon your mind, by the aid of pious books and conversation. You cannot remember the time when these efforts commenced. How often have you retired with us, to become the subjects of our earnest supplications at the throne of grace! You have been the witnesses of our agony for your eternal welfare. Have we not instructed, warned, admonished, encouraged you, as we laid open to your view the narrow path which leads to eternal life? Have we not been guided by this object in the selection of schools for your education, companions for your recreation, books for your perusal? Has not this been so interwoven with all our conduct, that, if at any time you had been asked the question—"What is the chief object of your parents' solicitude on your account?" you must have said, at once—"For my being truly pious." Yes, my children, this is most strictly true. At home, abroad, in sickness and in health, in prosperity and in adversity—this is the ruling solicitude of our bosoms.

How intently have we marked the development of your character, to see if our fondest wishes were likely to be gratified. We have observed your deportment under the sound of the gospel, and when you have appeared listless and uninterested, it has been as wormwood in our cup—while, on the other hand, when we have seen you listening with attention, quietly wiping away the tear of emotion—or retiring pensive and serious to your closet, we have rejoiced more than they which find great spoil. When we have looked on the conduct of any pious youth, we have uttered the wish, "O that my child were like him!" and have directed your attention to his character, as that which we wished you to make the model of your own. When, on the other hand, we have witnessed the behavior of some prodigal son, who has been the grief of his parents, the

thought has been like a dagger to our heart, "What if my child should turn out thus!"

1. Now, we cherish all this solicitude on OUR OWN account. We candidly assure you that nothing short of this will make us happy. Your piety is the only thing that will make us rejoice that we are your parents. How can we endure to see our children choosing any other ways than those of wisdom—and any other path than that of life? How could we bear the sight, to behold you traveling along the broad road which leads to destruction, and running with the multitude to do evil? "O God, hide us from this sad spectacle, in the grave, and before that time comes, take us to our rest." But how would it embitter our last moments, and plant our dying pillow with thorns, to leave you on earth in an unconverted state; following us to the grave—but not to heaven. Or should you be called to die before us, and take possession of the tomb, how could we stand at "the dreadful post of observation, darker every hour," without one ray of hope for you, to cheer our wretched spirits? How could we sustain the dreadful thought, which in spite of ourselves would sometimes steal across the bosom, that the very next moment after you had passed beyond our kind attentions—you would be received to the torments which know neither end nor mitigation? And when you had departed under such circumstances, what could heal our wounds—or dry our tears?

Should you become truly pious, this circumstance will impart to our bosoms a felicity which no language could enable me to describe. It will sweeten all our communion with you, establish our confidence, allay our fears, awaken our hopes. If we are prosperous, it will delight us to think that we are not acquiring wealth for those who will squander it on their lusts—but who will employ it for the glory of God when we are in dust. Or if we are poor, it will cheer us to reflect, that though we cannot leave you the riches of this world, we see you in possession of the favor of God, a portion which, after comforting you on earth, will enrich you through eternity. My dear children, if you are anxious to comfort the hearts of your parents, if you would fulfill our joy, if you would repay all our labor, concern, affection, if you would most effectually discharge all the obligations which you cannot deny you owe us—Fear God, and choose the ways of true religion—this, this alone will make us happy.

2. We cherish this solicitude on behalf of the CHURCH, and the cause of God.

We see every year conveyed to the tombs of their fathers, some valued and valuable members of the Christian church. We are perpetually called to witness the desolations of the 'last enemy' in the garden of the Lord. How often do we exclaim over the corpse of some eminent Christian and benefactor, "Departed saint, how heavy the loss we have sustained by your removal to a better state!

Who now shall fill up your vacant seat, and bless like you both the church and the world?" My children, under these bereavements, to whom should we look but to you? To whom should we turn but to the children of the kingdom, for subjects of the kingdom? You are the property of the church. It has a claim upon you. Will you not own it, and discharge it? Must we see the walls of the spiritual house mouldering away, and you, the rightful materials with which it should be repaired, withheld? We love the church, we long for its prosperity, we pray for its increase, and it cannot but be deeply distressing to us to witness the ravages of death, and, at the same time, to see the lack of true religion in those young people whose parents during their life filled places of honor and usefulness in the fellowship of the faithful.

We are anxious for your being pious that you might be the instruments of blessing the world by the propagation of true religion. **The moral condition of the world is too bad for description. If it be ever improved—it must be done by Christians. True piety is the only real reformer of mankind.** A spirit of active benevolence has happily risen up, rich in purposes and means, for the benefit of the human race. But the men, in whose bosoms it now lives and moves, are not immortal upon earth; they too must sleep in dust, and who then shall succeed them at their post and enter into their labors? Who will catch their falling mantle, and carry on their glorious undertaking for the salvation of millions? If it ever be done, it must be done of course by those who are now rising into life. The propagation of true religion to the next generation, and to distant nations, depends on you, and on others of your age. While I write, the groans of creation are ascending, and future ages are rising up to plead with you, that you would bow to the influence of true religion, as the only way of extending it to them.

3. But we are chiefly anxious, after all, on YOUR OWN account.

My children, the concern which we feel on this head, is far too intense for language. Here I may truly say, "poor is thought, and poor expression." If piety were to be obtained for you only by purchase, and I were rich in the possession of worlds, I would beggar myself to the last farthing to render you a Christian—and think the purchase cheap! "Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come." As I shall have more than one chapter on the advantages of piety, it will not be necessary to enlarge upon them here, any further than to say, that **true godliness will save you from much present danger and trouble, promote your temporal interests, prepare you for the darkest scenes of adversity, comfort you on a dying bed, and finally conduct you to everlasting glory. The lack of true piety ensure the reverse of all this. Sooner or later such a destitution will bring misery on earth, and be followed with eternal torments in hell.**

What then, my children, are all worldly acquirements and possessions, without true piety? What are the accomplishments of taste, the elegancies of wealth, the wreaths of fame—but as the fragrant and many-colored garland which adorns the miserable victim about to be sacrificed at the 'shrine of this world'? Authentic genius, a vigorous understanding, a well-stored mind, and all this adorned by the most amiable temper and most pleasing demeanor, will neither comfort under the trials of life, nor save their lovely possessor from the worm that never dies and the fire that is never quenched. Oh no—they may qualify for earth—but not for heaven. Alas! alas! that such estimable qualities should all perish for lack of that piety which alone can give immortality and perfection to the excellences of the human character!

Can you wonder, then, at the solicitude we feel for your personal true religion, when such interests are involved in this momentous concern?

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE DISPOSITIONS NECESSARY FOR AN INQUIRY INTO THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION

True religion is a subject of a spiritual and moral nature, and, therefore, requires a different frame of mind to that which we carry to a topic purely intellectual.

1. The first disposition essentially necessary is a DEEP SERIOUSNESS.

True religion is the very last thing in the universe with which we should allow ourselves to trifle. Nothing can be more shocking and incongruous than that flippancy and inconsiderateness with which some people treat this dread theme. When Uzzah put forth his hand, in haste, to support the ark--he paid his life for his recklessness; and if the man, who takes up his Bible to inquire into the meaning of its contents, with a frivolous and whimsical temper, does not suffer the same penalty, it is not because the action is less criminal or less dangerous—but because God has now removed the punishment to a greater distance from the sin. I cannot conceive of anything more likely to provoke God to give a person up to the bewildering influence of his own inherent depravity, and, consequently, to a confused and erroneous perception of religious truth, than this temper. To see a person approaching the Book of God with the same levity as a votary of fashion and folly enters a place of amusement, is, indeed, revolting to taste, to say nothing of more sacred feelings. True religion, enthroned behind the veil in the temple of truth, and dwelling amid the brightness which the merely curious eye cannot bear to look upon, refuses to

unfold her glories or discover her secrets to the frivolous mind; and delivers to every one who draws near to her abode, the admonition of Jehovah to Moses—"Take off your shoes, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground."

The subjects treated of by true religion are of the most exceedingly important nature. Everything about it is serious. The Eternal God, in every view of His nature and operations; the Lord Jesus Christ, in His sufferings and death; the soul of man, in its ruin and salvation; the solemnities of judgment, the mysteries of eternity, the felicities of heaven, the torments of hell--are all involved in the mighty comprehension of true religion. Should such themes be ever touched with irreverence? My dear children, I warn you against the too common practice of reducing, to the level of mere intellectual theories, and of treating with the same unconcern as the systems of philosophy, that sacred volume, which, to use the words of Locke, "has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its contents!" Do not forget, then, that the very first requisite, not only in true religion itself—but also in that frame of mind which enables us to understand its nature, is SERIOUSNESS.

2. A GREAT SOLICITUDE to be guided aright is the next disposition, and nearly allied to the former.

Eternal consequences hang upon this question. According as we mistake it or understand it--we shall travel onward to heaven or to hell. An inquiry of such importance should, of course, be urged with the deepest concern. It might be rationally expected that events so awfully tremendous as death and judgment—a subject so deeply concerning us--as whether we shall spend eternal ages in torments or in bliss, could in no possible case, and in no constitution of mind whatever, fail of exciting the most serious apprehension and concern. And yet there are multitudes who have talked a thousand times about religion—but yet have never had, in all their, lives, one hour's real solicitude, to know whether their views of its nature are correct. Is it to be wondered at, then, that so many remain in ignorance—or plunge into error?

3. A TEACHABLE DISPOSITION, is of great consequence.

Our Lord laid great emphasis on this, when he said—"Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Children, when they first go to school, have a sense of their own ignorance; they have neither biases nor prejudices; they present their unfurnished minds to their teachers, to receive, with implicit confidence, all that they are taught. A teachable spirit is essential to improvement in everything; for, if a child goes to school puffed up with high notions of his own attainments, imagining that he knows as much as his master can teach him, and with a disposition to cavil at everything that is communicated—in this case, improvement is out of the

question; the avenues of knowledge are closed. In nothing is a teachable spirit more necessary, than in true religion, where the subject is altogether beyond the cognizance of the senses and the discoveries of reason.

Christianity is purely and exclusively matter of revelation. Of course, all our knowledge on this topic must be derived from the Bible; to the right understanding of which, we must carry the same consciousness of our ignorance, the same destitution of prejudice and bias, the same implicit submission of the understanding, as the child, on his first going to school, does to his instructor. We must go to the word of God with these convictions in our mind—"This is the Master, from whom I, who know nothing, am most implicitly to receive all things. My Teacher is infallible, and I am not to cavil at his instructions, however, in some things, they may transcend my ability to comprehend them."

Yes, the Bible, the Bible alone, is the infallible teacher of spiritual truth, from whose authority there is no appeal; before whose solemn truths reason must bow in humble silence, to learn and to obey. This is a teachable spirit, by which I mean, not a supple disposition to believe what others believe, or to adopt the creed which they would impose upon us. No—this is the surrendering our understanding to be enslaved by human authority. But teachableness means going direct to the heavenly Master, with this determination—whatever he teaches I will believe; be it so sublime, so humiliating, so novel, and, to my present limited capacities, so incomprehensible as it may.

Are we, then, to exclude reason from the business of true religion? By no means. It would be as absurd to attempt it, as it would be impossible to accomplish it. The whole affair of piety is a process of reason; but then it is reason submitting itself to the guidance of revelation. Reason bears the same relation to true religion, and performs the same office, as it does in the system of jurisprudence; it examines the evidence by which a law is proved to be an enactment of the legislature; interprets, according to the known use of terms and phrases, its right meaning, and then submits to its authority. Thus, in matters of true religion, its province is to examine the evidences by which the Bible is proved to be a revelation from God; having done this, it is to ascertain, according to the fixed use of language, its true meaning, and then to submit to its authority, by believing whatever it reveals, and obeying whatever it enjoins. This is what we mean by prostrating our reason before the tribunal of revelation.

But, suppose that reason should meet with palpable contradictions in the word of God, is she to believe them? This is putting a case which cannot happen, since it is supposing that God will give His sanction to a lie. There can be no contradictions in the word of God; the thing is impossible. But still, it will be replied—Is not one kind of evidence for the divine authority of revelation derived

from its contents? and, if so, may not reason make the nature of a doctrine a test of its truth? At best, this is but a secondary species of evidence, and cannot oppose the primary kind of proof. If it cannot be proved that a doctrine is really an interpolation, and if there be, at the same time, all the evidence that the case admits of that it is a part of divine revelation, no difficulty in the way of understanding its meaning, no seeming mystery in its nature, should lead us to reject it—we must receive it, and wait for further light to understand it.

Revelation is the sun, reason the eye which receives its beams, and applies them to all the purposes of life, for which, in ceaseless succession, they flow in upon us; and it can no more be said that revelation destroys or degrades reason, by guiding it, than it can be said the solar orb renders the faculty of vision useless, by directing its efforts.

A teachable spirit, then, my dear children—by which I mean a submission of the human understanding, in matters of true religion, to the word of God—is essential to all true piety. I insist upon this with more earnestness, because it is easy to perceive the tendency of the present age is in an opposite direction. A haughty and flippant spirit has arisen, which, under the pretext of freedom of inquiry, has discovered a restless propensity to throw off the authority of divine truth; a spirit more disposed to teach the Bible than to be taught by it; to speculate upon what it should be, than to receive it as it is; a spirit which would receive the morality of the word of God as it finds it—but which is perpetually employed in mending its theology; which, in fact, would subvert the true order of things, and, instead of subjecting reason to revelation, would make reason the teacher and revelation the pupil. Beware, my children, of this dangerous spirit, which, while it pays flattering compliments to your understanding, is injecting the deadliest poison into your soul!

4. A PRAYERFUL SPIRIT is essential to a right disposition for inquiring into the nature of true piety. True religion is an affair so spiritual in its nature, so tremendously important in its consequences, and so frequently misunderstood; and, on the other hand, we ourselves are so liable to be misled in our judgments by the bewildering influence of internal depravity and external temptation--that it betrays the most criminal indifference, or the most absurd self-confidence--to enter on this subject without constant, earnest supplication for direction, to the Father and Fountain of lights.

The 'religious world' is like an immense forest, through which lies the right road to truth and happiness; but besides this, there are innumerable paths running in all directions—every way has its travelers, each traveler thinks he is right, and attempts to prove it by referring to the map which he carries in his hand. In such circumstances, who that values his soul or her eternal salvation, would not seek for guidance to Him who has promised to disclose to us, by His Spirit, the path of

life? When young people trust to the efforts of their own unaided reason, and neglect to ask for the guiding influence of the eternal God--it is matter of little surprise that they are found walking in the paths of error. There is a degree of pride and independence in this, which God often punishes by leaving them to the seductions of worldly philosophy and falsehood.

In addition, then, to the greatest seriousness of mind and the most intense desire after truth, and the most unprejudiced approach to the oracle of scripture--pray constantly to God to reveal to you the nature of true piety, and to dispose you to embrace it. This is the way appointed by God to obtain it. "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him." "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto those who are your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give His Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." "I will instruct you, and teach you in the way you shall go; I will guide you with my eye."

These, surely, with a thousand other passages of similar import, are sufficient to enjoin and encourage the temper I now recommend. I have no hope of those who neglect habitual prayer for divine illumination. I expect to see them left to embrace error, or to content themselves with the mere forms of godliness, instead of its power.

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION

All other questions, compared with this, are trifles light as air—or but as the dust of the balance. Philosophy, literature, commerce, the arts and the sciences, have, it is true, a relative importance—they soften the manners, alleviate the evils, multiply the comforts of life. Yet it is impossible to forget that they are the mere embellishments of a scene which we must shortly leave—the decorations of a theater, from which the actors and spectators must soon retire together. But true religion is of infinite and eternal importance, and develops its most significant consequence, in that very moment when the importance of all other subjects terminates forever. A mistake in the nature of true religion, persisted in until death, is followed by effects infinitely dreadful—and of eternal duration. You should bring to this inquiry, therefore, my children, a trembling solicitude to be led in the right way.

Some consider saving religion as a mere notional assent to certain theological opinions; others, as a bare attendance on religious ordinances; others, as the

performance of moral duties. They are all equally wrong—for, instead of being any one of these separately and apart from the rest, it is the union of them all. True religion admits of many definitions in scripture language. It is "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;" or it is "faith working by love;" or it is receiving "that grace which brings salvation, and teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world;" or it is "denying ourselves, taking up our cross and following after Christ;" or it is being born again of the Spirit, and sanctified by the truth; or it is the supreme love of Christ, or the habitual filial fear of God. Each one of these phrases is a definition of true piety. But I shall now adopt another, and represent **true religion as "a right disposition of mind towards God—implanted in our nature by the influence of the Holy Spirit—and exercising itself according to the circumstances in which we are placed."**

True religion is the same in substance in all rational creatures, whether innocent or fallen. In **angels** it is still a right disposition towards God, exercising itself in a way of adoration, love, gratitude, and obedience—but not of faith, hope, and repentance, because their circumstances preclude the possibility of these acts. True religion, in reference to fallen **man**, is a right disposition of mind—but inasmuch as he is a sinful and ruined creature, yet a creature capable of salvation, through the mediation of Christ, it must necessarily include in it, in addition to the feelings of angelic piety, all those mental exercises and habits which are suitable to a state of guilt and a dispensation of mercy. Let us take each part of the definition by itself.

I. God is the primary object of true religion.

It is not enough that we perform our duties towards our fellow-creatures—but to be truly pious we must perform our duty towards God. We may be exemplary and even punctilious in discharging every social obligation—we may be moral in the usual acceptance of the term—we may be honorable and amiable; and yet may be without one single spark of true piety; because in all this there may be no reference whatever to God. An atheist may be all this!

Until the mind is rightly affected towards God, there is no true religion because He is the direct and primary object of it. It is something totally independent, as to its essence, of all the social relations. If a man were wrecked on an uninhabited island, where there would be no opportunity for loyalty, honesty, kindness, mercy, justice, truth, or any of the 'relative virtues'—the claims of piety would still follow him to this dreary and desolate abode. And even there, where he would never hear the sweet music of speech, nor see the look on the human face—he would still be under the obligations of piety; even there one voice would be heard breaking the silence around him, with the solemn injunction of scripture, "You shall love the Lord your God."

Bear in recollection, then, my dear children, that God, as he is revealed in his word, is the direct and primary object of all true piety; and that the most exemplary discharge of the social duties can be no substitute for that reverence, and love, and gratitude, and obedience, which we owe to him.

Most strange it is, and yet most lamentably prevalent, for mankind to make the discharge of their duties towards each other—a substitute for those, and an excuse for neglecting the duties which they owe to God. As if the Divine Being, were the only one in the universe, who could, with propriety, be ignored—and as if He, without any criminality on our part, might be utterly neglected. He is our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor—in Him we live, and move, and have our being. His nature includes everything that can entitle him to our esteem and adoration—His goodness, everything that can claim our gratitude and love. How then can it be thought that the practical remembrance of our duty to man can be any reason for not loving and serving HIM! Our first and most important relation is that of creatures dependent on the Creator; and, therefore, our first and most indispensable duty is a right disposition towards God.

Hence, the scriptures resolve all crime into forgetfulness of God. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." To be a wicked man, and to forget God, are one and the same thing. To be destitute of right affections towards God, is the very essence of sin; and to possess these affections the essence of true religion.

II. True religion is a right disposition of mind towards God.

It is not merely a thing of outward forms and ceremonies—but of the heart. It is more than an external action, it is a disposition; not only a performance—but a taste; not an involuntary or compulsory pursuit—but a voluntary and agreeable one. That true religion must be an internal principle, an affair of the soul, is evident from the nature of its object, of whom it is said, "God is a spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." As the heart lies all open to him, unless there be true religion there—God scorns the uplifted hand and bended knee. It is evident from reason, that piety must have its seat in the heart; for what spiritual excellence can there be in an action, which is either performed from a bad motive, or from none at all?

This is evident from Scripture. Read such injunctions as these. "My son, give me your heart." "Get a new heart." "Your heart is not right in the sight of God." "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." "You must be born again." Equally in point are all those passages which command us to love God, to fear him, to trust in him, to glorify him; duties which of course imply the exercise, and the vigorous exercise of the affections of the mind. Notions however clear, morality however exemplary—are not enough until the current of feeling is turned towards God. A

mere cold correctness of deportment—but which leaves the heart in a state of alienation and estrangement from God—is not the piety of the word of truth.

Now, in consequence of our natural descent from Adam since his fall, we come into the world totally destitute of this right disposition towards God and grow up under the influence of a contrary temper. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." This is what we mean by the total depravity of human nature; not that there is an absence of all amiable and praiseworthy feeling towards our fellow-creatures; not that there is the predominance of criminal and wicked appetite—but that there is a total destitution of all right feeling towards God. Much loose and incorrect representation has been given, by injudicious writers, on the subject of human depravity. It would seem, from their statements, as if mankind were all like, as bad as vice could make them.

Now, by the total depravity of the whole race of man, we simply mean, that since the fall, every man comes into the world totally destitute of holiness and love to God—and in consequence of this destitution lives without God—until renewed by divine grace. Some will go further astray in sin than others, according to the circumstances in which they are placed—but so far as the state of the heart is concerned, all are equally destitute of the principles of holiness, as long as they are unrenewed by the Divine Spirit. Before true religion can be possessed by one human being, there must of consequence be an entire change of mind, a complete alteration in the disposition. The scriptures inform us that all are inherently depraved, for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh;" and, therefore, with equal explicitness they inform us, that all must be changed before they can partake of true piety. This change is so great that our Lord himself calls it a second birth. "Verily, verily, I say unto you—Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven."

Until this change takes place, there cannot be even the commencement of true religion. Whatever sins are avoided, or whatever morality is done that bears the semblance of piety—is carried on without a right disposition of mind; and we cannot suppose that God, who sees the heart, is pleased with such service, any more than we should be with compliments from a person whose bosom we knew to be destitute of all right feeling toward us. The mistake which many make in religion is, they do not begin with the beginning. They attempt to carry up the superstructure without seeking to have the foundation laid in the renewal of the nature. They profess to serve God outwardly before they have surrendered their heart to His renewing grace. Their religion is a new dress—but not a new nature. It is the mechanical performance of a machine—not the voluntary actions of a living man. It lacks that which alone constitutes piety—a "right disposition towards God."

III. This disposition is implanted in the soul by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The operations of Deity, in the formation of the material world, are frequently alluded to by the sacred writers, as illustrating the work of Jehovah in renewing the human mind and bringing forth the beauties of holiness in the human character. The soul of man, as to all spiritual excellence, is in its natural state, a chaos. And the same Divine Spirit who brooded on the materials of the formless void, who moved on the face of the deep, and brought order out of confusion, and beauty out of deformity; who said—Let there be light, and there was light—now operates on the dark **mind**, the crooked **affections**, the hard **heart** of the sinner—giving true light to the **understanding**, a right disposition to the **soul**, submission to the **will**; and, in short, creating the whole man anew in Christ Jesus, unto good works.

This is declared in many passages of the scriptures. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." To the same effect are our Lord's words to Nicodemus—"Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." This same truth is often repeated by the apostles. "You has he quickened." "Who has saved us by washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit." "It is God who works in us to will and to do." That it must be some power, outside of a man, and beyond himself to effect the change, is evident from the circumstance that it is not merely the conduct—but the disposition itself, which requires to be changed; and who can reach the mind, and regulate the springs of action—but God? Not that we are to lie down in indolent neglect, and say—"If, then, it is the Holy Spirit who must change the mind, I may give up all concern about the matter, and wait before I attempt to perform the duties of true religion, until I feel that I am changed."

No—as rational creatures, we must use our faculties, consider our case, examine our hearts, tremble at our situation, call upon God in prayer, and give Him no rest until He pours out His spirit upon us. The very circumstance that we are thus dependent on God, should make us more tremblingly anxious—more importunate in prayer for divine help. If you were entirely dependent upon the assistance of a fellow-creature for help to recover your property, liberty, or life—would not that very conviction impel you to the door and presence of the person, in all the eloquence and urgency of importunate entreaty? Would you not pour out your very soul in the language of wrestling supplication? Would you not press your suit by every argument, so long as a ray of hope fell upon your spirits? In this case—the idea that help must come from another—would not render you indolent. And why should it do so in the business of conversion?

The only circumstance which renders the influence of the Holy Spirit necessary for the conversion of the soul, is the lack of inclination or disposition to love and serve God. That is what we call moral inability, in distinction from natural inability. A man is morally unable when he has no inclination; he is naturally unable when he has no opportunity. When a master commands a servant to go and bring something to him—and the servant hears the command and at the same time has the use of his limbs—but refuses to obey, he is morally unable—that is, he has no inclination, no disposition. But if the master were to command the servant to go to another room, or to another street, and the servant at that time were deprived of the use of his limbs, he is, in that case, naturally unable. In the former case, he could go if he would; in the latter, he would if he could. The former is guilty of rebellion, for all he lacked was disposition; the latter is innocent, for he has no opportunity. One lacks will, the other lacks power.

This illustrates the case of the sinner—he is morally unable to obey and love God; he has enough natural power, he has reason, will, affections, and he has eyes to read God's commands, and ears to hear them. Why, then, does he not obey them? Because he has no disposition. If he were a lunatic or an idiot, from his birth, his inability to serve God would be a natural inability. Now, moral inability, or lack of disposition, so far from being an excuse for neglecting God and true religion, is the very essence of sin. The less disposition a man has to that which is good, and the more disposition he has to that which is evil, the more wicked he is; just as a person addicted to dishonesty, cruelty, or injustice, is the more guilty the stronger his propensities are to his wickedness. The more natural inability we have, the more we are excused from not doing what is right—but the greater our moral inability is, the more guilty we are.

Now, this moral inability is what our Lord speaks of us when he says—"No man can come unto me except the Father who has sent me draw him." He cannot, because he will not; and he will not, because he has no disposition. Hence he says, in another place—"You will not come unto me, that you may have life." The inability which the Spirit of God removes, then, in conversion, is the lack of inclination; the ability which he gives is a right disposition. In conversion, no violence is done to the will, because the will always follows the disposition. If this be correct, we are to take pains with ourselves, to think, to resolve, to act, though in dependence upon the grace of God.

IV. I shall now state how a right disposition of mind towards God will exercise itself in our circumstances as sinners; and this will bring us more immediately to a consideration of the nature of real religion.

First—**Reverence, veneration, and awe, are due from us to that great and glorious Being who is the author of our existence, the fountain of our comforts, the witness of our actions, and the arbiter of our eternal**

destiny! How sublimely grand and awesome is the character of God, as it is revealed in His word! Acknowledging, as you do, my children, His existence, you should make Him the object of your habitual fear and dread. You should maintain a constant veneration for Him, a trembling aversion of His wrath. A consciousness of His existence and of His immediate presence should never, for any length of time, be absent from your mind. The idea of an ever-present, omniscient, omnipotent Spirit, should not only be sometimes before your understanding, as an article of faith—but impressed upon your heart as a dreadful and practical reality. Your very spirits should ever be laboring to apprehend and to apply the representation which the scriptures give us of the Deity. A desire to know Him, to feel and act towards Him with propriety, should be interwoven with the entire habit of your reflections and conduct.

Secondly—**PENITENCE is indispensably necessary.** In order to this, there must be deep CONVICTION OF SIN; for none can mourn over a fault, which he is not convinced that he has committed. A deep CONSCIOUSNESS OF GUILT is one of the first feelings of a renewed mind, and is one of the first operations of the Holy Spirit. "When he has come, he shall convince the world of sin." We come to a knowledge of our sinful state by an acquaintance with the spirituality, purity, and extent of the moral law; "for sin is the transgression of the law." Until we know the law, which is the rule of duty, we cannot know in what way, and to what extent, we have offended against it. The exposition which our Lord has given us of the law, in his sermon on the mount, informs us that it is not only the overt act of iniquity which makes man a sinner—but the inward feeling, the imagination, the desire. An unchaste look is a breach of the seventh commandment; a feeling of immoderate anger is a violation of the sixth. Viewing ourselves in such a mirror, and trying ourselves by such a standard, we must all confess ourselves to be guilty of ten thousand sins.

And then, again, we are not only sinful for what we do that is wrong—but for what we leave undone that is right, and ought to be done. If, therefore, we have a right disposition towards God, we must have a deep feeling of depravity and guilt—an impressive sense of moral deviation—a humbling consciousness of vileness. To the charges of the law, we must cry guilty! guilty! We must not only admit, upon the testimony of others, that we are sinful—but, from a perception of the holiness of God's nature, and the purity of His law—we must discern the number, aggravations, and enormity of our offences. We must do homage to infinite holiness—by acknowledging ourselves altogether sinful.

SORROW is essential to penitence. We cannot have been made partakers of penitence if we do not feel inward grief on the review of our transgressions. We read of "godly sorrow, which works repentance unto salvation." If we have injured a fellow-creature, the first indication of a right sense of the offense, is a sincere regret that we should have acted so. How much more necessary is it that

we should be unfeignedly sorry for our innumerable offences against God. Sorrow for sin is not, however, to be estimated only by violent emotions and copious tears. The passions are much stronger in themselves, and much more excitable in some than in others; and, therefore, the same degree of inward emotion, or of outward grief, is not to be expected from all. The degrees of sorrow, as well as the outward modes of expressing it, will vary, as belonging more to the sensitive nature than to the rational; and for avoiding all scruple and doubtfulness on this topic, it may be laid down for certain, that the least degree of sorrow is sufficient—if it produces sincere reformation; the greatest degree of sorrow is insufficient—if it does not produce sincere reformation.

The next step in penitence is CONFESSION. Real sorrow for sin is always frank and impartial—while false or partial sorrow is prone to concealment, palliation, and self-justification. There is a wretched proneness in many people when convinced of sin, to offer excuses and to endeavor to think the best of their case. They cannot be brought to admit the charge in all its length and breadth—but they attempt to hide its magnitude from their own eyes. This is a dangerous disposition, and has often come between a man's soul and his salvation. All the great and precious promises of pardon are suspended upon the condition of confession. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Confession must be in detail, not in generals only; it must be free and impartial.

ABHORRENCE OF SIN is also included in penitence. There can be no real grief for an action, which is not accompanied by dislike of it. We shall unquestionably hate sin—if we partake of godly sorrow. This, indeed, is the true meaning of the term repentance, which does not signify grief merely—but an entire change of mind towards sin. Abhorrence of sin is as necessary a part of repentance, as grief. Our hatred of transgression must be grounded not merely on viewing it as an injury to ourselves—but as an insult to God. For penitence, on account of sin, is altogether a different feeling to that which we experience over a fire, a shipwreck, or a disease which has diminished our comforts. Our tears, then, are not enough, if not followed by abhorrence. "If we are sincere in our grief, we shall detest and fly the viper which has stung us, and not cherish and caress the beast, while with false tears we bathe the wound we have received."

Thirdly—**FAITH in Jesus Christ is no less necessary.** Faith is a very important, and most essential part of true religion. Faith in Christ is a firm practical belief of the gospel testimony concerning Christ, a full persuasion of the truth of what is declared, and a confident expectation of what is promised. The testimony is this—"It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish—but have everlasting life." Hence, then, faith is a belief that Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice

of atonement to divine justice for human guilt, accompanied by an exclusive dependence on that atonement for acceptance with God, and a confident expectation of pardon and eternal life according to the promises of the gospel.

Mere assent does not amount to the scriptural idea of faith. There must be dependence and expectation. The subject of the divine testimony is not like a problem in mathematics, which appeals exclusively to the understanding; in this case mere assent, or a perception of the truth of the proposition, is all that belief contains. But the gospel is a report that concerns our hearts, and which is, in fact, proposed to us not only as a promise to be believed—but a rule to be obeyed. Faith, then, certainly includes in it an exercise of the will, or else there can be nothing moral in its nature. We cannot affirm of anything merely intellectual, that it is matter of duty. Exclude an exercise of volition, or disposition from faith, and then, it is no longer obligatory upon the conscience. Besides, if belief be merely an intellectual exercise, so is unbelief; for they are opposites. A scriptural faith, then, includes dependence and expectation.

Faith is, most obviously, as much a part of a right disposition towards God, as penitence. God having given Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinners, and promised to save those who depend upon the atonement, and commanded all to ask for pardon and eternal life; it is manifest, that not to believe, is to dispute the divine veracity, as well as to rebel against the divine authority. To believe the gospel, and to expect salvation through Christ, is to honor all the **attributes** of Deity at once, is to praise that **mercy** which prompted the scheme of redemption, that **wisdom** which devised it, that **power** which accomplished it, that **justice** which is satisfied by it, and that **truth** which engages to bestow its benefits on all that seek them. Not to believe is an act of contempt which insults Jehovah in every view of his character at once. Until we are brought, therefore, actually to depend on Christ so as to expect salvation, we have no real religion.

Fourthly—**A willingness in all things to OBEY God, completes the view which ought to be given of a right disposition towards him.**

There must be a distinct acknowledgment of His right to govern us, and an unreserved surrender of our heart and life to his authority; a habitual desire to do what he has enjoined, to avoid what He has forbidden. Where there is this desire to please, this reluctance to offend God—the individual will read with constancy and attention the sacred volume, which is written for the express purpose of teaching us how to obey and please the Lord. Finding there innumerable injunctions against all kinds of immorality and sin, and as many commands to practice every personal, relative, and social duty—the true Christian will be zealous for all good works. Remembering that Jesus Christ is proposed there as our example, no less than our atonement—he will strive to be like him in purity, spirituality, submission to the will of God, and devotedness to

the divine glory. Nor will he forget to imitate the beautiful meekness, humility, and kindness of his deportment; so that the love which a right view of his atonement never fails to produce, transforms the soul of the believer into his image. Finding in the word of God many commands to cultivate the spirit and attend on the exercises of devotion; the true Christian will remember the sabbath-day to keep it holy, will maintain daily prayer in his closet, and unite himself in the fellowship of some Christian church, to live in communion with believers, and with them to celebrate the sacred supper.

During the trials of life, he will console himself with the promises of grace, and the prospects of glory. He will soften his earthly cares by the influence of his heavenly hopes. He will endeavor to keep himself pure from the vices of the world, and shine as a spiritual light amid surrounding darkness. His great business in this world will be to prepare for the better eternal home; and when the time arrives for him to leave the visible for the invisible state, he will bow in meek submission to the will of God, and retire from earth, cheered with the prospect and the expectation of eternal glory.

Such appears to me to be the nature of true religion. Its possessor, daily conscious of his defects, will habitually humble himself before God; and while he seeks forgiveness for past offences, through the blood of Jesus Christ, will as earnestly implore the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit to sanctify him more perfectly for the future.

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE ADVANTAGES AND RESPONSIBILITY OF A PIOUS EDUCATION

The value of any system of education, must, of course, be estimated by the importance of the end to be obtained, which, in the present case, is the possession of saving religion in this world—and eternal happiness in that which is to come. The end to be obtained includes not only a profession of piety in our present state of being—but all that infinite and everlasting felicity which piety brings in its train—of what vast consequence, then, must be the most suitable means for attaining to this sublime purpose!

I. The ADVANTAGES of a pious education.

The value of a thing, my dear children, is sometimes learned by the lack of it—consider, therefore, the situation of those young people whose parents, careless of their own souls, take no pains for the salvation of their children. In what a

helpless situation are such young people placed! They are taught, perhaps, everything but true religion. They are instructed in all the elegant accomplishments of fashionable life—but how to serve God and obtain eternal salvation, is no part of their education. In their abode, wisdom, in the form of parental piety, is never heard saying—"Hearken, O children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord." They see cards and other amusements often introduced to the domestic circle—but no Bible; they hear singing—but it is not the songs of Zion; there is feasting and partying—but no devotion; there is no domestic altar, no family prayer. The Sabbath is marked with the same levity as other days. They go to church, perhaps—but not to hear the true gospel of Christ. They are taken to every mirthful party in the neighborhood, and are studiously trained that 'pleasure' is their chief end. They scarcely ever see the lovely form of true religion in the circles which they frequent, except when, like its divine Author, it is brought there to be despised and rejected of men. How are such young people to be pitied! Who can wonder that they do not fear the Lord!

How different has been your lot!—the very opposite of this. From your earliest childhood, you have been taught the nature and the necessity of true religion. **Instruction** on this subject has been concurrent with the dawn of reason. Every topic of piety has been explained to you—as your mind could bear it. The doctrines of Christianity have been stated and proved, its duties unfolded and enforced. The nature and attributes of God, the extent and obligation of His law, the design and grace of the gospel, have been explained; your sinful state has been clearly set before you, the object of Christ's death pointed out, the necessity of regeneration, justification, and sanctification impressed upon your heart. If you perish—will it be for lack of knowledge? If you miss the path of life—will it be from not having it pointed out?

To instruction has been united **admonition**. With all the tenderness of parental affection, and all the seriousness which the nature of the subject demanded, you have been warned, entreated, and even pleaded with—to fear God and seek the salvation of your souls. You have seen the tear glistening in a father's eye, while his tongue addressed to you the fondest wishes of his heart for your eternal happiness. You have enjoyed the advantage of a system of mild and appropriate discipline. You remember the time when your budding corruptions were nipped by the kind hand of parental care—and the blossoms of youthful excellence were sheltered and nurtured by a mother's watchful solicitude. Have they not often reproved you for what was wrong, and commended you for what was right? Have they not, by praise and by dispraise, judiciously administered, endeavored to train you up to hate that which is evil, and to cleave to that which is good? Have they not kept you from improper company, and warned you against associates that were likely to injure you? Have they not, with weeping eyes and bleeding hearts, administered that correction which your faults deserved?

You have also seen all this enforced by the power of a **holy example**—imperfect, it is true, yet sufficient, like the sun, even when partially covered by a mist, to be your guide. You have seen them walking with God, and in fellowship with Christ. You have seen them retiring for prayer, and marked what an impression of devout seriousness they have brought from the presence of God. You cannot doubt that true religion was the governing principle of their hearts. The happiness as well as holiness of true piety has appeared in their conduct. You have seen the cloud of sorrow which affliction brought upon their brow, irradiated with the sunbeams of Christian faith and hope. Thus, the whole weight of parental example has been employed to give impression in favor of true religion on your heart.

But the advantage of a pious education rests not here; for you well know that it has procured for you all other religious benefits which conduce, in the order of means, to the salvation of the soul. You have been taken, from childhood, to hear the gospel preached by those who were anxious to save those who hear them. You have been associated with pious people, and joined the circles of the righteous, where the claims of true religion are respected, and her holy image has been welcomed with affection, and treated with respect. Religious books have been put into your hands. Schools have been selected for your education, which would aid the work of your parents—and everything kept out of your way which would be likely to be an impediment to the formation of your religious character, and your pursuits of eternal salvation.

Thus, so far as means go, the very avenues of perdition have been blocked up—the way to destruction has been filled with mounds and barriers; while the path of life has been carefully laid open to your view, and everything done to facilitate your entrance to the road to immortality. You have been born, cradled, and instructed in an element of true religion; you have trod the ground, and breathed the atmosphere of piety. What advantages! Who shall count their number, or calculate their value!

II. The RESPONSIBILITY of a pious education.

And now think of the **responsibility** which all these privileges entail upon you. This thought fills me with trembling for you—if you do not tremble for yourselves. Man is an accountable being, and his accountability to God is in exact proportion to his opportunities for knowing and doing the will of his Creator. No talents of this kind, that are entrusted to man, are so precious as those of a pious education; and with no people will God be so awfully strict in judgment, as with those who have possessed them. A 'law of proportion' will be the rule of the final judgment. Ten talents will not be required from those to whom only five were delivered; nor will only five be demanded from those with whom ten were entrusted. This is plainly stated by Christ, in that most impressive passage—

"That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants, will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." Luke 12:47-48

Who, upon this scale, shall measure the height and depth of your responsibility? The poor pagan—who hews down a tree, makes a god of its wood, and worships the deity which he has thus fashioned—who lives in all kind of lust, and cruelty, and falsehood—the Mohammedan, who turns his face to the rising sun, and calls upon his prophet—the savage, who revels in the village, where his father rioted before him, and where neither of them ever heard one parental admonition, nor one gospel sermon—no, even the infidel, who derides the scripture, and was taught to do it by his father—will not have so much to account for in the day of scrutiny as you, who have enjoyed the advantages of a pious education.

Think, I beseech you, upon all your privileges, the instructions, the warnings, the admonitions, the reproofs, you have received, even from your infancy—your father's earnest prayers, and your mother's admonishing tears—domestic teaching and ministerial advice—Sabbaths spent, and sermons heard—all, all must be accounted for at the last day—all will be demanded in judgment.

You may now think lightly of these things—but God does not. You may forget them as they pass—but God does not. They are dealt out to you as precious things; the number of them is written down in the records of Omniscience; and in that day, when the throne shall be set and the books shall be opened, the improvement of each will be demanded, by a voice at which the universe shall tremble. You will not be tried as one who had only the feeble glimmering of 'natural reason' to guide his perceptions and his conduct—but as one who walked amid the noontide splendor of divine revelation—as one who occupied just that station in the moral world, where the light of heaven fell with the clearest and the steadiest brightness.

Imagine yourself called into judgment to answer for your religious privileges; summoned by a voice which it is impossible to resist, from the throng of trembling spirits waiting for their doom. Imagine you hear that voice which commanded the universe into being, saying to **you**, "Child of godly parents, son of many prayers and much concern, give an account of yourself! Exhibit the fruits and improvement of all your rich and innumerable advantages for a life of piety. You parents who taught him, bear witness. I entrusted him to your care. Did you bring him up in the fear, and nurture, and admonition of the Lord? resign your trust; deliver your testimony; clear yourselves." Impressive and dreadful spectacle. There you stand before the tribunal of God, confronted by

the mother who bore you, and the father who loved you. If you shall then be found to have neglected your advantages, and lived without piety, what a testimony will they bear. "You are our witness, O God, and that unhappy individual in whom we once delighted as our child—but whom we now renounce forever, with what affectionate solicitude, and unwearied perseverance; with how many tears and prayers we labored for his salvation. But all was useless. This is not the season of mercy, or we would still pour over his guilty head one more fervent prayer for his salvation—but forbidden to commend him to your mercy, we can now do nothing but leave him to your justice."

Miserable man, what can he say? He is speechless. Conscious guilt leaves him without excuse, and despair seals up his lips in silence. One piercing, agonizing look is directed to his parents, one deep groan escapes his bosom, as the ghosts of murdered opportunities rise upon his vision, and crowd the regions of his memory. As his distracted eye ranges over the millions who stand on the 'left' hand of the Judge, there is not one whose situation he does not envy. The Pagan, the Mohammedan, the poor peasant, who sinned away his life in a benighted village, even the infidel going up to receive his doom for blaspheming the God of Scripture—appears less guilty, less miserable than he.

But where my pen dipped in the gall of celestial displeasure, I could not describe the weight of the sentence, nor the misery which it includes, that will fall upon the ungodly child of pious parents. Who shall portray the hell of such a fallen spirit, or set forth the torments with which it will be followed to the regions of eternal night? We all know that no sufferings are so dreadful as those which are self-procured; and that self-reproach infuses a bitterness into the cup of woe, which exasperates the anguish of despair. Disappointment of long and fondly-cherished hopes is dreadful—but if there be no reason for self-reproach, even this is tolerable. But to suffer through eternal ages, in the bottomless pit, with no prospect but of misery, no employment but that of numbering over the advantages we once possessed for escaping from the wrath to come—this is hell.

My children, my children! my heart agonizes as I write. I groan over these lines of my book—these pictures in my mind. Do take warning. Harken to these sentiments. Let them have their due weight with your souls. Treasure up this conviction in your minds—that of all lands on the earth, it is the most dreadful to travel to the bottomless pit from a Christian country; and of all the situations in that country, it is the most awful to reach the bottomless pit from the house of godly parents. Let me be anything in the day of judgment, and in eternal misery, rather than the ungodly child of pious parents!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James

THE PREVAILING OBSTACLES WHICH PREVENT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ENTERING ON A PIOUS LIFE

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Matthew 7:13-14

Our Lord has most explicitly taught us, my dear children, that the entrance to the path of life is attended with difficulty--and is not to be accomplished without effort. Into that road, we are not borne by the pressure of the thronging multitude, nor the force of natural inclination. No broad and flowery avenue attracts the eye; no siren songs of worldly pleasure allure the ear.

"Strive to enter in at the narrow gate--for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." This implies that there are obstructions to be removed, and difficulties to be surmounted.

The fundamental and universal obstruction with which everyone has to contend, and which can be removed only by the power of the Holy Spirit—is the darkness and depravity brought upon human nature by the fall; and the indulged sensuality, prejudice and enmity of the carnal mind. But this prevailing depravity manifests itself in various specific forms, according to the different circumstances, constitutions, ages, and tempers of its subjects. It is an inward and universal evil, exhibiting its opposition to true religion in an immense variety of ways.

1. Self-conceit is not uncommonly to be met with in the character of the young, and is very much opposed to the spirit of true piety. This is a sort of epidemic disease, which finds a peculiar susceptibility in people of your age to receive it. Young in years and experience, they are very apt, nevertheless, to form high notions of themselves, and to imagine that they are competent judges of all truth and conduct. They decide—where wiser minds deliberate. They speak—where experience is silent. They rush forward with impetuosity—where their sires scarcely creep. They think themselves quite as competent to determine and to act—as those who have witnessed the events of threescore years and ten.

This disposition shows itself oftentimes in reference to business; and the bankrupt list has, a thousand times, revealed the consequences. But it is seen in more important matters than business. In the gaiety of their spirits, and in the mirth of youthful energy, they see no great need of true religion to make them happy; or if some religion be necessary, they do not think it requires all that solicitude and caution with which older Christians attend to its concerns. They

think they are not so much in danger as some would represent. They shall not take up the humbling, self-abasing, penitential piety of their fathers—but adopt a more rational religion. They have their reason to guide them, and their strength to do all that is necessary—and therefore, cannot see the need of so much fear, caution, and dependence.

My children, be humble—or else pride and self conceit will be your ruin! Think of your age and inexperience. How often already have you been misled, by the ardor of youth, in cases where you were most confident that you were right. When the Athenian orator was asked, what is the first grace in oratory? he replied, Pronunciation; the second? Pronunciation; the third? still he replied, Pronunciation. So, if I am asked what is this first grace in true religion? I reply, Humility; the second? Humility; the third? still Humility! And self-conceit is the first, and the second, and the third obstruction!

2. Love of worldly pleasure is a great impediment to true piety. It has been most wickedly said, "**Youth** is the time for pleasure—**manhood** is the time for business—**old age** is the time for religion." It is painful to observe, that if the two latter parts of human life are neglected, the first is not. Young people too often answer the description given by the apostle, "Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." In youth, there are many temptations to this wicked propensity; the senses are vigorous, the spirits lively, the imagination ardent, the passions warm, and the concerns of life but few and feeble. Hence many give themselves up to the impulses of their corrupt nature, and are held in alienation from a life of piety—by a love of pleasure. Some are carried away by a vain and frivolous love of dress and show; others by a delight in mirth and parties; others by games, balls, and theatrical performances; others by the sports of the field; others by intemperance and debauchery.

It is admitted that all these gratifications are not equally degrading in themselves, nor equally destructive of reputation and health—but if indulged as the chief good, they may all prevent the mind from attending to the concerns of true religion. A predominant love of worldly pleasure, of any kind—is destructive in every point of view. It unfits you for the pursuits and the toils of business, and thus is the enemy of your temporal interests; it often leads on from gratifications which, in the opinion of the world, are decent and moral, to those which are wicked and immoral; it is incompatible with the duties and comforts of domestic life; it hinders the improvement of the understanding, and keeps the mind barren and empty; it prevents you from becoming the benefactors of our species—but its greatest mischief is, that **it totally indisposes the mind for true religion, and thus extends its mischief to eternity! in short, if cherished and persisted in, it ruins and damns the soul forever!**

My children, beware of this most dangerous propensity for worldly pleasure! Consider where it leads—check it to the uttermost—and ask grace from God to acquire a better taste. "What a hideous case is this—to be so debased in the temper of your minds, as to lose all the laudable appetites and advantages of an intellectual nature; and to be sunk into the deformity of a devil, and into the baseness of a brute! To be so drenched in deadly delights—and in sensual, fading, and hollow pleasures—as to forego all real and eternal satisfactions for them—and to entail insupportable and endless miseries upon yourselves by them!" Yes, if you live for worldly pleasure, and neglect true religion, you are giving up an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory, for light and frivolous gratifications, which are but for a moment! You are, for the sake of a few years' empty mirth, entailing everlasting ages of unmitigated torments!

Besides, though worldly pleasure temporarily gratifies—it does not really satisfy! When the honey is all sucked—it leaves a sting behind! And then, what are the pleasures of the world, compared with those of true piety—but the shadow to the substance; the stagnant pool to the fresh and running fountain; the smoking candle to the midday sun? Shall worldly pleasure cheat you of eternal salvation?

3. Prejudice against the ways of true religion as gloomy, keeps many from yielding to its claims. Many young people seem to compare true religion to a dark underground cavern, in descending to which, you leave all that is joyous in life; which is impervious to the light of heaven, and inaccessible to the melodies of creation; where nothing meets the eye but tears, nor the ear but sighs; where the inhabitants, arrayed in sackcloth, converse only in groans; where, in short, a smile is an offense against the superstition which reigns there, and a note of delight would be avenged by the dreadful master of the place, with an expulsion of the individual who had dared to be cheerful!

Is this true religion? No, my children, I will give you another figurative view of it. "Wisdom has built her spacious house with seven pillars. She has prepared a great banquet, mixed the wines, and set the table. She has sent her servants to invite everyone to come. She calls out from the heights overlooking the city. 'Come home with me,' she urges the simple. To those without good judgment, she says, 'Come, eat my food, and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your foolish ways behind, and begin to live; learn how to be wise.'" Proverbs 9:1-6.

This is a metaphorical description of true religion under the name of wisdom, and the figure of a feast. It is declared in Scripture, and all the saints in the universe will confirm the truth of the assertion, that "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

4. A thoughtless, heedless temper is with many, an obstruction to piety. There is frequently, in people of your age and circumstances, a peculiar

thoughtlessness of mind—a lack of calm consideration and steady reflection. They do not deliberate and ponder. Their minds seem as light as thistle-down, and as volatile as the butterfly. They are always walking, talking, smiling—but rarely thinking. The meditative mood, the contemplative attitude, is never theirs. If you want to find them, never look for them at home—but watch for them abroad. Their extreme thoughtlessness prevents them from giving due heed to the concerns of true religion. Though they are immortal creatures, lost sinners invited to salvation, destined to eternity, and hastening to heaven or hell—they have scarcely ever had a serious thought upon the subject—even these momentous topics are treated with the utmost lightness of mind.

If the eye of any one of this class should range over these pages, let me beseech him to look at his picture, and ask himself if he can admire it. O! my young friend, cannot the high themes of eternity make you serious? Placed as you are, on this earth, between the torments of the damned and the felicities of the redeemed—with the preparations for judgment going on, and the scenes of eternity opening before you—**will you laugh out your little share of existence, and flutter through life**, until, like a bird dropping into a volcano, you fall into the bottomless pit! Let these things soberize your thoughts, and bring you to the subject of true religion, with something like an appropriate seriousness of mind.

5. Evil companions have often proved an obstruction to young people in the ways of piety. Young people are generally inclined to company, and too often it proves a snare to them. Many a hopeful youth, that seemed at one time setting out in the ways of piety, has been arrested in his career by some unsuitable associate, with whom he has joined himself in the bonds of friendship; and thus he who seemed beginning in the spirit, has ended in the flesh—leaving his pious friends to exclaim, in the tone of grief and disappointment—"You did run well; who hindered you?" How difficult is it, when a young person is first brought under the influence of genuine piety, to break from his former mirthful companions! And yet, if he would persevere in his new course, it must be done! In such cases the bonds of association must be broken. You must give up your friends—or your salvation; and can you hesitate?

6. The misconduct of professing Christians, especially if they be our parents, proves to many young people a stone of stumbling at the entrance of the path of godliness.

They have seen the 'open immorality' or the 'secret hypocrisy' of those who profess to be partakers of true piety, and, under the influence of disgust and disappointment, are ready to conclude that all are alike—and that there is no reality in religion, no truth in Scripture. I know that these things must often prove an obstruction in their way, and have produced, in some instances, an

unconquerable antipathy to the ways of godliness. Yet is it rational to have our minds thus prejudiced against Christianity by the apostasies of those who were only its 'pretended disciples'? But can that system be divine, you exclaim, among whose followers there are so many hypocrites? Can that system, I reply, be otherwise than divine, which has outlived them all, and triumphs alike over the apostasies of its superficial friends, and the opposition of its real foes?

Considering the numberless instances of this kind which have occurred, even from the beginning, I am persuaded that had not Christianity been supported by Omnipotence, nothing more than its name, as an ancient delusion—would have reached the nineteenth century. Nothing but that which is sustained by a principle of divine life—could have outlived so much internal decay—and so much external violence!

Besides, does not the 'perpetual effort to counterfeit', prove its real excellence? For who counterfeits that which is worthless? Look at the bright as well as at the dark side. Against the deserters and renegades—there thronging millions, who have endured temptation, and continued faithful unto death. Call up the noble army of martyrs, whom neither dungeons nor fetters, scaffolds nor stakes could intimidate—who held fast their principles, amid unheard-of tortures—and did not allow the 'king of terrors' to pluck from their grasp, the doctrines of their faith.

Judge of true religion, as it demands to be tried, by its own evidences, and not by the conduct of its 'professors'. Look at it in its own light, and there you will derive a conviction of its truth and importance, which would make you cling to it in a crisis—even though all should forsake it. Is Christianity an imposture, because some of its professors are false? As rationally may you conclude that there is no real orb of day, because, by an optical illusion, mock suns are sometimes seen in the atmosphere.

Remember, **your** neglect of true religion will not be excused, on the ground of the misconduct of professing Christians. Your obligations are in no degree dependent on the manner in which others discharge theirs.

7. A spirit of procrastination has considerable influence in preventing the young from attending to the claims of true religion. This has been the ruin of multitudes now in hell! How many among the lost souls in prison are now regretting the cheat which was practiced upon their judgment—when they were persuaded to put off the affairs of eternity until another time! Perhaps there is not one in perdition but intended to be truly pious—at some **future** period!

It is recorded of Archius, a Grecian magistrate, that a conspiracy was formed against his life. A friend, who knew the plot, dispatched a courier with the news, who, on being admitted to the presence of the magistrate, delivered to him the

letter, with this message—"My lord, the person who writes you this letter begs you to read it immediately—it contains serious matters!" Archius, who was then at a feast, replied, smiling—"Serious affairs tomorrow," put the letter aside, and continued to revel. On that night the plot was executed, the magistrate slain—and Archius, on the morrow when he intended to read the letter, was a mutilated corpse—leaving to the world a fearful example of the effects of procrastination. My children, when God and the preacher say 'today', give your attention to true religion! Do not reply 'tomorrow'—for, alas! tomorrow you may be in—
ETERNITY!

Young people are very apt to presume on long life—but on what ground? Have they an assurance? No, not for an hour. Is it a rare thing for young people to die? Go into any churchyard in the kingdom, and learn the opposite from the dates on the tombstones. Have you any security in the vigor of your constitution, from the melancholy change produced by decay and death? "So have I seen a rose, newly springing up—at first it was as fair as the morning, and full with the dew of heaven—but when a strong wind had forced open its virgin modesty, and dismantled its too youthful and unripe home, it began to decline become sickly. It bowed the head, and broke its stalk; and at night, having lost some of its leaves, and all its beauty, it fell into the fate of weeds." (Jeremy Taylor, "Holy Dying")

But, besides, admitting that you should live, is not your **inclination** likely, if possible, to be less and less towards true religion? Your acts of sin will be confirmed into settled **habits**. Your heart will become harder and harder—for it is the nature of depravity to increase. If you wished to extinguish a fire, would you wait until it was a conflagration? If you wished to cure a cold, would you wait until it was a raging fever?

What if God should withdraw His Spirit, and give you up to total insensibility! For, consider His grace is necessary to salvation. True religion is the work of God in the soul of man. Despised and rejected today—is He not likely to abandon you tomorrow? and then what a situation are you in! Like a barren rock, insensible both to the beams of the sun and the showers of heaven!

You may presume on the protraction of life—but this presumption is your curse and not your blessing. You would tremble with indescribable horror at the thought of going this hour to the flame which is never to be quenched! You would account it the climax of eternal ruin. But I can tell you something worse than even this. What! worse than going immediately to the bottomless pit! Yes! To live longer abandoned by God, given up to the deceitfulness of sin and hardness of heart—left to fill up still more to the brim the measure of iniquity—this, this is worse than instant damnation! Horrible as it seems, yet it is true, that many now in torment, wish they had been there earlier—and that they had not

been permitted to live and commit those sins which are the sources of their bitterest sufferings!

These are among the most prevailing obstacles which often prevent young people from entering on a life of piety. Happy are they who, by the grace of God, are enabled to surmount them, and press through these impediments into the kingdom of God!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James

THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE HEART

"The human heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked! Who really knows how bad it is?" Jeremiah 17:9

The detection of deceit, if not a pleasant employment, is certainly a profitable one. That man deserves well of society who puts them upon their guard against a dangerous impostor. The object of this section of my book is to expose the greatest deceiver in the world, whose design is to cheat you, my dear children, not of your property, nor of your liberty, nor of your life—but of what is infinitely dearer than all these—the salvation of your immortal soul! His success has been frightful, beyond description. Earth is full of his wiles—hell of his spoils. Millions of lost souls bewail his success in the bottomless pit, as the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever. Who is this impostor, and what is his name? Is it the false prophet of Mecca? No! The spirit of paganism? No! The ploys of infidelity? No! It is the human heart! It is to this that the prophet's description belongs—"The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked! Who really knows how bad it is?" You will perceive that to the wiles of this deceiver, **you** are exposed. Let me, then, request your very serious attention, while I lay open to you some of his deep devices and endless machinations.

By the deceitfulness of the heart, we are to understand the liability of our judgment to be deceived and misled by the depravity of our nature.

And the following are the PROOFS of the fact:

1. One proof of the deceitfulness of the heart, is **the astonishing ignorance in which many people remain, of their character and motives.**

It is with the mind, as with the countenance, every one seems to know it better than its possessor. Now, is not this somewhat singular? With the power of introspection, with access to our hearts every moment, is it not remarkable that any one should remain in ignorance of himself? Yet, is it not the case of myriads?

How often do we hear people condemning others for those very faults of which everyone perceives that they themselves are guilty! We have a striking instance of this in David, when the prophet related to him the parable of the little ewe lamb.

It is astonishing with what dexterity some people will ward off the arrows of conviction which are aimed at their hearts, and give them a direction towards others. When in preaching or in conversation a speaker is endeavoring, in a covert way, to make them feel that they are intended as the objects of his censure—they are most busily employed in fastening it upon others, and admire the skill and applaud the severity with which it is administered. And when at length it becomes necessary to throw off the disguise, and to declare to them—"You are the man!" it is quite amusing to see what surprise and incredulity they will manifest, and how they will either smile at the ignorance—or frown on the malice, which could impute to them faults, of which, however guilty they may be in other respects, they themselves are totally innocent!

This self-deception prevails to a most alarming extent in the business of personal piety. The road to destruction is crowded with travelers, who vainly suppose that they are walking in the path of life, and whose 'dreams of happiness' nothing will disturb—but the dreadful reality of eternal misery! How can this mistake arise? The scripture most explicitly states the difference between a saved man and a wicked one—the line of distinction between conversion and impenitence is broad, and deep, and plain. This self-deception can only be accounted for on the ground of the deceitfulness of the heart.

Then, when conviction forces itself upon the mind, and the real character begins to appear, what a degree of evidence will be resisted, and on what mere shadows of proof will men draw a conclusion in their own favor. How they mistake motives which are apparent to every bystander; and, in some instances, even commend themselves for virtues, when the corresponding vices are rife in their bosoms!

2. Another proof of the deceitfulness of the heart, lies in **the disguises which it throws over its vices.**

It calls evil good, and good evil. How common is it for men to change the names of their faults, and endeavor to reconcile themselves to sins, which, under their own proper designations, would be regarded as subjects of condemnation. Thus, intemperance and excess are called social disposition and good fellowship; pride is called dignity of mind; revenge is called courage; vain pomp, luxury, and extravagance are called—taste, elegance, and refinement; covetousness is called prudence; levity, folly, vulgarity are called—innocent mirthfulness, cheerfulness, and good humor. But will a new name alter the nature of a vice? No! you may

clothe a swine in purple and gold, and dress a demon in the robes of an angel of light—and the one is a beast, and the other a devil still!

The same operation of deceit which would strip vice of its deformity—would rob holiness of its beauty. Tenderness of conscience is called ridiculous preciseness; zeal against sin is called moroseness and ill-nature; seriousness of mind is called repulsive melancholy; superior sanctity is called disgusting hypocrisy. In short, all spiritual religion is called nauseating cant and wild enthusiasm. It is, however, the climax of this deceitfulness, when vice is committed under the notion that it is a virtue; and this has been done in innumerable instances. Saul of Tarsus thought he was doing God service while he was destroying the church. The bigots of Rome have persuaded themselves they were doing right while they were shedding the blood of the saints. O! the depth of deceit in the human heart!

3. What a proneness is there, in most people, **to frame excuses for their sins**; and by what shallow pretexts are they often led to commit iniquity.

Ever since that fatal moment when our first parents endeavored to shift the blame of their crime from each other upon the serpent—a disposition to make excuses for sin, rather than to confess it, has been the hereditary disease of their offspring. It discovers itself early in the human character; and it is truly affecting to see how much adroitness is manifested by very young children in excusing their faults; and this disposition grows with their growth, and strengthens with their strength.

Some excuse their sins on the ground of custom; others plead the smallness of their sins; others endeavor to persuade themselves that the suddenness and strength of temptation will be admitted as a justification of their conduct; while some plead the power of bad example. It is the first offence, say some; it is force of habit, exclaim others. Some attempt to find excuse for their actual sins in the inherent depravity of their nature; others in the peculiarity of their temper and constitution; a few go so far as to lay all their sins upon the Author of their nature. These are but some among the many excuses by which men are first led on to sin; by which they afterwards defend themselves against the accusations of conscience—and which most convincingly demonstrate the deep deceitfulness of the human heart.

4. The deceitfulness of the heart, is also proved by **the gradual and almost insensible manner in which it leads men on to the commission of sin.**

No man becomes wicked all at once. The way of a sinner in his career has been compared to the course of a stone down a steep hill, the velocity of which is accelerated by every revolution. The heart does not offend and shock the

judgment by asking for too much at first; it conceals the end of the career, and lets only so much be seen as is required for the immediate occasion. When the prophet of the Lord disclosed to Hazeal his future enormities, he exclaimed, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this?" The exclamation was totally honest. At that time, no doubt, he was incapable of such wickedness, and it was a sincere revulsion of nature which prompted the expression of his abhorrence. But he knew not his heart. Little by little, he was led forward in the course of iniquity, and, at length, exceeded by his wickedness the prophet's prediction.

Habit renders all things easy, not excepting the most atrocious crimes.

Men have often done that without reluctance or remorse, which, at one period of their lives, they would have shuddered to even contemplate! Many have committed forgery, who at one time could have been persuaded by no arguments, nor induced by any motives to wrong an individual of a farthing; and the murderer whose hands are stained with blood, would, probably a few years or months before, have trembled at the idea of destroying an animal. "When the heart of man is bound by the grace of God, and tied in the golden bands of true religion, and watched by angels, and tended by ministers, those nurse-keepers of the soul—it is not easy for a man to wander, and the evil of his heart is like the fierceness of lions' whelps. But when he has once broken the hedge, and got into the strength of youth, and licentiousness of ungoverned adulthood, it is amazing to observe what a great inundation of evil, in a very short time, will overflow all the banks of reason and piety. **Vice** is first pleasing—then it grows easy—then it is delightful—then it is frequent—then habitual—then confirmed—then the man is addicted—then he is obstinate—then he resolves never to repent—then he dies—then he is damned!" (Jeremy Taylor's Sermons)

I have somewhere read of one of the early Christians, who, on being asked by a friend to accompany him to the amphitheater, to witness the gladiatorial combats with wild beasts, expressed his utmost abhorrence of the sport, and refused to witness a scene condemned alike by humanity and Christianity. Overcome, at length, by the continued and pressing solicitations of his friend, whom he did not wish to offend, he consented to go—but determined that he would close his eyes as soon as he had taken his seat, and keep them closed during the whole time that he was in the amphitheater. At some particular display of strength and skill, by one of the combatants, a loud shout of applause was raised by the spectators, when the Christian almost involuntarily opened his eyes; being once open he found it difficult to close them again; he became interested in the fate of the gladiator, who was then engaged with a lion. He returned home, professing to dislike, as his principles required him to do, these cruel games—but still his imagination ever and anon reverted to the scenes he had unintentionally witnessed. He was again solicited by his friend, who perceived the conquest that had been made, to see the sport. He found less difficulty now than before in consenting. He went, sat with his eyes open, and

enjoyed the gory spectacle. Again and again he took his seat with the pagan crowd, until at length he became a constant attendant at the amphitheater, abandoned his Christian principles, relapsed to idolatry, died a heathen, and left a fatal proof of the deceitfulness of sin!

When a young man who has received a pious education, begins to be solicited to break through the restraints imposed upon him by conscience, he can venture only on lesser sins; he perhaps only goes to see a play, or joins in one midnight revel—but even this is not done with ease; he hears the voice of an internal monitor, startles, and hesitates—but complies. A little remorse follows—but it is soon worn off. The next time temptation presents itself, his reluctance is diminished, and he repeats the offence with less previous hesitation, and less subsequent compunction. What he did once, he now without scruple does frequently. His courage is so far increased, and his fear of sin is so far abated, that he is soon emboldened to commit a greater sin, and the tavern and the horse-race are frequented with as little reluctance as the theater. Conscience now and then remonstrates—but he has acquired the ability to disregard its warnings, if not to silence them. In process of time, the society of all who make any pretensions to piety is avoided, as troublesome and distressing—and the heedless youth joins himself to wicked companions better suited to his taste. Now his sins grow with vigor under the fostering influence of evil company, just like trees which are set in a garden.

By this time the Bible is put out of sight, all prayer neglected, and the sabbath constantly profaned. At length he feels the 'force of custom', and becomes enslaved by the 'entrenched habit'. The admonitions of a father, and the tears of a pious mother, produce no impressions—but such as are like the "morning cloud, or early dew, which soon passes away." He returns to the society of his evil associates, where parental admonitions are converted into matter of wicked jest. The sinner is settled now in an evil way; and the 'sapling of iniquity' has struck his roots deep into the soil of depravity. The voice of conscience is now but rarely heard, and even then only in the feeble whisper of a dying friend.

His next stage is to lose the sense of shame. He no longer wears a mask, or seeks the shade—but sins openly, and without disguise. Conscience now is quiet; and he pursues without a check, the career of sin. He can meet a saint without a blush, and hear the voice of warning with a sneer. Would you believe it? he glories in his shame—and attempts to justify his conduct. Not content with being wicked—he attempts to make others as bad as himself—puts on the character of an apostle of Satan, and, like his evil master, goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

As he is condemned in all his ways by the Bible, he endeavors to get rid of this troublesome judge, and persuades himself that Christianity is a cheat. With

infidel principles, and immoral practices, he now hurries to destruction, polluted and polluting. His parents, whose gray hairs he brought in sorrow to the grave, have entered on their rest, and in mercy are not permitted to live to witness his shame. His vices lead him to extravagance; his extravagance is beyond his resources, and in an evil hour, under the pressure of claims which he is unable to meet, he commits an act which forfeits his life. He is arrested, tried, convicted, condemned, executed!

This is no imaginary picture; it has often occurred. My dear children, see the deceitfulness of sin. Meditate, and tremble, and pray. Be alarmed at little sins, for they lead on to great ones. Be alarmed at acts of sin, for they tend to habits. Be alarmed at common sins, for they proceed to those which are heinous. I have read of a servant who went into a closet, with an intention only to gratify his palate with some sweets—but perceiving some silver articles, he relinquished the lesser prey for these, purloined them, became a confirmed thief, and died at the gallows! Many a prostitute, who has perished in a garret upon straw, commenced her miserable and loathsome course with mere love of dress. **Sin is like a fire, which should be extinguished in the first spark, for if it be left to itself, it will soon rage like a conflagration!**

5. The last proof of the deceitfulness of the heart which I shall advance is, **the delusive prospects which it presents to the judgment.**

Sometimes it pleads for the commission of sin on the ground of **the pleasure which it affords**. But while it speaks of the honey of gratification—does it also tell of the venom of reflection and punishment?

At other times the deceitfulness of the heart **suggests that retreat is easy in the career of sin**, and may be resorted to if its progress be inconvenient. Is it so? The very contrary is true. Every step we advance renders it more and more difficult to return.

Then the deceitfulness of the heart urges us forward with the delusive idea that **there is time enough to repent in old age**. But does it say, what indeed is true, that for anything you know, you may die tomorrow? No! and herein is its deceit.

It dwells upon the mercy of God—but is silent upon the subject of his justice.

What think you now of the human heart? Can you question its deceitfulness, or that it is deceitful above all things? How then will you treat it?

Think basely of it. Surely with such a picture before you, you will not talk of the moral dignity of human nature; because this would be to talk of the dignity of falsehood and deceit.

Seek to have it renewed by the Holy Spirit. It is a first principle of true religion, that the heart must be renewed, and here you see the need of it. It is not only the conduct which is bad—but the heart, and therefore it is not only necessary for the conduct to be reformed—but the very nature must be regenerated. It is the **heart** which imposes upon the **judgment**, and the judgment which misleads the **conduct**; and therefore the root of the evil is not touched until the disposition is changed.

Suspect the heart and search it. Treat it as you would a man who had deceived you in every possible way, and in innumerable instances had been proved to be false. Continually suspect it. Always act under the supposition that it is concealing something that is wrong. Perpetually examine it. Enter the house within you; break open every door; go into every apartment; search every corner; sweep every room. Take with you the lamp of Scripture, and throw a light on every hiding place.

Watch the heart with all diligence, knowing that it is the wellspring of everything you do. You would carefully observe every attitude, every movement, every look of an impostor who had fixed his eye upon your property. Thus treat your hearts. Let every thought, every imagination, every desire—be placed under the most vigilant and ceaseless inspection!

Place your heart in the hand of God to keep it. "My son, give me your heart," is his own demand. Give it to him that it may be filled with his love, and kept by his power. Let it be your daily prayer, "Lord, hold me up and I shall be safe; keep me by your power through faith, unto salvation."

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

TRANSIENT DEVOTIONS

"The church," said Saurin, "had seldom seen happier days, than those described in the nineteenth chapter of Exodus. God had never diffused his benedictions on a people in a richer abundance. Never had a people more lively gratitude, or more fervent piety. The Red Sea had been passed; Pharaoh and his insolent court were buried in the waves; access to the land of promise was opened; Moses had been admitted to the holy mountain to derive felicity from God the source, and sent to distribute it among his countrymen; to these choice favors, promises of new and greater blessings yet were added; and God said, 'You have seen what I have done unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed,

and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people, although all the earth be mine.' The people were deeply affected with this collection of miracles. Each individual entered into the same views, and seemed animated with the same passion; all hearts were united, and one voice expressed the sense of all the tribes of Israel—'all that the Lord has spoken we will do.'

But this devotion had one great defect—it lasted only forty days. In forty days the deliverance out of Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea, the articles of the covenant; in forty days, promises, vows, oaths, all were effaced from the heart, and forgotten. Moses was absent, the lightning did not glitter, the thunder claps did not roar, and "the people made a calf at Mount Sinai; they bowed before an image made of gold. They traded their glorious God for a statue of a grass-eating ox!" Psalm 106:19-20

Here, my children, was a most melancholy instance of transient devotion. Alas! that such instances should be so common! Alas! that Jehovah should so frequently have to repeat the ancient reproach, and his ministers have to echo, in sorrowful accents, the painful complaint—"O Ephraim! what shall I do unto you? O Judah! what shall I do unto you? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passes away."

Nothing, however, is more common than such short-lived religious impressions. Disappointment of the bitterest kind is very frequently experienced, both by parents and ministers, in consequence of the sudden turning aside of those young people, who, for awhile, seemed to run the race that is set before us in the word of God. At one time, they appeared to be inflamed with a holy ambition to win the prize of glory, honor, and immortality; we saw them start with eagerness, and run with speed—but after a while, we met them turning back—leaving us, in the bitterness of our spirits, to exclaim—"You did run well; what hindered you?"

"The religion I am now describing is not the hypocrisy of the pretending Christian, nor is it the backsliding of the real one; it goes further than the first—but does not go so far as the last. It is sincere of its kind, and in that it goes further than hypocrisy—but it is unfruitful, and in that it is inferior to the piety of the weak and backsliding Christian. It is sufficient to discover sin—but not to correct it; sufficient to produce good resolutions—but not to keep them; it softens the heart—but does not renew it; it excites grief—but does not eradicate evil dispositions. It is a piety of times, opportunities, and circumstances—diversified a thousand ways, the effect of innumerable causes—but it expires as soon as the causes are removed."

"Inconstans" was a youth who had enjoyed a pious education; he developed many amiable qualities, and was often impressed by the religious admonitions he received—but his impressions soon wore off, and he became as careless about his eternal concerns as before. He left the parental roof, and was apprenticed; and his parents having taken care to place him in a pious family, and under the faithful preaching of the word, he still enjoyed all the external means of grace, and still, at times, continued to feel their influence. His attention was oftentimes fixed when hearing the word, and he was sometimes observed to weep. On one occasion in particular, when a funeral sermon had been preached for a young person, a more than ordinary effect was produced upon his mind. He returned from the house of God pensive and dejected, retired to his closet, and with much earnestness prayed to God, resolved to attend more to the claims of true religion, and to become a real Christian. The next morning he read the Bible, and prayed before he left his chamber. This practice he continued day after day. A visible change was produced in his deportment. His seriousness attracted the attention and excited the hopes of his friends. But, by degrees, he relapsed into his former state, gave up reading the scriptures, then prayer; then he reunited himself with some companions from whom, for a season, he had withdrawn himself, until at length he was as unconcerned about salvation as ever.

Some time after this, Inconstans was seized with a fever. The disease resisted the power of the medicine, and baffled the skill of the physician; he grew worse and worse. His alarm became excessive. He sent for his minister and his parents, confessed and bewailed his fickleness. What tears he shed! What sighs he uttered! What vows he made! "O, if God would but spare me this once! if he would but grant me one more trial; if he would but indulge me with one more opportunity of salvation, how would I improve it to his glory, and my soul's eternal interest!" His prayers were answered; he recovered. What became of his vows, resolutions, and promises? The degree of his piety was regulated by the degree of his malady. Devotion rose and fell with his pulse. His zeal kept pace with his fever; as one decreased, the other died away, and the recovery of his health was the resurrection of his sins. Inconstans is at this moment, what he always was—a melancholy specimen of the nature of mere **transient religion**.

What is lacking in this religion? You will, of course, reply, "Perseverance." This is true. But why did it not continue? I answer—there was no real change of the heart. **The passions were moved, the feelings were excited—but the disposition remained unaltered.** In the affairs of this life, men are often led by the operation of strong causes to act in opposition to their real character. The cruel tyrant, by some sudden and most affecting appeal to his clemency, may have the spark of pity smitten from his flinty heart—but the flint remaining, the wretch returns again to his practices of blood. The covetous man may, by a vivid description of poverty and misery, be for a season melted to liberality—but, like the surface thawed for an hour by the sun, and frozen again immediately after

the source of heat has retired—his benevolence is immediately chilled by the prevailing frost of his nature.

In these cases, as in that of true religion, there is a suspension of the natural disposition, not a renewal of it. All religion must be transient, by whatever cause it is produced, and with whatever ardor it should, for a season, be practiced—which does not spring from a regenerated mind. It may, like the grass upon the house-top, or the grain that is scattered in unprepared soil, spring up and flourish for a season—but for lack of root it will speedily wither away. Do not then, my dear children, be satisfied with a mere excitement of the feelings, however strong it may happen to prove—but seek to have the general bias of the mind renewed.

You cannot, if you consider only for a moment, suppose that these 'transitory impressions' will answer the ends of true religion, either in this world or in that which is to come. They will not honor God—they will not sanctify the heart—they will not comfort the mind—they will not save the soul—they will not raise you to heaven—they will not save you from hell. Instead of preparing you at some future time to receive the gospel, such a state of mind, if persisted in, has a most direct and dangerous tendency to harden the heart. What God, in His sovereign grace, may be pleased to effect, it is not for me to say—but as to natural influence, nothing can be more clear than that this 'fitful piety' is gradually putting the soul further and further away from true religion.

Iron, by being frequently heated, is hardened into steel; water that has been boiled becomes the colder for its previous warmth; soil that has been moistened with the showers of heaven becomes, when hardened by the sun, less susceptible of impression than before; and that heart which is frequently impressed by pious impressions, without being renewed by them, becomes more and more insensible to their sacred influence.

They who have trembled at the terrors of the Lord without being subdued by them—who have outlived their fears without being sanctified by them—will soon come to that degree of insensibility which will enable them to bear, without being appalled, the most awful denunciations of divine wrath. They who have been melted, from time to time, by the exhibitions of divine love—but have not been converted by it, will come at length to hear of it with the coldest indifference. It is a dreadful state of mind to be given up to a spirit of slumber and a callous heart; and nothing is more likely to accelerate the process than occasional, yet ineffectual religious impressions.

Can we conceive of anything more likely to induce Jehovah to give us up to judicial blindness and insensibility, than this tampering with pious convictions—this trifling with devotional impressions? These pious emotions which are

occasionally excited, are kind and gentle admonitions that he has come near to the soul, with all the energies of his Spirit; they are the work of mercy knocking at the door of our hearts, and saying—"Open to me, that I may enter with my salvation." If they are from time to time neglected, what can be looked for but that the celestial visitor should withdraw, and pronounce, as he retires, the fearful sentence—"Woe unto you—when my Spirit departs from you."

There is something inexpressibly wicked in remaining in this state of mind. Such people are in some respects more sinful than they whose minds have never been in any degree enlightened; whose fears have never been in any degree excited; who have paid no attention whatever to true religion—but whose minds are sealed up in ignorance and insensibility. When people who have taken some steps in true religion return again; when they who have come near the kingdom of God, recede from it; and they who have sipped, as it were, of the cup of salvation, withdraw their lips from the water of life, the interpretation of their conduct is this—"We have tried the influence of true religion, and do not find it so worthy of our reception as we expected; we have seen something of its glory, and are disappointed; we have tasted something of its sweetness, and, upon the whole, we prefer to remain without it." Thus they are like the spies who brought a false report of the land of promise, and discouraged the people. They defame the character of true piety, and prejudice men's minds against it. They libel the Bible, and persuade others to have nothing to do with true religion. My children, can you endure the thought of this?

Mere transient devotions have a great tendency to strengthen the principle of unbelief in our nature. It is not only very possible—but very common for men to sin themselves into a state of despair of God's mercy; and none are so likely to do this, as those who have repeatedly gone back to the world, after a season of religious impression. In our communion with society, if we have greatly offended and insulted a man after many professions of decided friendship and warm attachment to him—we can hardly persuade ourselves to approach him again, or be persuaded to think he will admit us again to the number of his friends. And, as we are prone to reason from ourselves to God, if we have frequently repented, and as frequently returned again to sin, we shall be in great danger of coming to the conclusion that we have sinned past forgiveness—and abandon ourselves to guilt and despair.

I have read of a man who lived without any regard to true religion until he was taken alarmingly ill—when his conscience was roused from its slumber, and he saw the wickedness of his conduct. A minister was sent for, to whom he acknowledged his guilt, and begged an interest in his prayers, at the same time vowing that if God would spare his life, he would alter the course of his behavior. He was restored to health, and for awhile was as good as his word. He set up family worship, maintained private prayer, and frequented the house of God; in

short, appeared to be a new man in Christ Jesus. At length he began to relax, and step by step went back to his former state of careless indifference. The hand of affliction again arrested him. His conscience again ascended her tribunal, and in terrible accents arraigned and condemned him. The state of his mind was horrible. The arrows of the Lord pierced him through, the poison whereof drank up his spirits. His friends entreated him to send for the minister, as above. "No!" he exclaimed, "I who have trifled with the mercy of God once, cannot expect it now!" No persuasion could shake his resolution; no representation of divine grace could remove his despair; and, without asking for God's pardon, he died!

The same despair has, in many other instances, resulted from the sin of trifling with religious impressions.

These pages will probably be read by some, whose minds are under religious concern. Your situation is more critical and important than any language which I could employ, would enable me to represent. If your present concern subsides into your former carelessness, you are in the most imminent danger of being left to the depravity of your nature. God is now approaching you in the exercise of his love, and waiting that he may be gracious. Seek him while he is to be found, call upon him while he is near. The soft breezes of celestial influence are passing over you, seize the favorable season, and hoist every sail to catch the breath of heaven. Tremble at the thought of losing your present feelings. Be much and earnest in prayer to God, that he would not allow you to relapse into unconcern and neglect. Take every possible means to preserve and deepen your present convictions. Read the Scriptures with renewed diligence. Go with increased earnestness, and interest, and prayer, to the house of God. Endeavor to gain clearer views of the truth as it is in Jesus—and labor to have your mind instructed, as well as your heart impressed.

Be satisfied with nothing short of a renewed mind—the new birth. Be upon your guard against self-dependence. Watch against this, as much as against grosser sins. Consider yourself as a little child, who can do nothing without God. Study your own sinfulness in the mirror of God's holy law. Grow in humility; it is not well for a plant to shoot upwards quickly, before it has taken deep root; if there be no fibers in the earth, and no moisture at the root, whatever blossoms or fruit there may be in the branches, they will soon fall off. And in the same way, if your religion does not strike root in humility, and be not moistened with the tears of penitential grief, whatever blossoms of joy or fruits of zeal there may be on the mind or conduct, they will soon drop off under the next sharp gust—or heat of temptation. Take heed of 'secret sinning'. **A single lust unmortified, will be like a worm at the root of the newly-planted piety of your soul.** Continually remember that it is yet but the beginning of true religion with you. Do not rest here; believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; nothing short of this will save you; without faith, all you have felt, or can feel, will do you no good. You must

come to Christ, and be anxious to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of God our Savior.

Some, it is probable, will read these lines, who have had religious impressions, and lost them. Your goodness has vanished like the cloud of the morning; and, like the early dew, has sparkled and then dried up. Sometimes you exclaim, with an emphasis of deep melancholy,

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."

You are not—you cannot be happy. Oh no! the din of pleasure or of business cannot drown the voice of conscience; a pause now and then occurs, when its thunders are heard, and heard with indescribable alarm. Sometimes, in the midst of your pleasures, when all around you is jollity and mirth—you see a spectre which others do not see, and are terrified by a mystic hand which writes your doom upon the wall. From that moment there is no more joy for you. Sometimes you almost curse the hour when the voice of a faithful preacher lodged conviction in your bosom, and half-spoiled you for a man of pleasure and the world. You look with almost envy on those who, by never having been taught to fear God, are wrapped in total darkness, and see not the dim spectres, the half-discovered shapes of mischief, which, in the twilight of your soul, present themselves to your affrighted vision.

At other times, a little relenting, you exclaim, "O that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shined on me. What would I give to recall the sentiments and feelings of those days! Happy seasons! But you have fled. And are you fled forever? Can no power recall you to this troubled mind?" Yes, my young friend, they are all within reach, lingering to return. Fly to God in prayer, beseech him to have mercy upon you. Implore him to rouse you from the slumber into which you have fallen. Beware of the chilling influence of despondency. There is no room for despair. Covet the possession of true religion.

Search for the cause which destroyed your impressions in the past. Was it some improper companion? Abandon him forever—as you would a viper! Was it some situation unfriendly to godliness which you voluntarily chose—as Lot chose Sodom, on account of its worldly advantages? Relinquish it without delay. Escape for your life, and tarry not in all the plain. Was it some besetting sin, dear as a right eye, or useful as a right hand? Pluck it out, tear it off without hesitation or regret; for is it better to make this sacrifice, than to lose eternal salvation, and endure everlasting torments! Was it self-dependence, self-confidence? Now put your case into the hand of Omnipotence, and call upon God. Ask for the Holy

Spirit to renew, to sanctify, and to keep your soul. Learn from your past failure what to do, and what to avoid for the future. Believe the gospel, which declares that the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. It was saving faith that was lacking, in the first instance, to give permanence to your religious impressions. There was no saving belief, no full persuasion, no practical conviction, of the truth of the gospel. Your religious feelings were like the stream raised by external and sporadic causes—but there was no spring. You stopped short of believing, you made no surrender of the soul to Christ, nor committed yourselves to him, to be justified by his righteousness, and to be sanctified by his Spirit. This do and live!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

DECISION OF CHARACTER IN TRUE RELIGION

How deep, and how just a reproach did the prophet Elijah cast upon the tribes of Israel, when he addressed to the assembled multitudes on Mount Carmel, that memorable interrogation, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him! But the people were completely silent." 1 Kings 18:21. From this it appears they were in a state of indecision, in reference to the most momentous question in the universe, not wholly satisfied that they were doing right in worshiping Baal, yet not sufficiently resolute to abandon his service. What a criminal, what a degrading, what a wretched state of mind! Not decided whom they would acknowledge to be their God! to whom they would pay divine homage!

But is this state of mind, my dear children, uncommon? By no means. To how many of the youth who attend our places of devotional resort, could we address, with propriety, the same question, "How long are you going to waver between two opinions?" How many are there who can go no further than Agrippa, when he said to Paul, "you *almost* persuade me to be a Christian." Almost! Only almost persuaded to be a Christian! What a melancholy thought!

In the last chapter you saw in the character of "Inconstans", an instance of this indecision. Did you admire it? Impossible. What was lacking?—DECISION. But what do I mean by decision? "A fixed purpose, not made in haste—but with much deliberation; not in our own strength—but in reliance on the grace of God; without delay, and at all risks, to seek the salvation of the soul through faith in Christ—and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world." It includes an inflexible severity of conviction, that this is the one great thing we have in this world to do—and such a concentration of all the energies of our soul

in this mighty business, as, to idle spectators, shall put on the appearance of fanaticism. It is such a purpose as subordinates everything to itself.

In opposition to transient devotion—it is permanent; in opposition to fluctuating opinions—it is a fixed, abiding resolution; in opposition to mere occasional acts—it is an indelible character, an indestructible habit. In short, it is faith in opposition to mere opinion and speculation—it is actually receiving Christ instead of talking about him. It is not like the vapor, which, after attracting every eye by its meteoric splendor, vanishes away while yet the surprised and delighted spectator beholds its luminous course—but it is like the shining light which holds on its way in the heavens, and shines more and more unto the perfect day. It is attended with a relinquishment of former associations, former pursuits and pleasures, and the embracing of all such as are on the side of true religion.

We have a fine instance of this decision in the heroic leader of the armies of the Lord, when looking around upon the wavering tribes of Israel, he exclaimed, "Let others do what they will—as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Another example, equally splendid, was presented by the great apostle of the Gentiles, when with the perspective of his suffering career before his eyes, he gave utterance to that burst of sublime heroism, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I might fulfill the ministry I have received of the Lord, and finish my course with joy." Similar to this is the language of a decided Christian, "Self-denial, ridicule, rage, mortification, loss—all are nothing to me—so that I may believe the gospel, live in the fear of God, die in his favor, and, through the merits of Christ, be received to everlasting glory."

It will be proper to state here the **reasons why so many that have strong impressions occasionally made upon their minds, are not thoroughly and decidedly engaged in the practice of true religion.** Some of these will be found in the chapter "On the Obstacles of Piety," but there are others which are still more specific in reference to the case before us.

There is in many **a lack of deep serious consideration.** They do not follow up the subject of true religion, even when it has been impressed with some degree of force upon their hearts. When emotions have been excited, they do not cherish them—but go to their usual conversation, company, or business—instead of entering into their closets to examine their hearts, and to apply the subjects they have heard. An officer in the army, when about to embark for the continent, came to a Christian friend, and told him that he had a great many serious thoughts about the state of his soul, and was resolved to lead a new life; "but," said he, "there is such a company I must be with tonight; I wish I could disengage myself from them." His friend of course attempted to dissuade him from joining the party. He, notwithstanding, went to them, forgot all his serious

thoughts when there; was drawn into the revelry of the night; the following day went abroad; and the next news his friends heard of him was, that he was killed in action. Thus his vain companions extinguished his serious thoughts, diverted his good resolutions, and by his own consent, robbed him of his eternal salvation.

Another cause of irresolution is, **the feeble and uncertain perceptions which many people have of divine and spiritual things**. They have a dim view of the truths of Scripture—but they appear like objects in a mist, too indistinct to be made the matter of pursuit. Hence it is of tremendous consequence, that when a young person becomes in any degree serious about true religion, he should instantly betake himself to all proper means for informing his judgment on the nature of true religion. He should read the scriptures with intense application of mind, listen to the preaching of the word with great fixedness of attention, and peruse good books with much seriousness of mind.

The dominion of some one prevailing sin, if cherished and indulged, has a most fatal influence in preventing decision. Herod would do many things—but would not part from Herodias. Felix was moved by Paul's preaching—but he would not give up covetousness. Thus it is with many—they admit the claims of true religion, admire its beauty, are moved by its force, resolve to submit to its influence—but then there is some besetting sin, which, when they come to the point, they cannot be induced to sacrifice. Every plant has some leading root which connects it with the soil in which it grows, on which, more than any of the rest, it is dependent for support and nourishment. So it is in the human heart—there is in most people some prevailing corruption of nature, which, more than any of the rest, holds the heart to an unregenerate state, and to which very particular attention must be paid in the business of true religion. This sin may be different in different people—but whatever it is—it must be destroyed, or it will destroy us!

Fear of persecution operates in many to prevent decision. You are deterred, probably, my children, from giving up yourselves to the influence of piety, by the apprehensions that you shall be called to endure the ridicule of those with whom you have been accustomed to associate, and who, being unfriendly to true religion, will vent their scorn and contempt on those who submit to its claims. It is impossible that I can be so ignorant of the irreconcilable enmity existing, and destined ever to exist, between true piety and the depravity of human nature; or of the usual practice of those who hate true religion, as to promise you an exemption from the sneers of the scorner, if you walk in the paths of wisdom. The only weapons which many are able to wield against Christianity, are sneers. For there is no mind so imbecile, no fool so foolish, as not to be able to laugh—the individual who could no more argue than an infant—or could use the sword or brandish the spear of a Goliath—can shoot out the lip, and cry 'fanatic!'

The power to argue is comparatively rare—but almost every village in the kingdom will furnish a mob of little minds, to follow after true religion as it passes by, and, like the children of Bethel persecuting the prophet of the Lord, to ridicule its venerable form. Never did Satan invent a more successful weapon against true religion than 'ridicule'. By this apparently base and contemptible weapon, he arms all of his drudges.

A morbid sensibility to shame, I am perfectly convinced, has kept not a few young people from piety. They cannot bear the broad, loud laugh, the contemptuous sneer, the witty jest. They cannot endure the attack of the profane, nor the raillery of the impious. They blush, and conceal their secret attachment to piety, as soon as it is assailed. But, my children, where is the dignity or the courage of your mind? Are you indeed convinced of the truth of Christianity and the justice of its claims—and yet allow yourselves to be vanquished by the laugh of folly? What! flee from the enemy of your souls, and surrender your salvation, when he only hisses at you in the skin of a fool! What though the whole world were to unite in scorn—shall this deter you from acting, when God, truth, heaven, the Bible, conscience, salvation, saints, angels, are all on your side? What! when your spirit has plumed her wings of faith and hope for flight to heaven—shall she give up the dazzling object of her high ambition, and cower down on earth, because she is watched and ridiculed by the witling? Or shall her eagle pinions be blown from their lofty course by the scoff of the scorners?

Be DECIDED, and all this base and feeble kind of persecution will soon cease. Before that sublime and unbending decision which dares to be singular, which nothing can divert from its purpose, which nothing can diminish in its ardor, which clings the closer to its object for all the efforts that are employed to detach it from the pursuit; I say before that inflexible spirit, it is astonishing to see how the space clears away, and how soon she is left to pursue her course—while all the tribe of little, pecking, caviling, noisy minds, drop down into their hedges, and leave the eagle to her course.

"This invincibility of decided conviction," says the profoundest and most elegant essayist in the English language, "will often make the scoffers themselves tired of the sport. They begin to feel that against such a man it is a poor kind of hostility to laugh. There is nothing that people are more mortified to spend in vain, than their scorn. A man of the right kind would say, upon an intimation that he is opposed by scorn—'They will laugh, will they? I have no concern about their mirth. I do not care if the whole neighborhood were to laugh in a chorus. I would indeed be sorry to see or hear such a number of fools—but pleased enough to find that they do not consider me one of their stamp. The good to result from my project will not be less, because vain and shallow minds, that cannot understand it, are opposed to it, and to me. What would I think of my

pursuits, if every trivial, thoughtless fool could comprehend, or would applaud them. What would I think of myself, if I needed their levity and ignorance for my allies, or would shrink at their sneers?" (Foster "Essay on Decision of Character")

I would deem it an insult to my readers, to suppose they have not read these essays; and not less so their author, to suppose that they needed my recommendation. I cannot help, however, enjoining on my readers to read the essay from which the above extract is made, with the resolution to seek, and the prayer to obtain all that decision which is there so eloquently described, not only in reference to every good work in general—but to true religion in particular.

My children, think of the importance of the matter to be decided upon—the service of God, the pursuit of immortality, the salvation of the soul—and shall a false shame deter you from the pursuit? Think of the example of Jesus Christ, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame. Look at this divine sufferer, as he is presented to us in the hall of Pilate, when he was made the object of every species of scorn and indignity; and will you shrink from a few sneers and scoffs for HIM? Remember our Lord's most alarming language—"Whoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father, and with the holy angels." Anticipate, if you can, the shame, the disgrace, the mortification, the torment, of being disowned, rejected, and abandoned by Christ, before assembled worlds—and let that be a preservative against being ashamed of Him now!

It is time now to set before you **the evil of indecision**, as a motive to induce you to seek after decided convictions.

Indecision is most unreasonable, if you **consider both the IMPORTANCE of the subject, and the means you possess of coming to speedy and right decision**. Is it a matter of trifling importance? Yes, if God, and eternity, and salvation, and heaven, and hell, are trifles! If true religion is a trifle, where, in all the universe, shall we find anything that is important? Irresolution here is to be undetermined whether you will be the friend or the enemy of God. Irresolution here is to be undetermined whether you will live in this world under the favor or the curse of Jehovah. Irresolution here is to be undetermined whether in the world to come, you will eternally in the torments of the bottomless pit, or amid the felicities of the heavenly city. Irresolution here is to be undetermined whether you will choose condemnation or salvation.

There is no language which can describe, there is no allusion which can illustrate, **the folly of indecision in true religion**. The irresolution of a slave, whether he should continue to groan in fetters or be free; of the leper, whether he should still be covered with the most loathsome disease, or enjoy the glow of

health; of the condemned criminal, whether he should choose an honorable life, or the most torturing and ignominious death—is not marked with such desperate folly as an undecided state of mind about personal religion. The scripture demands decision, and it demands it in these striking words—"See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil; therefore choose."

Yet some are undecided whether they will serve God, their Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, and inherit eternal life—or yield themselves to Satan, their destroyer, and suffer the bitter pains of eternal death! If the matter were involved in obscurity, as to what was your duty or your interest, there would be some apology—but when both are as clear as the day, the 'folly of indecision' is so palpably manifest, as to entail a most fearful degree of guilt upon the conscience of the irresolute.

Indecision is CONTEMPTIBLE. "Unstable as water you shall not excel," is a character which no one ever pretended to admire. In the ordinary affairs of life, indecision renders a man an object of pity or contempt. "It is a poor disgraceful thing not to be able to answer with some degree of firmness to the questions—What will you decide? What will you do? It is a pitiable thing to see a creature with all the faculties of a rational being about him, so irresolute and undecided, as almost to wish that he could exchange reason for instinct, in order that he might be spared the trouble of thinking, and the pain of choosing. An undecided person is a poor, dependent, powerless creature, that floats like a feather or a ship along the stream of time, belonging to whatever can seize him; and without one effort of resistance, whirled in every little eddy, and intercepted by every little twig."

But how much more disgraceful is this irresoluteness of mind in the affairs of true religion, where there are so many means, and so many motives for coming to a proper conclusion. To be blown about like thistle-down by every wind of doctrine, and carried just wherever the gust or the current impels—is as dishonorable to our understanding as it is detrimental to our salvation.

Indecision is UNCOMFORTABLE. Suspense is always painful. Hesitation as to the steps we shall take, and the conduct we shall pursue, is a most undesirable state of mind; and this uneasiness will be in exact proportion to the importance of the business to be decided, and to the degree of compunction we feel for not deciding upon a course, which, we cannot help thinking, upon the whole, is the right one. The undecided cannot be altogether easy in their present fluctuating state of mind. No! directed one way by conviction, and dragged another by inclination—determining at one time to serve God fully, and at another smarting under the guilt of broken vows; resolved on the Sunday, and irresolute on the Monday; sometimes advancing with courage, and then again retreating with fear and shame—no, this is not the way to be happy. You may as well expect peace

on the field of battle, as in the bosom where such a conflict is carried on. Look up to God, and ask for grace to terminate by decided piety the dreadful strife that is carried on in your bosom.

Indecision is DANGEROUS. Consider the uncertainty of life. How soon and how suddenly the King of Terrors may arrest you, and bear you to his dark domain. Some acute, inflammatory disease, in a few days may extinguish life! Or a fatal accident, which leaves you no leisure even to bid adieu to those you love on earth, may hurry you into eternity! And then what becomes of you? In a state of indecision you are unprepared for death, for judgment, for heaven! You are within the flood-mark of Divine vengeance. God accounts all those to be decidedly against him—who are not decidedly for him. There is, properly speaking, no middle ground between regeneracy and unregeneracy, between conversion and unconversion—and therefore he who does not occupy the one—is found within the limits of the other. You are a child of God—or an enemy of God. Whatever may be your occasional relentings, your transient emotions, your ineffectual desires, if you do not become decidedly pious, God will take no account of these things—but treat you, if you die in this state, as one that had decided against him.

Can you then linger—when death and hell do not linger? Can you halt, hesitate, and fluctuate—when death may the very next hour decide the business for you? And, oh! if you should die without decision, what will be your reflections—and what will be ours. How bitterly will you exclaim, "Fool that I was, to let anything interfere with my eternal salvation, to let anything interpose between my soul and her everlasting welfare. Why, why did I hesitate? I saw the excellence of true piety. I coveted the possession of true religion. Often I felt my heart rising to go and surrender unreservedly to God. I wept, I prayed, I resolved—but that accursed lust in which I took pleasure, held me fast—and rather than tear myself from it—I let go the hope of eternal life. I was afraid of a little ridicule, which I ought to have disregarded or despised—and when I seemed near the kingdom, was ruined by indecision. While I hesitated, death seized me, and now I shall be exhibited, by the light of this flame in which I burn forever, a dreadful proof of the folly and the danger of indecision! Woe, eternal woe upon my wretched spirit!"

Spare yourselves, my dear children, these dreadful reflections, this inconceivable torment. Without an hour's delay, resign yourselves to God and the influence of true religion. Decide the doubtful point. Believe and obey!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE PLEASURES OF A PIOUS LIFE

A desire after happiness, my dear children, is inseparable from the human mind. It is the natural and healthy craving of our spirit; an appetite which we have neither the will nor the power to destroy, and for which all mankind are busily employed in making provision. This is as natural, as for birds to fly, or fish to swim. For this the scholar and the philosopher, who think happiness consists in knowledge, pore over their books, light the midnight lamp, and keep frequent vigils, when the world around them is asleep. For this the warrior, who thinks that happiness is inseparably united with fame, pursues that bubble through the gory fields of conflict, and is as wasteful of his life as if it were not worth a soldier's pay. The worldling, with whom happiness and wealth are kindred terms, worships daily at the shrine of Mammon, and offers earnest prayers for the golden shower. The voluptuary gratifies every craving sense, rejoices in the midnight revel, renders himself vile, and yet tells you he is in the chase of happiness. The ambitious man, conceiving that the 'great essential' hangs in rich clusters from the throne, consumes one half of his life, and embitters the other half in climbing the giddy elevation of royalty. All these, however, have confessed their disappointment; and have retired from the stage exclaiming, in reference to happiness, as Brutus, just before he stabbed himself, did in reference to virtue, "I have pursued you everywhere, and found you nothing but a name." This, however, is a mistake; for both virtue and happiness are glorious realities, and if they are not found, it is merely because they are not sought from the right sources.

We may affirm of pleasure what Job did of wisdom, "But do people know where to find wisdom? Where can they find understanding? No one knows where to find it, for it is not found among the living. 'It is not here,' says the ocean. 'Nor is it here,' says the sea. It cannot be bought for gold or silver. Its value is greater than all the gold of Ophir, greater than precious onyx stone or sapphires. Wisdom is far more valuable than gold and crystal. It cannot be purchased with jewels mounted in fine gold. The price of wisdom is far above pearls. Its value is greater than the purest gold. But do people know where to find wisdom? Where can they find understanding? For it is hidden from the eyes of all humanity. God surely knows where it can be found, for he looks throughout the whole earth, under all the heavens. He made the winds blow and determined how much rain should fall. He made the laws of the rain and prepared a path for the lightning. Then, when he had done all this, he saw wisdom and measured it. He established it and examined it thoroughly. And this is what he says to all humanity: 'The fear of the Lord is true wisdom; to forsake evil is real understanding; and wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.' "

Happiness has no other equivalent term than true religion—and this is a moral synonym. If, indeed, the case were otherwise, and true religion, so far as the present world is concerned, entailed nothing but wretchedness, yet, as it leads to eternal felicity in the world to come—it would surely be in our interest to attend to its claims. The poor Hindu devotee, who endures all kinds of tortures, under the idea that it is the only way to eternal felicity, acts with perfect rationality—IF his theory is true. A life protracted to the length of Methuselah's, and filled with penances and pilgrimages, would be willingly and thankfully endured, if salvation could be procured by no other means.

In the prospect of eternity, with heaven spreading out its ineffable glories, and hell uncovering its dreadful horrors, the only question which a rational creature should allow himself to ask is, "What is necessary to avoid the torments of the one, and secure the felicities of the other?" and on being told "True religion," he should apply with all the energies of his soul to this great business, without scarcely allowing himself to ask whether its duties are pleasant or irksome. The man who is journeying to take possession of a kingdom, scarcely thinks it worth his while to inquire whether the road be through a wilderness or a paradise. It is enough for him to know, that it is the **only** road to the throne. Hence the representation of the pleasures of true religion, is a sort of gratuity in this subject. It serves, however, to leave those still more destitute of excuse, who live in the neglect of piety, and in this view may have still greater power to rouse the conscience.

1. That true piety is pleasure, will appear, if you consider **what part of our nature, it more particularly employs and gratifies.**

It is not a gratification of the senses, or of the animal part of our nature—but a provision for the immaterial and immortal MIND. The mind of man is an image not only of God's spirituality—but of his infinity. It is not like the senses, limited to this or that kind of object, as the sight does not meddle with that which affects the smell. But with a universal superintendence, the mind arbitrates upon all, and affects all. The mind is, as I may say, an ocean, into which all the little rivulets of sensation, both external and internal, empty themselves. Now, the mind is that part of man to which the exercises of true religion properly belong. The pleasures of the understanding, in the contemplation of truth—have been sometimes so great, so intense, so engrossing all the powers of the soul—that there has been no room left for any other kind of pleasure. How short of this, are the delights of the epicure! How vastly disproportionate are the pleasures of the eating man—and of the thinking man! "Indeed," says Dr. South, "as different as the silence of an Archimedes in the study of a problem—and the stillness of a sow in her mire." **Nothing is comparable to the pleasures of mind;** these are enjoyed by the spirits above, by Jesus Christ, and the great and blessed God.

Think what objects true religion brings before the mind, as the sources of its pleasure—no less than the great God himself, and that both in his nature and in his works. For the eye of true religion, like that of the eagle, directs itself chiefly to the sun—to a glory that neither admits of a superior or an equal. The mind is conversant in the exercises of piety, with all the most stupendous events that have ever occurred in the history of the universe, or that ever will transpire until the close of time. The creation of the world; its government by a universal providence; its redemption by the death of Christ; its conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit; its trial before the judgment bar of God; the immortality of the soul; the resurrection of the body; the certainty of an eternal existence; the secrets of the unseen state—subjects, all of them, of the loftiest and most sublime kind, which have engaged the inquiries of the profoundest intellects—are the matter of contemplation to real piety.

What topics are these for our reason, under the guidance of true religion, to study! What an ocean to swim in! What a heaven to soar in! What heights to measure! What depths to fathom! Here are subjects which, from their infinite vastness, must be ever new, and ever fresh—which can be never laid aside as dry or empty. If novelty is the parent of pleasure, here it may be found; for although the subject itself is the same, some new view of it, some fresh discovery of its wonders—is ever bursting upon the mind of the devout and attentive inquirer after truth.

How, then, can true religion be otherwise than pleasant, when it is the exercise of the noble faculties of the mind, upon the most sublime topics of mental investigation—the voluntary, excursive, endless pursuits of the human understanding in the region of eternal truth? Never was there a more interesting or important inquiry than that proposed by Pilate to the illustrious Prisoner at his bar; and if the latter thought it not proper to answer it, it was not to show that the question was insignificant—but to condemn the light and flippant manner in which a subject so important was taken up. True religion can answer this question, and with an ecstasy greater than that of the ancient mathematician, exclaims, "I have found it—I have found it!"

The Bible is not only true—but TRUTH. It contains that which deserves this sublime emphasis. It settles the disputes of ages, and of philosophers—and makes known what is truth—and where it is to be found. It brings us from among the quicksands, and crags, and rocks of skepticism, ignorance, and error—and shows us that goodly land, in quest of which myriads of minds have sailed, and multitudes have been wrecked; and true religion is setting our foot on this shore, and dwelling in the region of eternal truth.

2. That a pious life is pleasant, is evident from **the nature of true religion itself.**

True religion is a principle of spiritual life in the soul. Now, all the exercises and acts of life are agreeable. To see, to hear, to taste, to walk, are all agreeable, because they are the voluntary energies of inward life. So true religion, in all its duties, is the exercise of a living principle in the soul—it is a new spiritual existence. Piety is a spiritual taste. Hence it is said, "If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." No matter what the object of a taste is, the exercises of it are always agreeable. The painter goes with delight to his picture; the musician to his instrument; the sculptor to his bust—because they have a taste for these pursuits. The same feeling of delight attends the Christian to the exercises of godliness; and this is his language, "It is a good thing to give thanks, and to draw near to God. O, how I love your law! it is sweeter to my taste than honey. How amiable are your tabernacles!"

True religion, where it is real, is the natural element of a Christian; and every creature rejoices in its own appropriate sphere. If, my children, you consider true piety with disgust—as a hard, unnatural, involuntary thing—you are totally ignorant of its nature, entirely destitute of its influence, and no wonder you cannot attach to it the idea of pleasure. But viewing it as a new nature, you will perceive that it admits of most exalted delight.

3. Consider the MISERIES which true religion prevents.

It does not, it is true, prevent sickness, poverty, or misfortune. It does not fence off from the wilderness of this world, a mystic enclosure, within which the ills of life never intrude. No! these troublesome things happen to all alike. But how small a portion of human wretchedness flows from these sources, compared with that which arises from the dispositions of the heart. "The mind can make a heaven of hell—and a hell of heaven." **People carry the springs of their happiness or misery in their own bosom!** Hence it is said of the wicked, "that they are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, which is never at peace—but continually casting up mire and dirt." In contrast with which it is affirmed, that "the work of righteousness is peace; and that the good man shall be satisfied from himself."

Would you behold the misery entailed by **pride**, look at Haman. Would you behold the misery entailed by **covetousness**, look at Ahab. Would you behold the misery entailed by **malice**, look at Cain. Would you behold the misery entailed by **profaneness** and **sensuality**, united with the forebodings of a guilty conscience, look at Belshazzar. Would you behold the misery entailed by **envy** and a consciousness of being rejected of God, look at Saul. Would you behold the misery entailed by **revenge**, look at Herodias writhing beneath the accusations of John, and thirsting for his blood. Would you behold the misery entailed by **apostasy**, look at Judas.

True religion would have prevented all this—and it will prevent similar misery in you. Harken to the confessions of the outcast criminal in the land of his banishment; of the felon in his irons and in his dungeon; of the prostitute expiring upon her bed of straw; of the malefactor at the gallows—"Wretched creature that I am, abhorred of men, accursed of God! To what have my crimes brought me!" True religion, my children, prevents all this! All that wretchedness, which is the result of crime—is cut off by the influence of genuine piety. Misery prevented—is happiness gained.

4. Dwell upon the PRIVILEGES which true religion confers.

To the man who is a partaker of its genuine influence, all the sins he has committed, be they ever so numerous or so great, are all forgiven, and he is introduced to the bliss of pardoned guilt; he is restored to the favor of that Great Being whose smile is life, and lights up heaven with joy; whose frown is death, and fills all hell with woe. But I cannot describe these privileges in such brilliant language as has been employed by an American author, "Regeneration is of the highest importance to man, as a subject of the divine government. In his former unregenerate state, he was a rebel against God, and with the new birth he becomes cheerfully an obedient subject. From an enemy, he becomes God's friend. From an apostate, he becomes God's child. From the debased, hateful, and miserable character of sin—he makes a final escape, and begins the glorious and eternal career of virtue. With his character, his **destination** is equally changed! In his native condition he was a child of wrath, an object of abhorrence, and an heir of woe. Evil, in an unceasing and interminable progress, was his lot; the regions of sorrow and despair his everlasting home; and fiends, and fiend-like men his eternal companions. On this character holy beings looked with detestation, and on his ruin with pity; while evil beings beheld both with that satanic pleasure, which a reprobate mind can enjoy at the sight of companionship in turpitude and destruction.

"But when he becomes a subject of this great and happy change of character, all things connected with him are also changed. His unbelief, impenitence, hatred of God, rejection of Christ, and resistance of the Spirit of grace—he has voluntarily and ingenuously renounced! No longer rebellious, impious, or ungrateful—he has assumed the amiable spirit of submission, repentance, confidence, hope, gratitude, and love. The image of his Maker is enstamped upon his mind, and begins there to shine with moral and eternal beauty. The seeds of immortality have there sprung up, as in a congenial soil; and warmed by the life-giving beams of the Sun of Righteousness and refreshed by the dewy influence of the Spirit of grace—rise, and bloom, and flourish, with increasing vigor. In him sin and the world and the flesh daily decay, and daily announce their approaching dissolution; while the soul continually assumes new life and virtue, and is animated with superior and undying energy. He is now a joint heir with Christ,

and the destined inhabitant of heaven; the gates of glory and of happiness are already opened to receive him, and the joy of saints and angels has been renewed over his repentance. All around him is peace—all before him purity and transport. God is his Father; Christ is his Redeemer; and the Spirit of Truth his Sanctifier. Heaven is his eternal habitation; virtue is his immortal character; and cherubim and seraphim, and all the children of light, are his companions forever. Henceforth he becomes of course a rich blessing to the universe; all holy beings—no, God himself—will rejoice in him forever, as a valuable accession to the great kingdom of righteousness, as a real addition to the mass of created good, and as a humble but faithful and honorable instrument of the everlasting praise of heaven. He is a vessel of infinite mercy; an illustrious trophy of the cross; a gem in the crown of glory, which adorns the Redeemer of mankind." (Dwight's Sermon on Regeneration)

Who, my children, can read this animated description of the privileges of true piety—and it is not an exaggerated account!—without secretly longing to be a child of God? What are all the brightest distinctions of an earthly nature, after which envy pines in secret, or ambition rages in public, compared with this? Crowns are splendid baubles, gold is sordid dust, and all the gratifications of sense but vanity and vexation of spirit, when weighed against such splendid privileges as these!

5. Consider the CONSOLATIONS which true religion impart.

Our world has been called in the language of poetry, a valley of tears, and human life a bubble, raised from those tears, inflated by sighs, which, after floating a little while, decked with a few gaudy colors, is touched by the hand of death, and dissolves. Poverty, disease, misfortune, unkindness, instability, death—all assail the travelers as they journey onward to eternity through this gloomy valley. And what is to comfort them but true piety?

The consolations of true religion are neither few nor small; they arise in part from those things which are already mentioned in this chapter; that is, from the exercise of the understanding on the revealed truths of God's word, from the impulses of the spiritual life within us, and from a reflection upon our spiritual privileges—but there are some others, which though partially implied in these things, deserve a special enumeration and distinct consideration.

A good conscience, which the wise man says is a perpetual feast, sustains a high place among the comforts of genuine piety. It is unquestionably true, that a man's happiness is in the keeping of his conscience—all the sources of his felicity are under the command of this faculty. "A wounded spirit who can bear?" A troubled conscience converts a paradise into a hell, for it is the flame of hell kindled on earth. But a quiet conscience would illuminate the horrors of the

deepest dungeon with the beams of heavenly day. The former has often rendered men like tormented fiends amid a paradise of delights—while the latter has taught the songs of cherubim to martyrs in the prison or the flames. True religion furnishes a good conscience. By faith in the blood of Christ, it takes away guilt towards God—and by a holy life it keeps the conscience clear towards man. It first makes it good by justification—and then keeps it good by sanctification. What trouble may not a man bear beneath the smiles of an approving conscience! If this be calm and serene, the storms of affliction, which rage without, can as little disturb the comfort of the mind as the fury of the wintry tempest can do, to alarm the inhabitants of a well-built, well-stored mansion.

In addition to this, true religion comforts the mind, with **the assurance of an all-wise, all-pervading Providence**, so minute in its superintendence and control, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the knowledge of our heavenly Father; a superintendence which is excluded from no point of space, no moment of time, and overlooks not the lowest creature in existence. Nor is this all; for the word of God assures the believer that "all things work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to his purpose." Nothing that imagination could conceive is more truly consolatory than this—to be assured that all things, however painful at the time, not excepting the failure of our favorite schemes, the disappointment of our fondest hopes, the loss of our dearest comforts, shall be overruled by infinite wisdom, for the promotion of our ultimate good. This is a spring of comfort whose waters never fail.

True religion consoles also by **making manifest some of the benefits of affliction, even at the time it is endured**. It crucifies the world, mortifies sin, quickens prayer, extracts the balmy sweets of the promises, endears the Savior; and to crown all, it directs the mind to that glorious state where the days of our mourning shall be ended—that happy country where God shall wipe every tear from our eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow or crying. Nothing so composes the mind, and helps it to bear the load of trouble which God may lay upon it, as the near prospect of its termination.

True religion shows the weather-beaten mariner the haven of eternal repose, where no storms arise, and the sea is forever calm. Genuine piety exhibits to the weary traveler the city of habitation, within whose walls he will find a pleasant home, rest from his labors, and friends to welcome his arrival. Genuine piety discloses to the wounded warrior his native country, where the alarms of war, and the dangers of conflict will be no more encountered—but undisturbed peace forever reign. **In that one word, HEAVEN, true religion provides a balm for every wound, a cordial for every care.**

Here, then, is the pleasure of that wisdom, which is from above; it is not only enjoyed in prosperity—but continues to refresh us, and most powerfully to

refresh us, in adversity; a remark which will not apply to any other kind of pleasure.

In the hour of misfortune, when a man, once in happy circumstances, sits down, amid the wreck of all his comforts, and sees his fortune wiped away—what, in this storm of affliction, is to cheer him but true religion? And this can do it, and enable him to say, "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty—yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains." Habakkuk 3:17-19

What but true religion can comfort the poor laborer in that gloomy season when times are bad, and work is scarce, and he hardly knows where to procure his next meal? What can comfort the suffering female in that long and dreadful season, when, wasting away in a deep decline, she lies, night after night, consumed by fever, and day after day convulsed by coughing? Tell me, what can send a ray of comfort to her dark scene of woe, or a drop of consolation to her parched and thirsty lips—but true religion? And when the agonized parent, with a heart half broken by the conduct of a prodigal son, exclaims—"Oh! who can tell how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, to have a thankless child?" what, in that season of torture, can pour a drop of balm into the wounded spirit, but true religion?

And when we occupy the bedside of a departing friend, "the dreadful post of observation darker every hour," what but true religion can sustain the mind, and calm the tumult of the soul? What—but this, can enable us to bear with even common composure the pang of separation? And we, too, must die; and here is the excellence of piety—it follows us where no other friend can follow us, down into the dark valley of the shadow of death, stands by us when the last hand has left his grasp, reserves its mightiest energies for that most dreadful conflict, presents to the eye of faith the visions of glory rising up beyond the sepulcher, and angels advancing to receive us from the hand of earthly friends, and bear us to the presence of a smiling God.

Other sources of pleasure are open only during the season of health and prosperity. Admitting that they are all which their most impassioned admirers contend for—what can balls, games, plays, cards, do in the season of sickness, misfortune, or death? Alas! alas! they exist then only in recollection, and the recollection of them is painful.

6. The pleasures of true religion appear in the GRACES it implants.

"And now abides these three—Faith, Hope, Love."

FAITH is the leading virtue of Christianity. To believe, in any case, where the report is welcome, and the evidence of its truth convincing, is a pleasing exercise of the mind—how much more so in this case, where the testimony to be believed, is the glad tidings of salvation, and the evidence of its truth most entirely satisfactory?

HOPE is a most delightful exercise. The pleasures of hope have formed a theme for the poet; and it is evident that these pleasures must be in proportion to the importance of the object desired—and the grounds that exist to expect its accomplishment. What, then, must be the influence of that hope which is full of immortality, which has the glory of heaven for its object, and the truth of God for its basis! which, as it looks towards its horizon, sees the shadowy forms of eternal felicity rising, expanding, brightening, and advancing, every moment.

LOVE is a third virtue, implanted and cherished in the soul by true religion. Need I describe the pleasures connected with a pure and virtuous affection? True religion is love—love of the purest and most sublime kind; this is its essence, all else but its earthly attire, which it throws off as Elijah did his mantle, when it ascends to the skies. The delight of love must be in proportion to the excellence of its object, and the strength of its own propensity towards that object. What, then, must be the pleasure of that love which has God as its object, and which consists in complacency in his glories, gratitude for his mercies, submission to his will, and the enjoyment of his favor! This is a heavenly feeling, which brings us into communion with angels, and anticipates on earth the enjoyments of eternity. Submission, patience, meekness, gentleness, justice, compassion, zeal—are also among the graces which true religion implants in the human soul; which, like lovely flowers, adorn it with indescribable beauty, and refresh it with the most delicious fragrance!

7. Consider the DUTIES which true religion enjoins and you will find in each of these a spring of hallowed pleasure.

How delightful an exercise is **prayer**! "Prayer is the peace of our spirits, the stillness of our thoughts, the evenness of recollection, the seat of meditation, the rest of our cares, and the calm of our tempests. Prayer is the daughter of charity, and the sister of meekness." It is pleasant to tell our sorrows to another; how much more to him who is omnipotent in power, infallible in wisdom, and infinite in compassion! With prayer is connected **praise**, that elevated action of the soul, in which she seems at the time to be learning motion and melody from an angel.

How pleasant an exercise is the perusal of the **Scriptures!** In prayer we speak to God—and in the Bible God speaks to us—and both confer upon us honor indescribable. Passing by the antiquity of its history, the pathos of its narratives, the beauty of its imagery—how sublime are its doctrines, how precious its promises, how free its invitations, how salutary its warnings, how intense its devotions! "Precious Bible! when weighed against you, all other books are but as the small dust of the balance." Nor less pleasant is the holy remembrance of the Sabbath! "I was glad," exclaims the Christian, "when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord;" and there, when standing within the gates of Zion, surrounded with the multitude that keep holy day, he repeats, amid the years of his manhood, the song of his childhood, and from the fullness of his joy, he exclaims—

"Lord how delightful 'tis to see
A whole assembly worship Thee;
At once they sing, at once they pray,
They hear of heaven and learn the way."

The sweetly-solemn engagements of the sacramental feast; the flow of brotherly love, called forth by social prayer, together with the ardor of benevolence, inspired by the support of public religious institutions; in these exercises is true happiness to be found, if indeed it is to be found anywhere on earth.

8. As a last proof of the pleasures derived from true religion, I may appeal to **the experience of its friends.** Here the evidences accumulate by myriads on earth, and millions in heaven. Who, that ever felt its influence, will doubt its tendency to produce delight? Go, go, my children, to the saints of the most high God, and collect their testimony, and you shall be convinced that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Go not to the Christian of doubtful character, for he has only just religion enough to make him miserable. **Go to the most holy, and you shall find them the most happy.**

And then there are also two or three other circumstances which are connected with the pleasures of true religion that deserve attention. **It is pleasure that never satiates or wearies.** Can the epicure, the voluptuary, the drunkard, the ball-frequenter, say this of their delights? "How short is the interval, how quick the transition between a worldly enjoyment—and a burden. If sport refreshes a man when he is weary, it also wearies when he is refreshed. The most devoted pleasure-hunter in existence, were he bound to his sensual delights every day, would find it an intolerable burden, and fly to the spade and the hoe for a diversion from the misery of an unintermitted pleasure. Custom may render continued labor tolerable—but not continued pleasure. All pleasures that affect the body must needs weary, because they are unable to keep up that height of intensity, that the pleasure of the sense raises them to.

But the pious pleasure of a well-disposed mind moves gently, and therefore constantly; it does not need by rapture and ecstasy—but is like the pleasure of health, which is still and sober, yet greater and stronger than those which call up the senses with grosser and more affecting impressions.

And as all the grosser pleasures of sense weary, and all the sports and recreations soon pall upon the appetite, so, under some circumstances, do the more elevated enjoyments of exalted rank, agreeable company and lively conversation; it is true religion alone that preserves an unfading freshness, an undying charm, an inexhaustible power to please; it is this alone of all our pleasures which never cloy, never surfeits—but increases the appetite the more it gratifies it, and leaves it, after the richest feast, prepared and hungry for a still more splendid banquet.

And then another ennobling property of the pleasure that arises from true religion is, that as the sources and the seat of it are in a man's own bosom, it is not in the power of anything outside him to destroy it, or take it away. Upon God alone is he dependent for its enjoyment. Upon how many other agents, and upon what numerous contingencies, over which he can exercise no control, is the votary of worldly pleasure dependent for his bliss. How many things which he cannot command are necessary to make up the machinery of his schemes! What trifles may disappoint him of his expected gratification, or rob him of his promised delights! A variable atmosphere, or a human mind no less variable; a lack of punctuality in others, or a lack of health in himself—these, and a thousand other things, might be enumerated as circumstances, upon the mercy of each one of which, the enjoyment of worldly pleasure depends. "But the good man shall be satisfied from himself." "Whoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him," said Jesus Christ, "shall never thirst—but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The piety of his heart, produced by the Holy Spirit, is this well-spring of pleasure, which a godly man carries everywhere with him, wherever he goes. He is independent of all the contingencies of life for his bliss. "It is an easy and a portable pleasure, such as he carries about in his bosom, without alarming the eye or the envy of the world. A man putting all his pleasures into this one, is like a traveler putting all his goods into one jewel; the value is the same, and the convenience greater."

"Nor is this kind of pleasure out of the reach of any outward violence only—but even those things also, which make a closer impression upon us, which are the irresistible decays of nature, have yet no influence at all upon this. For when time itself, which of all things in the world will not be baffled or defied, shall begin to arrest, seize, and remind us of our mortality—by pains, aches, and weakness of limbs, and dullness of senses—yet then the pleasure of the mind

shall be in its full youth, vigor, and freshness. A palsy may as soon shake an oak, or a fever dry up a fountain, as either of them shake, dry up, or impair the delight of conscience; for it lies within, it centers in the heart, it grows up into the very substance of the soul, so that it accompanies a man to his grave; he never outlives it, and that for cause only, because he cannot outlive himself."

How comes it to pass, then, that, in opposition to all this, the opinion has gained ground that true religion leads to melancholy? The unsaved judge of it by their own feelings; and as they are not conscious of any pleasurable emotions excited by sacred things, they conclude that others in like manner are destitute of them. But is their testimony to be received, before that of the individual who has tried and found it by experience to be bliss?

Again, unsaved people form their opinion by what they see in many professors, some of whom, though professing godliness, are destitute of its power; and being more actuated by a spirit of the world than of piety, are strangers to the peace that passes understanding; others are not yet brought out of that deep dejection, with which the earlier stages of conviction are sometimes attended. The sinner, when first arrested in his thoughtless career, is filled with dismay and the most poignant grief; reviewed in this state of mind, his appearance may produce the idea that true religion is the parent of melancholy. But wait—he who sows in tears shall reap in joy. His tears, like showers in summer from a dark and lowering cloud, carry off the gloom which they first caused, portend a clearer and cooler atmosphere, and are ultimately followed by the bright shining of the sun.

An unfavorable impression against true religion is sometimes produced by the constitutional gloom of some of its genuine disciples. It should be recollected, that, in these cases, true religion does not cause the dejection, for this would have existed had there been no piety. All that can be said is, that it does not cure it, which is not to be expected, unless piety pretended to exert an influence over the physical nature of man.

The supposition that piety leads to melancholy is also founded, in part, on the self-denying duties which the word of God enjoins. Penitence, self-denial, renunciation of the world, willingness to take up the cross and follow after Christ, are unquestionably required, and must be truly found in the genuine Christian. Hence the worldling thinks it impossible—but that with such duties should be associated the most sullen and miserable state of mind. Little does he imagine, that the pleasures which true religion has to offer for those she requires us to abandon, are like the orb of day to the glow-worm of the hedge; and that for every moment's self-denial she requires us to endure, she has a million ages of ineffable delight to bestow!

"And now upon the result of all, I suppose that to exhort them to be religious is only in other words to exhort them to take their pleasure—a pleasure, high, rational, and angelical—a pleasure with no appendant sting, no consequent loathing, no remorse or bitter farewells—but such an one, as being honey in the mouth, never turns to gall in the belly; a pleasure made for the soul, and the soul for that; suitable to its spirituality, and equal to its capacities; such an one as grows fresher upon enjoyment, and though continually fed upon, is never consumed; a pleasure that a man may call as properly his own, as his soul and his conscience; neither liable to accident, nor exposed to injury; it is the foretaste of heaven, and the pledge of eternity. In a word, it is such a pleasure begun in grace, which passes into glory, blessedness, and immortality—and those joys that neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man to conceive!" (This, and the other quotations, are from Dr. South's sermon on Proverbs 3:1, which is so striking that I could not avoid giving these extracts from it. See also an excellent volume of sermons, by H. F. Burder, on 'The Pleasures of True Religion')

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE ADVANTAGES OF EARLY PIETY

A quaint but eminently spiritual poet of the last century, has a poem entitled, "Strife in Heaven"—a singular idea to attach to that region of untroubled repose. The design of the piece, however, is ingenious and interesting. A company of the redeemed above, are represented as discussing, in a spirit of perfect love, the question, "which of them was most indebted to divine grace for his salvation?" Among these grateful and holy debaters, two appeared to have claims for the greatest weight of obligation to sovereign mercy, so nearly balanced, as to render it difficult to say which owed most. One was a glorified spirit, converted in old age, after a long life of sin; the other was a saint redeemed in youth, and who spent as long a life in holiness. The one contended, that his forgiveness, after such a lengthened course of vice and destructive conduct, made him the greatest monument of saving love in heaven; "except," exclaimed the other, "myself; who, by divine grace, was prevented from that course of sin, and was enabled by true religion to spend my years in holiness and usefulness." I think the happy throng must have confessed the justice of the younger person's claims; Omniscient wisdom from the throne must have confirmed their judgment; and in heaven it must have been decided that **they owe most to sovereign grace, who have been called by its power to the service of God in their youth.**

Youth is a season which presents peculiar advantages for the pursuit of piety.

It is attended in general, with more leisure and less care, than any subsequent period of life. As yet, my children, you are not entangled in the concerns of business, nor the cares of a family. The ten thousand tumultuous anxieties of a father or a mother, do not yet fill your minds, and exclude all other topics. Tell us, you fathers, struggling with the difficulties of a precarious trade; and you mothers, absorbed in the duties of a rising family; which, do you think, is the best time to begin the pursuit of eternal life? With tears they respond, "Seize! O seize, young people, the halcyon days of youth!"

Youth is a season of greater susceptibility of mind than any which follows it.

In nature's spring-time, the soil is best prepared for the reception of the seed; and the energies of vegetation are most vigorous; so it is with the mind. In youth the heart is more easily impressed, the affections more readily moved, the imagination is more lively. You have an ardor and fervency most remote from the timid, hesitating caution of old age, and eminently favorable to conversion. Disdaining all resistance, ambitious of great achievements, full of high resolves, and leaping over opposing obstacles, youth surveys, with sparkling eyes, the crown of its wishes, braces itself for action, and flies to the goal; while old age, creeping fearfully along, afraid of every difficulty, discouraged by the least resistance, can scarcely be impelled to move. I know that these things of themselves are not sufficient to make you holy—but when grace sanctifies them, and directs them to proper objects, they must render your entrance on true religion more easy, your progress more rapid, and your enjoyment more strong.

Youth are less hardened in sin, than people of riper years.

The depravity of our nature grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength. Like a tree, it strikes its roots deeper, and takes a faster hold on the soil every year. You have principles of corruption already in your hearts, my children—but they have not, by long indulgence, become so stiffened into habit, as they may be at some future time. Your prejudices and biases are yet few, and feeble. As yet the sentiments of modesty and propriety, and a regard to the opinions of others, would make you blush for acts of vice, and endeavor to conceal them from the world.

In riper years you will assume a boldness in iniquity, disregard the censures of others, and cease to be restrained by them. **Conscience** has not yet been deeply corrupted; it still preserves something of its tremulous delicacy, and sharp sensibility; it still elevates its warning voice, and strongly remonstrates against

your least deviation from the path of virtue. But in the aged sinner, weary of useless reproof, it is almost silent, or totally disregarded. We know that without divine grace, conversion, in any case, cannot take place—but we know, at the same time, by observation, that divine grace very often follows in the order of nature.

Youth are pre-eminently encouraged to seek the possession and influence of piety.

There are many invitations, promises, and injunctions, specially addressed to them. "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." "I love those who love me, and those who seek me early shall find me." Under the Jewish dispensation, God called for the first-fruits of all things, intending, no doubt, to teach, among other lessons, his delight in the dedication of the first fruits of our life to his service. How pleased was the Redeemer with the hosannas of the children, and how deeply was he concerned in the case of that hopeful youth, who came to inquire of him the way to life! And does not the parable of the prodigal son teach us how welcome is the return of the young to the Father of Mercies? God chose David, the youngest son of the family; and set his love upon Jacob, while Esau the elder is passed by. Among all the disciples, John was the most beloved, and he was, at the same time, the youngest.

But still the principal design of this chapter is to set forth **the ADVANTAGES attendant on the possession of early piety.**

1. Of these advantages, some relate to OTHERS.

This will cause you to be a source of ineffable delight to your parents; and probably render you a blessing to your brothers and sisters. Piety in youth will render you a benefactor to your species, and a blessing to society. Instead of seducing others by a bad example, you will benefit them by the influence of a good one; instead of poisoning others by corrupt principles, you will scatter along your path the seeds of truth, piety, and morality; instead of drawing down the vengeance of God upon society by your crimes, you will bring down his blessing by your prayers. You will benefit society in the most elevated and successful manner; and by your good conduct, and the support of Christian institutions, do more, in connection with others of a similar disposition, for the good of your country, than fleets and armies can achieve.

In the memoirs of that truly apostolic missionary, Henry Martyn, occurs the following anecdote, which most forcibly illustrates the subject of the influence of filial conduct upon parental and domestic comfort and respectability. "Visited the hospital this day, and read the eleventh chapter of John to a poor man, in whose room, at the workhouse, I was struck with the misery that presented itself. He

was lying with his clothes and hat on, upon the bed, dying. His wife was cleaning the room, as if nothing was the matter; and upon the threshold was the daughter, about thirty years old, who had been delirious thirteen years." What a scene of wretchedness! What a miserable group! It is a picture from which the mind turns with the deepest emotions of distressful pity. But, oh! the cause of this misery! "The dying man," continued Mr. Martyn, "was once a respectable innkeeper in the town—but the extravagance of a son brought him to poverty, and his daughter to insanity." What must have been the feelings (except, indeed, vice had turned his heart to stone) of the guilty author of this complicated misery, when he saw the consuming grief of his broken-hearted father, and heard the wild ramblings of his maniac sister, while conscience thundered in his ear, "You are the cause of this dreadful calamity!" How many broken hearts, and insane minds, has similar conduct produced! How many are at this moment bending to the grave, or shut up in the cells of a lunatic asylum, who—but for profligate children, might have been living in health, sanity, and respectability!

2. Innumerable advantages will result from early piety to YOURSELF.

Early piety will exert a friendly influence over your temporal interests.

It will open springs of consolation all along your path through the valley of tears, whose waters adapted to every condition, shall never fail. True religion, chosen in youth as your guide, companion, and friend, will attend you through all the journey of life; will go with you where you go, and dwell with you wherever you dwell; she will accompany you when with many tears you leave the parental roof, and you go forth, a young adventurer, into the world. She will travel with you in the wilderness, or sail with you on the ocean. She will abide with you in a mansion, or inhabit with you the poor cottage. When every other friend forsakes you, she will cling to you the closer. She will smile on you, when every other face is covered with a frown. She will put forth all her energies to comfort you in the time of your humbled fortunes. In seasons of perplexity, she will guide you to the fountain of light. When oppressed with care, she will place you on the rock of ages. In the storms of affliction, she will cast forth for you the anchor of hope. And in times of dreary desolation, she will enable you, by faith, to see the land which is afar off—the land of promise and of rest.

Early piety is a distinguished honor. If there be true honor in the universe, it is to be found in true religion. Even the heathen were sensible of this; hence the Romans built the temples of virtue and honor close together, to teach that the way to honor was by virtue. True religion is the image of God in the soul of man. Can glory itself rise higher than this? What a distinction! to have this luster put upon the character in youth. It was mentioned by Paul as a singular honor to the believing Jews that they were the first to trust in Christ; and in referring to Andronicus and Junia, he mentions it to their praise that they were in Christ before him. To be a child of God, an heir of glory, a disciple of Christ, a warrior

of the cross, a citizen of the New Jerusalem, from our youth up, adorns the brow with amaranthine wreaths of fame. A person converted in youth, is like the sun, rising on a summer's morning to shine through a long bright day—but a person converted late in life, is like the evening star, a lovely object of Christian contemplation—but not appearing until the day is closing, and then seen but for a little while.

Early piety will be of immense importance to you in the various relations of life in which you may stand. If you are parents it will dispose and enable you to train up your children in the fear of God. It will prevent you from neglecting the immortal interests of those who are committed to your care. **How many parents are accessory to the murder of their children's souls; blood-guiltiness rests upon their conscience, and the curses of their own offspring will be upon them through eternity!** In those cases where people are redeemed late in life, what anguish is sometimes felt on seeing their children wandering in the broad road that leads to destruction; and on remembering that they themselves, were the means of leading them astray. "Oh, my children! my children!" they exclaim, "I wish I had known true religion earlier for your sakes. Why did I not seek the Lord in youth? Then I would have trained you up in the fear of God, and have been spared the agony of seeing you walking in the path of destruction; or, at least, have been spared the torturing reflection, that it was through my neglect you despised true religion."

Early piety will be a guard to you against the temptations to which we are all exposed in this life. Temptations to sin, like the wind, come from every quarter. In company, in solitude, at home, abroad, in God's house, and in our own—we are always open to attack. Business, pleasure, companions—all may become a snare. We never know when, or from what, or in what way to expect the assault. At one time we may be tempted to infidelity—at another to immorality; now to licentiousness—then to intemperance. **Piety is the only effectual guard of our character.** Luther tells us of a young believer who used to repel all temptations with this exclamation, "Begone, I am a Christian." My children, adopt the same character, and maintain it with the same constancy and success. When Pyrrhus tempted Fabricius, the first day with threats of punishment, and the next day with promises of honor—the Roman nobly replied, "I fear not your force, I am too wise for your fraud." True religion will enable you to say the same to every one who threatens or allures. Neglect piety in youth, and who shall say how long in vice and infamy you may be found in after life? Omit to take with you this shield, and your moral character may be destroyed, or receive a wound—the scar of which you may carry to the grave.

Early piety will thus leave you fewer sins to bewail in after life. Among other things which the illustrious Beza gave thanks to God for, in his last will and testament, was this—that he became a real Christian at the age of sixteen, by

which he was prevented from the commission of many sins, which would otherwise have overtaken him, and rendered his life less happy. Every year's impenitence, must cause many years' repentance. If you neglect true religion in youth, God may give you up to the delusions of infidelity, or to the practices of immorality—and during this unhappy season—of what remediless evil may you be the occasion? How many companions may you lead astray by your crimes; who, admitting that you are afterwards reclaimed by grace, are not so easily led back by your virtues.

Instances have occurred in which young men, during the days of their impiety, have perpetrated the horrid crime of corrupting female virtue, and then abandoned the hapless victim of their passion. Cast off as a guilty worthless thing, the injured partner of his sins has added iniquity to iniquity, and she who—but for her betrayer—might have lived a long and virtuous life, has sunk amid disease, and poverty, and infamy—to an early and dishonored grave. God, in the mysteries of his grace, has, in after years, given repentance to the greater criminal of the two. But can he forget his crime? Oh no! God has forgiven him—but never, never can he forgive himself! Not even the blood which has washed away the guilt from his conscience, can efface the history of it from the page of memory; nor floods of tears deaden the impression which it has left upon the heart. He cannot restore the virtue he destroyed, nor refund the peace, which with felon hand, he stole from a pure bosom—until it knew him. He cannot rebuild the character he demolished, much less can he rekindle the life which he extinguished—or call back from the regions of the damned the miserable spirit which he hurried to perdition! Ah! that spirit now haunts his imagination, and as she exhibits the mingled agony, fury, revenge, and despair of a lost soul, seems to say, "Look at me, my destroyer!" For a while he can see nothing but her flames, and hear nothing but her groans.

Early piety would have saved him from all this. Late piety brings him salvation for another world—but it comes not soon enough to save him from remorse in this.

Early piety will procure for you, if you live so long, the honor of an aged disciple. A person converted late in life is a young disciple—though a gray-headed man. An aged hero, who has spent all his years contending for the liberties of his country; or a philosopher, who has long employed himself in improving science; or a philanthropist, who has become old in relieving needs, are venerable sights—but far inferior, if they are destitute of true religion, to the aged Christian who has employed half a century in glorifying God, as well as doing good to man. An aged pious disciple is honored in the church, and respected even in the world. His hoary head is lifted like a crown of glory among other and younger disciples, over whom his decaying form throws its venerated shade. How rich is he in experience of all the ways of godliness! Like a decrepit warrior, he can talk of conflicts and of victories. Younger Christians gather round

him to learn wisdom from his lips, and courage from his feats, and to show him tokens of respect. By his brethren in Christ he is regarded with veneration; his presence is always marked with every demonstration of respect, and his opinion is listened to with the profoundest deference. He is consulted in emergencies, and the fruits of his experience are gathered with eagerness. His virtues have been tried by time, the surest test of excellence, and they have passed the ordeal with honor.

That suspicion and skepticism, which innumerable moral failures have produced in some minds, as to the reality of true religion in general, and the sincerity of any of its professors, retire from the presence of such a man, convinced of the injustice of its surmises; and even the infidel and the profane bear a testimony to his worth, which his long-tried consistency has extorted. "There, at least," say they, "is one good man, whose sincerity has been tried by the fluctuating circumstances and varying situations of half a century. His is no mushroom piety, which springs up in a night, and perishes in a day. The suns of many summers, and the storms of many winters have passed over it; and both adversity and prosperity have assailed and demonstrated its stability. We begin, after all, from that very character, to believe that there is more in true religion than we have been apt to imagine."

Early piety, if persisted in, prepares for a comfortable old age. The condition of **an old man without piety**, is wretched indeed. He presents to the eye of Christian contemplation, a melancholy spectacle. As to all the grand purposes of existence, he has passed through the world in vain. Life to him has been a lost adventure. Seventy years he has sojourned in the region of mercy, and is going out of it without salvation. Seventy years he has dwelt within reach of redemption, and yet is going to the lost souls in prison. If he is insensible of his dreadful case, he is going to ruin asleep—but if a little awakened, how bitter are his reflections. If he looks back upon the past, he sees nothing but a wide and dreary waste, where the eye is relieved by no monuments of piety—but is scared by memorials of a life of sin; if he looks at his present circumstances, he sees nothing but a mere wreck of himself, driving upon the rock of his destiny and destruction. But the future! oh! how can he look on that, which presents to him **death**, for which he is not prepared; **judgment**, from which he can expect nothing but condemnation; **heaven** which he has bartered for fleeting pleasure, the remembrance of which is now painful, or insipid; **hell**, which he has merited, with its eternity of torments, by his iniquities. The spirit of spent years and departed joys flit before him, and points to these regions of woe, where sinful delights conduct the sensualist and voluptuary.

Miserable old man! the winter of life is upon him, and he has nothing to cheer his cold and dreary spirit; nor any spring to look forward to; the night of existence has come on; not a star twinkles from heaven upon his path; nor will

any morning dawn upon the gloom which enwraps him. Such is the old age of those who do not remember God in their youth—and carry on their oblivion of true religion, as such people generally do—to the end of life!

But should any one be called at the eleventh hour, such a convert will be subject, at times, to the most painful doubts and apprehensions; he questions the reality of his religion; he fears that it is the result of circumstances, not of a divine change; he is afraid that, like a half shipwrecked vessel driven into port by the violence of the storm, rather than by the effort of the crew, he has been forced to religion more by the terrors produced by approaching death, than by the choice of his own will. He often concludes that he never forsook the world, until he could no longer retain it; and that he renounced the enjoyments of earth only because, from the decay of his body, from the feebleness of his mind, and the weakness of his fancy, he is unable to indulge in them. These, and other similar fears, generally occasion, in people converted in old age, a painful hesitancy concerning the security of their state; prevent them from going on their way rejoicing, and hang like a cloud upon the prospect of immortality.

How much more cheering and consolatory are the reflections of the aged Christian, who remembered his Creator in the days of his youth. He too has arrived at the wintry days of existence—but, like the inhabitant of a well-stored mansion, he has a thousand comforts which enable him to hear the howling of the tempest without a fear, and to look on the dreariness of the scene unconscious of a need. And then, in addition to this, the days of everlasting spring approach. He too is overtaken by the evening; his shadow lengthens on the plain—but the heavens pour upon him the glory of God, while the word in which he trusted, is a lamp unto his feet—and an eternal day is about to dawn upon his soul. In the past he sees the long interval between the season of youth, and the furrowed countenance of age, filled up, in some good degree, with works of devotion, righteousness, and benevolence—whereby he has glorified God, benefited his species, and prepared a balm for his memory. No sins of youth fill his bones with pain, nor his spirit with remorse.

He has little doubt of his sincerity; for his life, though it affords him no ground of dependence for salvation, furnishes him with numerous evidences of the faith which justifies the soul, and purifies the heart. He forsook the world when most capable of enjoying it; he was not driven by force to true religion—but deliberately weighed anchor, and, with every sail set, steered for the haven of piety. He has resisted innumerable attacks upon his principles, and against every foe has held fast his integrity. On the verge of life he can say, "I have kept the faith. I have fought a good fight, I have nearly finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life, which God the righteous Judge will bestow upon me."

Surely, surely my children, an old age thus serene and venerable, is an object worthy of your desires! Surely these peaceful recollections, these sublime prospects, amid the dreariness of old age, are deserving your exertions!

Early piety will have a considerable influence on your eternal felicity. In dwelling upon the two different and contrary states of heaven and hell, we are not to conceive of them as conditions of being, where all people in heaven will be equally happy—and all in hell be equally miserable. There are different degrees of glory in one, and different degrees of torment in the other. This is proved by scripture, and accords with reason. Grace is glory in the bud—glory is grace in a state of fructification. And as in the natural world, so it is in the spiritual world—where there is little blossom, there cannot be much fruit. Life is the seed-time for eternity. What a man sows, that shall he also reap, not only in kind—but in degree. Late sowings, as well as scanty ones, are generally followed with small crops. The reward of the righteous is all of grace—but then that grace which rewards the righteous rather than the wicked, may, with equal consistency, reward righteousness according to its degrees. We cannot think that the reward of the dying thief, who was converted in the dark valley of the shadow of death, will be equal to that of Timothy or of Paul, who spent a long and laborious life in the service of Christ. Nor is it to be imagined that the crown of the aged convert will be as bright, or as heavy as that of the Christian who is converted in youth, and continues, until a good old age, in a course of consistent piety.

But there is one consideration which should come home to the bosom of young people with overwhelming force; I mean, that unless they become partakers of piety in early life, the probability is, that they will never partake of it at all. Is it of consequence that you should become pious at any time? Then does all that consequence attach to the present time? Let me sound this idea again and again in your ears—let me detain your attention upon the dreadful and alarming sentiment.

The probability of your salvation becomes weaker and weaker as the years of youth roll by. It is less probable this year than the last, and will be less probable next year than this. I do not now argue upon the uncertainty of life, that I have considered before, I appeal to FACTS, which in reference to the sentiment I have now advanced, are of the most alarming aspect. Consider, only two individuals of the six hundred thousand, who left Egypt above the age of twenty years, entered Canaan. Of those who are converted at all, by far the greater part are brought to seek true religion in their youth; and of the few who are reclaimed in adult, or old age, how rare a case is it to find one who has been religiously educated. It is easy to observe, generally speaking, that sinners who have been brought under the means of grace, or under some new and impressive preaching, which they never enjoyed before, if they do not soon profit by their

privileges, rarely profit by them at all. God's time of conversion seems to be the morning of religious privilege. The churches mentioned in the New Testament, were chiefly made up of people converted by the first efforts of the apostles. Hence, when these servants of the cross were unsuccessful in their early labors in a city, or province, they looked upon it as a bad omen and a strong indication that it would be useless to continue their ministries there. So the usual order of divine grace is, for its showers to fall on what might be called morning sowings. The seasons of youthful years, or youthful means, are the usual times of conversion; and those who misimprove either of these, are in general found to neglect true religion forever after. (See Acts 13:46, 48; 22:18; 28:23-28)

I am aware, that instances to the contrary are sometimes found; and therefore none who are inclined to seek God at any age should despair—yet they but rarely occur, and therefore let none presume. **True repentance is never too late—but late repentance is seldom true!**

It is very probable, that some who may read these pages, deliberately and sincerely make up their minds to serve God at some **future** time—after they have a little longer enjoyed the world. Mistaken youth! Sinful young people! Let them consider what their intention amounts to—"I will go on sinning a little longer, and then I will repent. I will serve Satan, and the world, and sin as long as I can, and when I am worn out in their service, or weary of it, I will turn to God, and try the ways of true religion. O Lord! the preserver of my days, spare my life a little longer to disobey you, to insult you—and then give me your grace to assist me to turn from my wicked ways and live." What wickedness! What shocking impiety! What daring madness! Do they not tremble? Are they not terrified at this view of their own conduct? Can they live another day in this state of mind? Can they give their eyes to sleep with such a purpose in their bosom? Let them consider how just it is that God should reserve the dregs of his wrath for those, who reserve only the dregs of their time for Him!

NOW, now, my children, is the accepted time—this is the day of salvation. "Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." You know not what another day, hour, moment—may bring forth. Opportunity, mercy, salvation, heaven, eternal glory—are all upon the wing of the present hour! Condemnation, hell, eternal torment, and despair—may all come in the next hour! That door of grace which is open today, may be shut tomorrow; that scepter of mercy which is stretched out today may be withdrawn tomorrow. Oh the noble purposes that have withered—the sublime prospects that have failed—the millions of immortal souls that have perished by putting off the present season, for a more convenient time. "Soul opportunities," says an old author, "are more worth than a thousand worlds." And they are rapidly slipping away, with the days of your youth!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE INFLUENCE OF TRUE RELIGION UPON THE TEMPORAL INTERESTS OF ITS POSSESSOR

Godliness has the promise of the life that is to come—it conducts to glory, honor, immortality—this is its chief commendation. Scripture has drawn aside the veil which hangs over the unseen state, and urged you, my children, upon the great business of true religion—by a contemplation of the dark world of hell—and of the splendors of the celestial city. It might seem that, after such an appeal, every other were useless, and that to speak of other advantages than eternal life, were only adding a drop to the ocean—or a candle to the sun. But there are people who are more regulated by present good, however small, than any future prospect of the greatest gain—who are more governed by illustrations borrowed from things seen and temporal, than by those which are derived from things unseen and eternal. In this respect also, and on this ground, true religion can plead its advantages, for it has "the promises of the life that now is" as well as that which is to come. I do not assert, that true religion will conduct all its followers to wealth, honor, and health. No! Still, however, it exerts a friendly influence on all the temporal interests of mankind, and protects them from many evils to which, without it, they are exposed.

1. Piety exercises and improves the UNDERSTANDING.

From beginning to end, true religion is an intellectual process. Whatever raises man above the dominion of the animal senses, and renders him independent of these, as sources of gratification, must have a salutary influence upon the mind. Now the objects which true religion exhibits, are such as the mental faculties alone can converse with; and the moment a man begins to feel solicitude about spiritual things, he begins to experience a considerable elevation of character.

Also, the subjects of divine truth are of the most sublime and lofty kind. They form the Alps in the world of mind. The existence and attributes of the great God; the system of Providence, embracing all worlds and all ages; the scheme of redemption, planned from eternity for the salvation of millions of sinful creatures; the immortality of the soul; the solemnities of judgment; the everlasting states of the righteous and the wicked—these are the everyday topics of thought to a Christian. Can a man live in the daily contemplation of these vast ideas—and not feel an elevating influence upon his understanding? It will probably be said, that science will have the same effect. This is admitted in part. But how many are there to whom philosophical pursuits are utterly inaccessible!

Besides this, it may be replied that **nothing but true piety will infallibly guard the soul from being debased by wicked indulgences.**

Read the missionary records, and learn by these interesting details, what true religion has done for the Negroes of the West Indies, the Hottentots of South Africa, the Eskimos of Labrador, the fur-clad Greenlanders of the Arctic regions, and the voluptuous cannibals of the South Sea Islands. It has raised them from savages into rational creatures; it has awakened their dormant understanding; sharpened their powers of perception; taught them the art of reasoning; and invested them with the power of eloquence.

But why do I go to distant countries, while our own furnishes illustrations so numerous, and so striking? How many people are there, who were educated in our Sunday-schools, and who are now filling stations of importance, honor, and usefulness, who—but for true religion, would never have risen in the scale of society, or ascended above the lowest level of poverty. Education, it is true, gave the first impulse to their minds—but it was an impulse which would have soon spent its force, had it not been continued and increased by true religion. It was this that gave the sober, serious, and reflective turn of mind which has led to such mental improvement; and they who but for the power of godliness, would have been still earning their bread at the plough or the anvil, are filling the place of tradesmen or clerks; or are raised to the distinction of preaching with ability and success, the truths of salvation!

As a proof of the influence which true religion has in strengthening and elevating the powers of even the most cultivated understanding, I may give the following quotation from the life of Henry Martyn, a book which I most emphatically recommend to the perusal of all young people, as one of the most interesting publications that modern times have produced. "Since I have known God in a saving manner," he remarks, "painting, poetry, and music have had charms unknown to me before. I have received what I suppose is a taste for them—for true religion has refined my mind, and made it susceptible of impressions from the sublime and beautiful. O how true religion secures the heightened enjoyment of those pleasures which keep so many from God, by their becoming a source of pride!"

And it may be fairly argued, that the sublimity of Milton's genius was owing, in no small degree, to the influence of true religion upon his mind. This is at once far more direct and obvious in its tendency, than any natural scenery, however bold and striking may be its features—since piety not only brings the mind into the region of sublime mental scenery—but fixes the eye most intently upon it.

2. True religion guards the HEALTH.

I do not mean to say that the rose will always bloom upon the countenance of piety—but I will affirm, that where it already displays its beauty, and sheds its fragrance—true religion will prevent those vices, which, like worms at the root of a flower, consume its strength, and shorten its existence. How many diseases are generated by sin! It is calculated that even in time of war, there are more who perish by drunkenness and licentiousness than by the sword! "You victims of voluptuousness, you victims of lusts, who formerly tasted the pleasures of sin for a season—but now are beginning to feel the horrors of it forever; you serve us for demonstration and example. Look at those trembling hands, that shaking head, those disjointed knees, that faltering resolution, that feeble memory, that worn-out body—all putrefaction; these are the dreadful rewards which vice bestows now, as pledges of what Satan will bestow presently, on those on whom he is preparing to exhaust his fury."

True religion will prevent all this; that **passion** which wastes the strength as with a fever; that **ambition** which wears out the frame faster than hard labor; that **malice** which robs of sleep; that **gambling** which hurries a man backward and forward between the delirium of hope and the torture of fear; that **gluttony** which brings on morbid obesity; that **drunkenness** which preys as a slow fire on the organs of life; that **debauchery** which corrupts the whole mass of the blood, and brings the infirmities of age on the days of youth—are all kept off by true religion. "The fear of the Lord prolongs days—it is a fountain of life to guard us from the snares of death." But of the drunkard and the fornicator it may be said, "his bones are full of the sins of his youth, which lie down with him in the dust. He enjoyed the taste of his wickedness, letting it melt under his tongue. He savored it, holding it long in his mouth. But suddenly, the food he has eaten turns sour within him, a poisonous venom in his stomach." Job 20:11-14

3. True religion builds up and protects the REPUTATION.

It prevents those **sins** which render a man dishonorable and despicable; it promotes all those **virtues** which raise and cherish esteem. How despised is the liar, the extortionate and deceptive tradesman, the unfaithful servant, the unkind husband, the cruel oppressive master! Who respects the individual that is notoriously addicted to vice, and flagrantly neglectful of the plainest obligations of virtue? Whereas, a man of consistent piety, who is known to be a real Christian, and whose Christianity renders him scrupulously true, honest, and upright—such a man is always universally esteemed. The wicked may laugh at a saint—but is he not the very man with whom they love to trade; in whose character they find sufficient warrant for the propriety of his conduct; and in whose fidelity they can repose unbounded confidence?

This was remarkably exemplified in the instance of the missionary Schwartz, who labored to spread the gospel in the southern part of the Indian peninsula. Such

was the repute in which this holy man was held by the native princes of Hindostan, that when Tippoo Saib was about to enter into a treaty with the Company, not being disposed to place much confidence in their agents, he exclaimed, "Send to me the missionary Schwartz, I will deal with him, for I can confide in his trustworthiness."

How many people has the lack of true religion brought to an untimely end! No man would ever have been exiled as a felon, or executed as a malefactor—if he had lived under the influence of piety. No jail would have been needed, no gallows erected—if all men were pious. Godliness may not, indeed, guard us from poverty—but it will certainly save us from vice and infamy. It may not advance us to wealth—but it will assuredly raise us to respectability.

4. True religion protects our SECULAR interests.

I do not pretend that piety bears into the church the cornucopia of worldly wealth, to pour down showers of gold on all who court her smiles and bend to her sway—but still there is a striking tendency in her influence, to improve our worldly circumstances.

It certainly prevents those vices which tend to poverty. Poverty is often the effect of vice. How many have hurled themselves and their families from the pinnacles of prosperity to the depths of adversity—by a course of wicked and profligate extravagance. Multitudes have spent all their substance, like the prodigal son, upon harlots and riotous living. Pride has ruined thousands—and indolence its tens of thousands! It is an observation of Franklin, "that one vice costs more to keep, than two children." True piety is the most economical thing in the world—and sin the most expensive thing in the world. How much do the drunkard, debauchee, and frequenter of theaters—pay for their sinful gratifications! What is spent in this nation every year in the grosser sensual indulgences, would pay the remainder of the national debt. Piety would save all this to the nation.

Piety not only prevents the vices which tend to poverty—but **enjoins and cherishes the virtues which lead to prosperity.** It makes a man industrious—and is not this the way to wealth? It renders him sober—and does not sobriety tend to advance our fortune? It enforces a right improvement of time—and surely this is advantageous to everyone. It prescribes frugality—which tends to increase. If a young man is in the service of another, piety, by causing him to speak the truth, and adhere to the principles of honesty—renders him trustworthy and confidential.

We have a most striking and instructive instance of this in the history of Joseph, of whom the historian thus writes—"And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a

prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he had, he put into his hand. And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he knew not anything he had, save the bread which he did eat." This is one of the most lively and convincing cases on record of the influence of true religion on our temporal interests. It was his piety that secured to Joseph this elevation and prosperity—it was true religion that exalted him from a menial slave to a steward.

Innumerable are the cases in which people, who set out on the journey of life without property, and without support, have by the force of those virtues which true religion enjoins, risen to respectability and affluence. They were first probably in a state of servitude, where by their steadiness and good conduct they so attached themselves to their employers, as to become in their estimation almost essential to the future success of the business; and, the result has been a share, and, in some cases, the whole of the trade, which they had contributed so materially to establish.

A friend of mine was once walking in the neighborhood of a large manufacturing town on a very cold winter's morning, when he overtook a plain man, decently clad, and wrapped in a comfortable great coat. After the usual salutations, my friend said to the stranger, "I am glad to see you with such a good warm covering this cold morning."—"It was not always thus," the man replied. "I was once a poor miserable creature, and had neither good clothes nor decent food; now I have both, and surplus money in the bank."—"What produced this favorable change?" continued my friend. "True religion, sir. I used to spend half my time, and all my wages nearly at the public-house. I was of course always poor, and always wretched. By God's direction I was led to hear the gospel, when by divine grace the word reached my heart. I repented of my sins, and became a new creature in Christ Jesus—old things passed away, and all things became new. True religion made me industrious and sober—no money and time now went for sin; and the result is, that I am comfortable, and comparatively rich."

Here then, is a proof and an illustration, that godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come. Nor are these proofs uncommon. Many people, now living in circumstances of high respectability, are willing to ascribe all they possess here, as well as all they hope for hereafter—to the influence of true religion.

All this is seen in the case of individuals—but if the subject be carried out to society at large, it will appear still more striking.

What but true religion can raise men from a savage to a civilized state? What else could have achieved the wonders which have been wrought in Africa—and taught the crudest barbarians to till the ground, to learn trades, to clothe themselves in decent apparel, to read, to keep accounts, to print books, to frame laws?

Godliness alone can expel from society the practice of cruelty, and introduce the reign and prevalence of mercy. The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty. Rome and Greece in the zenith of their glory, had neither a hospital for the sick, nor an asylum for the poor; they treated their enemies with the most insolent cruelty; practiced the most vigorous slavery; instituted games, in which myriads of human beings were torn to pieces in fighting with wild beasts. What a blessing has Christianity been to the whole world—even in relation to its present comforts! It has suppressed polygamy, put a stop to the sale of children by their parents, and the abandonment and murder of aged parents, by their children; it has rescued women from their abominable degradation by the other sex, and raised them to their just rank in society; it has sanctified the bond of marriage, checked the licentiousness of divorce, destroyed slavery, mitigated the terrors of war, given a new sanction to treaties, introduced milder laws, and more equitable governments; it has taught mercy to enemies and hospitality to strangers—it has made a legal provision for the poor; formed institutions for instructing the ignorant; purified the stream of justice; erected the throne of mercy. "These, O Jesus, are the triumphs and the trophies of your gospel! Which of your enemies—Paganism, Islamism, or Infidelity—has done, or could do the like?"

Even the avowed and inveterate opponents of the gospel, have been reluctantly compelled to acknowledge, in this view, its excellence. Voltaire says expressly, "that religion is necessary in every community; the laws are a curb upon open crimes, and religion on those that are private." "No religion," says Bolingbroke, "ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind, as the Christian religion. The gospel of Christ is one continued lesson of the strictest morality, of justice, benevolence, and universal charity. Supposing Christianity to be a human invention, it is the most amiable and useful invention that ever was imposed upon mankind for their good." Hume acknowledges, "that disbelief in futurity, looses in a great measure the ties of morality, and may be supposed, for that reason, pernicious to the peace of civil society." Rousseau confesses, "that if all were perfect Christians, individuals would do their duty, the people would be obedient to the laws, the rulers just, the magistrates incorrupt, and there would be neither vanity nor luxury in such a state." Gibbon admits, "that the gospel discouraged suicide, advanced education, checked oppression, promoted the emancipation of slaves, and softened the ferocity of barbarous nations; that fierce nations received at the same time lessons of faith and humanity, and that

even in the most corrupt state of Christianity, the barbarians learned justice from the law, and mercy from the gospel." (See an interesting work by Dr. Ryan, entitled, "The History of the Effects of Religion on Mankind in Countries Ancient and Modern, Barbarous and Civilized." I very particularly recommend the perusal of this volume to all young people who can procure it.)

And yet with such concessions, and after having paid such a tribute of praise to the excellence of Christianity, these miserable men have been so vile and perverse as to conspire for her destruction.

Thus has it been most demonstrably proved, that godliness exerts a powerful and favorable influence over the temporal interests of mankind. Neglect it, my children, and you know not what awaits you, either in this world or that which is to come. You may imagine that, provided you are moral and steady, although you are not pious, you are far enough removed from the probability of that wretchedness which vice brings with it. But, ah! in some unguarded moment, temptation may be successful to lead you astray—one vice makes way for another; and the dreadful progress described in the chapter on the deceitfulness of the heart, may be realized by you. Neglect true religion, and you will certainly be ruined for the world to come—and maybe for the life that now is. **Vice certainly brings hell in its train—and sometimes a dreadful pledge of its future torments—in present poverty, disease, and misery!**

I reflect with unutterable grief, as I now write, upon many young men, who were entering life with the greatest advantages, and the brightest prospects, whom, to use a common expression, fortune favored with her brightest smiles—but, alas! they would not be happy and respectable, for taking to the ways of sin, they dashed all the hopes of their friends, and wantonly threw away the opportunities which a kind providence had put within their reach. They went first to the theater, then to the brothel, then to the tavern. They became dissipated, extravagant, idle. Unhappy youths! I know not what they might have been—respectable tradesmen, prosperous merchants, honorable members of society. I know what they are—bloated rakes, discarded partners, bankrupts, miserable vagrants, a burden to their friends, a nuisance to the community, and a torment to themselves!

Seek true religion, then; for, as Solomon says, "Happy is the person who finds wisdom and gains understanding. For the profit of wisdom is better than silver, and her wages are better than gold. Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. She offers you life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying. Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly." Proverbs 3:13-18.

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE CHOICE OF COMPANIONS

Man was made for society, and society is thought to be essential to his happiness. Adam did but half enjoy the lovely and untainted scenes of Eden, while there was no rational companion, to whom he could impart the raptures of his soul—and Paradise was incomplete until God gave him a friend. How much more might it be expected, that now, when the human bosom is bereft of its innocence, man should look outside of himself for happiness, and endeavor to find it in society. Young people, especially, are anxious to form associations of this kind, and are in imminent danger of choosing companions that will do them no good. The design of the present chapter is to put you, my children, on your guard against this evil, and to assist you in the selection of those friends with whom you daily mingle. This subject has been already adverted to—but it is of sufficient importance to occupy a separate chapter.

It behooves you very seriously to reflect on the influence which your companions, of whatever kind they are, will certainly have in the formation of your character.

"We are all," says Mr. Locke, "a kind of chameleons, that take a tincture from the objects which surround us." A still wiser man has told us, that "He who walks with wise men shall be wise—but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Hence he says to us; "make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man you shall not go; lest you learn his ways, and get a snare to your soul." These admonitions are founded on the general principle, that the example of our companions will exert a strong influence in the formation of our own character, slow and silent, perhaps—but irresistible and successful—and this influence will be in proportion to the love and esteem we cherish for them. All nations and all ages have confessed the truth of this sentiment.

The example of a beloved companion is powerful—more especially if he be a sinful one, because a bad model finds in the depravity of our nature, something that prepares it to receive the impression. One evil companion will undo in a month—all that parents and teachers have been laboring for years to accomplish. Here then pause, and consider that the **character of your associates will, in all probability, be your own.** If you do not carry to them a similarity of taste, you will be sure to acquire their dispositions; "for how can two walk together except they be agreed?"

Let me now set before you **the DANGERS to be apprehended from bad company.**

By bad company I mean all those who are destitute of the fear of God; not only the infidel, the profligate, the profane—but those who are living in the visible neglect of true religion. Now these are no fit companions for you. They may be respectable and noble as to their rank in life; they may be graceful and proper in their manners; they may be people of fine taste, and cultivated minds; humorous, and polished wit—but these things, if connected with ungodly habits, only make them the more alarmingly and successfully dangerous. They are like the fair speech, and lovely form, and glowing colors, which the serpent assumed when he attacked and destroyed the innocence of Eve. Look through these gaudy ornaments, pierce this dazzling exterior, and recognize the fang and the venom of the wily foe! The more external accomplishments any one has, if he be without the fear of God—the greater is his power to do evil. And remember, that when you have listened to his wiles, and feel the sharpness of his tooth, and the deadly agony of his venom, it will be no compensation, nor consolation—that you have looked on his gaily-colored skin, and have been ruined by the fascination of his charms! The companions you are to avoid, then, are those who are obviously living without the fear of God.

Consider the many dangers arising from such associates—you will soon leave all sense of serious piety, and lose all the impressions you may have received from a religious education. These you cannot hope to preserve; you may as soon expect to guard an impression traced with your finger in the sand from being effaced by the tide of the Atlantic ocean. Even they whose religious character has been formed for years, find it hard to preserve the spirituality of their mind in ungodly company. "Throw a blazing firebrand into snow or rain, and its brightness and heat will be quickly extinguished, so let the liveliest Christian plunge himself into sinful company, and he will soon find the warmth of his zeal abated, and the tenderness of his conscience injured."

How, then, can you expect to maintain a sense of true religion, whose habits are scarcely formed, and whose character has yet so much of the tenderness and suppleness of youth? Do consider your proneness to imitate; your dread of singularity; your love of praise; your morbid sense of shame. Can you bear the sneer, the jest, the broad, loud laugh? With none to defend you, none to join in your reverence for piety, what are you to do singly and alone?

In such company you lay yourselves open to temptation, and will probably be drawn into a great deal of guilt. In private and alone, the force of temptation and the power of depravity are very great—but how much greater when aided by the example of intimate friends. As united fires burn the fiercer, and the concentrated virus of many people thrown into the same room infected with the

plague, renders the disease more malignant—so a sinful community grows in impiety, as every member joins his brother's pollution to his own. **Nothing is so contagious as bad morals!** Evil communications corrupt good manners. Multitudes have committed those sins without scruple in society, which they could not have contemplated alone without horror. It is difficult indeed to wade against the torrent of evil example, and, generally speaking—whatever is done by the group—must either be done or approved by every individual of which it is composed.

In such company you will throw yourselves out of the way of repentance and godliness. The little relish you once had for devotional exercises will soon be lost. Your Bible will fall into disuse, the house of God will be neglected, and pious friends carefully shunned. Should an occasional revival of your serious feelings take place under a sermon, or the remonstrances of a friend, they will be immediately lulled again to repose, or banished from your bosom by the presence and conversation of an ungodly companion.

In many cases, evil society has destroyed forever even the temporal interests of those who have frequented it. Habits of self-indulgence, amusements, folly, and extravagance—have been acquired; character has been ruined, business neglected, poverty and misery entailed. But if this should not ensue, the influence of evil association will go far to ruin your souls and sink you to eternal perdition! A companion of fools shall be destroyed; their path is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death. Yes—if you connect yourselves with them, they will drag you into the vortex of their own ruin, as they sink into the gulf of eternal perdition. Is there the companion on earth whose society you will seek to retain at this dreadful hazard? Is there one, for the sake of whose friendship you would be willing to walk with him to the bottomless pit?

What though you could have the society of the best poets, philosophers, wits, and fashionables of the age—and yet were to lose your own souls—what would this profit you? Will it soothe the agonies of your spirit in those regions of horrible despair, to remember that you joyed in the company of your mirthful companions on earth? Alas! alas! all that rendered your communion on earth delightful, will then come to a final end. There will be no opportunities granted you to gratify your sensual desires together; no delicious food, no intoxicating liquors; there are no amusing tales; no merry songs there; no coruscations of wit will enliven the gloom of hell; no mirthful pleasure will brighten the darkness of eternal despair; no sallies of humor shall illumine the darkness of everlasting night. "But there shall be weeping, and wailing and gnashing of teeth—the worm that never dies, and the fire that is never quenched."

What mind but His, who comprehends the universe in his survey, can count the multitudes that have been ruined for both worlds, by the influence of bad

company. Their names have been recorded on every roll of infamy, and found in every memorial of guilt and wretchedness. The records of the workhouse and the hospital; of the jail and the prisons; of the gallows and the morgue, would declare the mischief—and could we look into the prison of lost souls, a crowd of miserable spectres would meet our eye, who seem to utter in groans of despair, this sad confession, "We are the wretched victims of evil companions!"

In the large and populous town where Providence has fixed my lot, I have had an extensive sphere of observation; and I give it as my decided conviction, and deliberate opinion, that improper companions are the most successful means which are employed by Satan for the ruin of men's souls!

The advice then which I offer is this:

- 1. Be not over anxious about getting friends.** Do not take up the opinion that all happiness centers in a friend. Many of you are blessed with a happy home and an agreeable circle round your own fireside. Here seek your companions—in your parents, and your brothers and sisters.
- 2. Determine to have no companion, rather than have an evil one.** The one case is but a privation of what is pleasant—the other is a possession of a destructive evil.
- 3. Maintain a dignified—but not proud reserve.** Do not be too open and naive. Be cautious of too hastily attaching yourselves as friends to others, or them to you. Be polite and kind to all—but communicative and familiar with few. Keep your hearts in abeyance, until your judgment has most carefully examined the characters of those who wish to be admitted to the circle of your acquaintance. Neither run nor jump into friendships—but walk towards them slowly and cautiously.
- 4. Always consult your parents about your companions, and be guided by their opinions.** They have your interest at heart, and see further and better, than you can.
- 5. Cultivate a taste for reading and mental improvement;** this will render you independent of living for society. Books will always furnish you with intelligent, useful, and elegant friends. No one can be dull who has access to the works of illustrious authors, and has a taste for reading. And after all there are but comparatively few, whose society will so richly reward us, as this 'silent converse with the mighty dead'.
- 6. Choose none for your intimate companions but those who are decidedly pious, or people of very high moral worth.** A scrupulous regard to all the duties of morality; a high reverence for the scriptures; a belief in their

essential doctrines; a constant attendance on the means of grace, are the lowest qualifications which you should require in the character of an intimate friend.

Perhaps I shall be asked one or two questions on this subject, to which an answer ought to be returned. "If," say you, "I have formed an acquaintance with a young friend, before I had any serious impressions upon my mind, ought I now to leave his society, if he still remains destitute of any visible regard to true religion?" First try, by every effort which affection can dictate, and prudence direct, to impress his mind with a sense of true religion—if, after awhile your exertions should be unavailing, candidly tell him, that as you have taken different views of things, and acquired different tastes to what you formerly possessed; and that as you have failed to bring him to your way of living, and can no longer accommodate your pursuits to his, conscience demands of you a separation from his society.

Sir Matthew Hale, one of the most upright and able judges that ever sat upon the bench, was nearly ruined by his dissolute companions. When young, he had been very studious and sober—but the players happening to come to the town where he was studying, he became a witness of their performance, by which he was so captivated that his mind lost its relish for study, and he addicted himself to dissipated company. When in the midst of his associates one day, it pleased God to visit one of them with sudden death. Matthew was struck with horror and remorse. He retired and prayed, first for his friend, that if the vital spark had not fled, he might be restored; and then for himself, that he might never more be found in such places and company as would render him unfit to meet death. From that day he left all his wicked companions, walked no more in the way of sinners—but devoted himself to piety and literature.

Young people of good habits should take great heed that they do not, by insensible degrees, become dangerous characters to each other. That social turn of mind, which is natural to men, and especially to young people, may perhaps lead them to form themselves into little societies, particularly at the festive season of the year, to spend their evenings together. But let me entreat you to be cautious how you spend them. If your games and your talks take up your time until you entrench on the night; and perhaps on the morning too, you will quickly corrupt each other. Farewell, then, to prayer, and every other religious exercise in secret. Farewell, then, to all my pleasing hopes for you, and to those hopes which your pious parents have entertained. You will then become examples and instances of all the evils I have so largely described.

Plead not that these things are lawful in themselves; so are most of those in a certain degree which, by their abuse, prove destruction to men's souls and bodies. If you meet, let it be for rational and Christian conversation; and let prayer and other devotions have their frequent place among you—and if you say

or think that a mixture of these will spoil the company, it is high time for you to stop your career, and call yourselves to an account; for it seems by such a thought, that you are lovers of pleasure, much more than lovers of God. Some of these things may appear to have a tincture of severity—but consider whether I could have proved myself faithful to you, and to him in whose name I speak, if I had omitted the caution I have now been giving you. I shall now only add, that had I loved you less tenderly, I should have warned you more coldly of this dangerous and deadly snare!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

ON BOOKS

The invention of the art of **printing**, forms an era in the history of mankind, next in importance to the promulgation of the law, and the publication of the gospel. Until this splendid gift was bestowed upon man, books, which were all in manuscript, were circulated within a comparatively narrow sphere, and knowledge was in the possession of only a privileged few. This invaluable art, however, rendered the fountains of information accessible to all, and gave opportunity to the poorest of our race, to slake their mental thirst at the deepest and purest streams of truth. There was a time when ignorance was rather a misfortune than a reproach; and when, indeed, a craving after information would, with many, have been rather a calamity than a benefit—since the means of satisfying the appetite were beyond their reach. The state of things is altered now, and almost a whole circle of science may be purchased for a few shillings.

Education is also much improved and extended. Under these circumstances, ignorance is a deep reproach; and a young person who can allow days and weeks to pass without taking up a book, is a pitiable spectacle of doltish insipidity. Cultivate, then, my children, a taste for reading; and, in order to this, there must be a thirst after information. "Knowledge," says Lord Bacon, "is power;" and if it were not power—it is pleasure. Knowledge gives us weight of character, and procures for us respect. Knowledge enables us to form an opinion with correctness, to state it with clearness, to offer it with confidence, and to enforce it with argument. It enlarges the sphere of our usefulness, by raising the degree of our influence. Other things being equal, that man will be the most useful, who has the greatest measure of information. Here I shall offer some directions for your guidance in the selection of books.

The BIBLE of course occupies the supreme place, an elevation exclusively its own. It is, as its title signifies, THE BOOK—the standard of all right sentiments;

the judge of all other works. Sir William Jones, that prodigy of learning, wrote on the fly-leaf of his Bible these remarks—"I have carefully and regularly perused these holy Scriptures, and am of opinion that the volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever language they may have been written." Salmasius, the learned antagonist of Milton, said on his death-bed, "That were he to begin life again, he would spend much of his time in reading David's Psalms and Paul's Epistles." Whatever books you neglect, then, my children, neglect not the Bible. Whatever books you read, read this. Let not a day pass without perusing some portion of holy writ. Read it devoutly; not from curiosity, nor with a view to controversy—but to be made wise unto salvation. Read it with much prayer. Read it with a determination to follow its guidance wheresoever it leads.

As to that class of books denominated **novels**, I join with every other moral and religious writer in condemning, as the vilest trash, the greater part of the productions, which, under this name, have carried a turbid stream of vice over the morals of mankind. They corrupt the taste, pollute the heart, debase the mind, demoralize the conduct. They throw prostrate the understanding, sensualize the affections, enervate the will, and bring all the high faculties of the soul into subjection to an imagination which they have first made wild, insane, and uncontrollable. They furnish no ideas, and generate a morbid, sickly sentimentalism, instead of a just and lovely sensibility. A wise man should despise them, and a godly man should abhor them.

As to **religious novels**, they are rarely worth your attention. I would be sorry to see this species of writing become the general reading of the Christian public. Symptoms of a craving appetite for this species of mental food have been very apparent of late. These are far more likely to lead young people of pious education to read other kinds of novels, than they are to attract the readers of the latter to pious tales. They have already, in many cases, formed a taste for works of fiction, which is gratifying itself with far more exceptionable productions. They have become the harbingers, in some families, of works, which, until they entered, would have been forbidden to pass the threshold.

It is very evident that the taste of the present age is strongly inclined for works of fiction. I am not unacquainted with the arguments by which such productions are justified, nor am I by any means prepared to pronounce a sweeping sentence of condemnation upon them all. Genius is elicited and cherished by writing them; and taste is formed, corrected, and gratified, by reading them. Provided they are totally free from all unscriptural sentiments and immoral tendencies, they form a recreation for the mind, and keep it from amusements of a worse character. I am also aware that they may be, and have been, made the vehicle of much instruction. Johnson tells us that this, among many other arts of

instruction, has been invented, that the reluctance against truth might be overcome. And as medicine is given to children in confections, biblical precepts have been hidden under a thousand appearances, that mankind may be bribed by a pleasure to escape destruction.

Will not history and biography answer all the ends of fiction, unattended with its injurious effects? Here all is life, variety, and interest. Here is everything to amuse, to recreate. Here the finest moral lessons are inculcated in the details of facts. Here are passions, motives, actions—all forming the most exquisite delineations of character, set home upon the heart with the aid of the powerful conviction that these are facts. I am sure that none can have attended to the more secret and subtle operations of their own minds, without perceiving that a display of virtue or vice, embodied in fact, has inconceivably more power over the mind, than the same character exhibited by the most extraordinary genius in a fiction. While reading the latter, we may have been deeply affected, we may have glowed with anger at the sight of vice, melted with pity at the display of misery, or soared in rapture at the exhibition of excellence—but when the book is laid down, and the mind recovers from the illusion, does not the recollection, that all this was the creation of imagination, exert a cold and chilling influence upon the heart, and go far to efface almost every favorable impression, until, by a kind of revenge for the control which a fiction has had over us, we determine to forget all we have felt. We cannot do this in rising from a fact.

Fiction is generally overwrought. It is vice in caricature, or virtue in enamel; the former is frequently too bad to be dreaded as likely to happen to us; the latter too high to be an object of expectation. All the attendant circumstances are too artificially contrived. There is little that is like it in real life. Our passions are too much excited, our hopes are too much raised. And when we come from this ideal world into the every-day scenes of ordinary life, we feel a sense of dullness, because everything looks tame and commonplace. The effect of such works is great for the time—but it is not a useful effect—it is like the influence of ardent spirits, which fit men for desperate adventures—but not for the more steady and sober efforts of ordinary enterprise.

Observe then, although I do not totally condemn all works of fiction, for then I would censure the practice of Him who spoke as never man spoke, whose parables were fictitious representations; yet I advise a sparing and cautious perusal of them, whether written in poetry or prose. History, biography, travels, accounts of the manners and customs of nations, will answer all the ends of fiction; they will amuse, and they will in the most easy and pleasing way instruct. They will exhibit to us every possible view of human nature, and every conceivable variety of character. They will introduce us to a real world, and exhibit to us the feelings and the excellences of men of like passions with

ourselves; and who, according to the complexion of their character, may be regarded as beacons to warn us, or the polar star to guide us.

Again, and again, I say, cultivate, my children, a taste for the acquisition of knowledge; thirst after information as the miser does after wealth; treasure up ideas with the same eagerness as he does pieces of gold. Let it not be said, that for you the greatest of human beings have lived, and the most splendid of human minds have written—in vain. You live in a world of books, and they contain worlds of thought. Devote all the time that can lawfully be spared from business to reading. Lose not an hour. Ever have some favorite author at hand, to the perusal of whose production, the hours, and half-hours, which would otherwise be wasted, might be devoted. **Time is precious. Its fragments, like those of diamonds, are too valuable to be lost.** Let no day pass without your attempting to gain some new idea. Your first object of existence, as I have already stated, should be the salvation of your soul; the next, the benefit of your fellow-creatures; and then comes the improvement of your mind.

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

AMUSEMENTS AND RECREATIONS

It is a trite remark, that the mind, like a bow, will lose its power by being always strained; and that occasional relaxation from the cares of business is necessary to preserve the vigor and elasticity of the human faculties. Allowing this to be true, it becomes a question, in what way recreation may be lawfully sought; or, in other words, what kind of amusement may be innocently resorted to. Here TWO RULES may be laid down.

1. All recreations are improper which have an injurious influence upon the moral and religious character. This is an axiom. No reasoning is necessary to support it—no eloquence is requisite to illustrate it—none but an atheist can oppose it.

2. All recreations are improper which, by their nature, have a tendency to dissipate the mind, and unfit it for the pursuit of business; or which encroach too much on the time demanded for our necessary occupations. This rule is as intelligible and as just as the former.

These two directions, the propriety of which all must admit, will be quite sufficient to guide us in the choice of amusements.

First, there are some diversions, which, by leading us to inflict pain—produce 'cruelty of disposition'.

A reluctance to inflict misery, even to an insect, is not a mere decoration of the character, which we are left at liberty to wear or to neglect—but it is a disposition which we are commanded, as matter of duty to cherish. It is a necessary part of virtue. It is impossible to inflict pain, and connect the idea of gratification with such an act, without experiencing some degree of mental hardening. We are not surprised that he who, while a boy, amused himself in killing flies, should, when he became a master, exhibit the character of a cruel and remorseless tyrant. To find pleasure in causing animals to fight and devour each other, is a disposition truly diabolical; and the man who can find delight in dog-fighting, cock-fighting, bull-baiting—is quite prepared to imitate those cannibals who sported with the mangled carcasses and palpitating limbs of their murdered victims, and dragged them about with their teeth in their gardens.

Horse-racing, in addition to the cruelty with which it is attended, is generally a means of assembling on the course, all the gamesters, swindlers, and vile characters in the neighborhood—and is the cause of much drunkenness, debauchery, and ruin. All field sports, of every kind, are, in my view, condemned by the laws of humanity. Shooting, hunting, fishing—are all cruel. What agony is inflicted in hooking a worm or a fish; in maiming a bird; in chasing and distressing a rabbit. And to find sport in doing this, is inhuman and unchristian. To say that these animals are given for food, and must be killed, is not a reply to my argument. I am not contending against killing them, or eating them—but against **the act of killing of them for sport!**

The infliction of death, under any circumstances, and upon any creature, however insignificant in the scale of creation, is too serious a matter to be a source of amusement. No two terms can be more incongruous than death and sport. It seems totally monstrous, that after having subjected the irrational creation to the terrors of death by his sin, man should experience pleasure in executing the sentence. Death is the enemy even of animals. And irrational creates manifest symptoms of instinctive horror at man's approach. For one to find delight in throwing the shuddering victim to the devourer, is shocking. I would extend these remarks to all animals, and say, that it is unlawful to find sport in killing such as are harmful. Wolves, bears, serpents, are to be destroyed when their continuance endangers human life—but to find pleasure in the act of killing even these, has a hardening tendency on the human heart.

Secondly. Some amusements tend to cherish selfish and avaricious feelings—and at the same time tend to produce that gambling taste which leads to the utter ruin of both the temporal and eternal interests of mankind. Billiards, cards, dice, have this tendency—and indeed, all other

games that are played for money. The object of the player in these games is to get money, by a speedy process. What arts of fraud and deception are often resorted to, in order to avoid the loss and shame of defeat—and secure the gain and honor of success! What anger and ill-will are often produced in the mind of the unsuccessful party! Even the rules of decorum observed in polished society, are not sufficient, in many cases, to restrain the passionate invective, and the profane oath. I may here most confidently appeal to the frequenters of the card-table, for the truth of what I say, when I affirm, that the lack of success during an evening at whist is a trial of temper, which few are able to bear with honor to themselves, or the comfort of those around them. Passion, petulance, and sullenness are always waiting under the table, ready to appear in the person and conduct of the loser.

I have had scenes described to me by spectators of them, which I would have thought a disgrace to the vulgar company assembled at an alehouse, much more the polite party in the drawing-room. Have not the most serious misunderstandings arisen from this source between man and wife! What wrath and fury has the latter, by her tide of ill success, brought down upon her head from her irritated husband. The winner sees all this, retains his ill-gotten gain, and knows not all the while, that a chilling frost of selfishness is upon his heart, freezing up the generous feelings of his nature.

Nothing is more bewitching than the love of **gambling**. The winner having tasted the sweets of gain, is led forward by the hope of still greater gain; while the loser plunges deeper and deeper into ruin, with the delusive expectation of retrieving his lost fortune. How many have ruined themselves and their families forever by this mad passion! How many have thrown down the cards or dice, only to take up the pistol or the poison; and have rushed, with all their crimes about them, from the gambling-table to the—fiery lake of hell!

To affirm that these remarks are applicable only to those who play high, is nothing; because **it is the nature of vice to be progressive**. Besides, it is a fact, that many tradesmen, and even laboring people, have ruined themselves by the love of gambling. It is, as I have said, a most ensnaring practice, leading us from one degree to another, until multitudes who begin with only an occasional game, end in the most confirmed and inveterate habits of gambling.

Thirdly. Some amusements tend to foster vanity and pride, while, at the same time, they generate a distaste for all the serious pursuits of true piety, and the sober occupations of domestic life.

If I mistake not, these remarks will apply to balls, games, and concerts. I am not quite sure that the morals of society have not suffered considerable deterioration by such assemblies. Circumstances are connected with this species of

amusement, the tendency of which is more than questionable. The mode of dress adopted at these fashionable resorts; the nature of the employment; the dissipating tendency of the music, the conversation, and the elegant uproar; the lateness of the hour to which the dazzling scene is protracted; the love of display which is produced; the false varnish which is thrown over many a worthless character, by the fascinating exterior which he exhibits in a ball room—have a tendency to break down the mounds of virtue, and expose the beholder to the encroachments of vice.

And if it were conceded, which it certainly cannot be, that no immoral consequence results to those who occupy the upper walks of life, who are protected by the decorum of elegant society, yet what mischief is produced to their humble imitators, who attend the assemblies which are held in the barn or the ale-house!

I look upon **dancing**, among these, to be a practice fraught with immorality; and my soul is horrified at this moment by remembering the details of a most tragic event which occurred in this neighborhood a few years since, to an young female, who, after having lost her virtue on the night that followed the dance, was found, a few hours after, murdered, either by her seducer or herself. Have nothing to do then with this fascinating, though injurious species of amusement. Besides, what an encroachment does it make upon time, which is demanded for other pursuits! How does it dissipate the mind, and poison it with a vain and frivolous taste for dress and personal decoration! How completely does it unfit the soul for piety, and even the necessary occupations of domestic life! Let there be a love once acquired for these elegant recreations by any female, and, from my heart, I pity the man who is destined to be her husband!

My opinion of the STAGE I shall reserve for a separate chapter; in the meantime I shall reply to a question which, no doubt, before this, you are ready to ask, **"What amusements I would recommend?"**

I do not hesitate at once to observe, that young people stand in much less need than is supposed, of any amusement properly so called. Their spirits are buoyant, their cares are light, their sorrows are few, and their occupations rarely very fatiguing to the mind. What more is necessary beyond mere change of employment, I should say, may be found in activities both strengthening to the body, and improving to the mind. **A country ramble** amid the beauties of nature, where, surrounded by sights and sounds which have awakened and cherished the spirit of poetry, we may admire the works of God and man together, will, to every mind of taste or piety, be quite enough to refresh and stimulate the wearied faculties.

The perusal of an entertaining and instructive book, where our best authors have said their best things, and in their best manner too, will have the same effect. My children, acquire a taste for **reading**. Aspire to an independence of the 'butterfly pursuits of the pleasure hunter'. Seek for that thirst after knowledge, which, when the soul is jaded with the dull and daily round of secular affairs, shall conduct her to the fountains of thought contained in the well-stocked library—where, as she drinks the pure perennial streams of knowledge, she forgets in their murmurs the toils of the day. And where young people are happily situated beneath the wing of their parents, the pleasures of home, the agreeable communion of the domestic circle are no base or insufficient recreation from the fatigues of business.

But perhaps many a youthful bosom will at this thought heave a sigh, and sorrowfully exclaim, "I am not at home. In that beloved retreat, and with its dear inhabitants, I would need no further amusements. My father's greeting smile; my mother's fond embrace; the welcome of my brothers and my sisters; the kind looks, the fond inquiries, the interesting though unimportant conversation of all, would recruit my strength, and recreate my mind. But I am far from these. I am in a distant town, a stranger in a strange place; a mere lodger, where the attentions which I receive are all bought and paid for. Wearied and dispirited, I oftentimes return from the scene of labor, and find in the cold and heartless salutation of my employer, and in the dreary solitude of my own chamber, that I am, indeed, not at home. Often and often, as I sit musing away the hour that intervenes between business and sleep, and carrying out into painful contrast my lodging and my home.

Who can wonder that in such a situation I should occasionally pay a visit to the theater, or the concert, and seek to forget that I am not at home—by amusements which have a tendency to drown reflection and divert my mind. Oh! give me again the pleasures of home, and I will make a cheerful surrender of all that I have adopted as their substitutes."

I feel for such young people. I too have been in their situation; I have felt all that they feel. I have wept at the contrast between being a stranger—and a happy child at home. I too have returned at night to meet the silent look, or cheerless greeting of the hostess, instead of the smiling countenance and fond expression of the mother who bore me, the father who loved me. I too have retired to my room to weep at thoughts of home. I can therefore sympathize with you. And shall I tell you how, in these circumstances, I alleviated my sorrows and rendered my situation not only tolerable—but even sometimes pleasant? By the exercises and influence of true piety; by the communion of a holy fellowship with pious companions; and by the assistance of books. Try, do be persuaded to try the same means.

"RELIGION, what treasures untold
Reside in that heavenly word!
More precious than silver and gold,
Or all that this earth can afford."

This will find you a home, and a father and friends—in every place. It will soften your banishment, and open to you springs of consolation, which shall send their precious streams into your forlorn abode. It will render you independent of the theater and the ball-room. It will guard you from vices, which, where they are committed, only serve to render the recollection of home still more intolerable. It will give you an interest and a share in all the pious institutions which are formed in the congregation with which you associate, and will thus offer you a recreation in the exercise of a holy and enlightened philanthropy.

Amusements, in the usual acceptance of the word, are but the miserable expedients resorted to by the ignorant and unsanctified mind of man for happiness; the ineffectual efforts to restore that peace which man lost by the fall, and which nothing but true piety can bring back to the human bosom. In departing from God, the soul of man strayed from the pasture to the wilderness, and now is ever sorrowfully exclaiming, as she wanders on, who will show us any good? To relieve her sense of need, and satisfy her cravings, she is directed to amusements—but they prove only the flowers of the desert, which, with all their beauty, do not satisfy.

No, no. It is the return of the soul to God through faith in Jesus Christ which can alone give true and satisfying delight. Believing in him—we have peace which passes understanding—the mind is at rest in the contemplation of saving truth—and the heart in the enjoyment of the chief good. Peace with God, attended by peace with conscience, producing peace with the world, and affording a foretaste of peace beyond the grave—gives a feast to the soul, compared with which worldly pleasures are but as noxious and gaudy flowers around the food of an hungry man, adding nothing to its relish by their colors, and only spoiling all by their odors. True religion conducts us to the fountain of living waters, and shows that these things are but broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Amusements are but expedients to make men happy without piety. The mere husks, which they only crave after, and feed upon, who are destitute of the bread which comes down from heaven; and which are rejected by those who have their appetite satisfied with this celestial manna.

In addition to this, **cultivate a taste for reading**. Employ your leisure hours in gaining knowledge. Thus even your situation will be rendered comparatively comfortable, and the thoughts of home will neither destroy your happiness, nor send you for consolation to the polluting sources of worldly amusement.

But there are some who will reply, "I have neither taste for true religion nor reading, and what amusements do you recommend to me?" None at all. What, that man talk of amusement, who, by his own confession, is under the curse of heaven's eternal law, and the wrath of heaven's incensed King? AMUSEMENT! what, for the poor wretch who is on the brink of perdition, the verge of hell, and may the next hour be lifting up his eyes in torment, and calling for a drop of water to cool his parched tongue! Diversion! what, for him who is every moment exposed to that sentence, "Depart from me, accursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" What, going on to that place where the worm dies not, and the fire is never quenched; where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth—and calling for amusements! Oh monstrous absurdity! We have heard of prisoners dancing in their chains—but who ever heard of a poor creature asking for amusements on his way to the place of execution? This is your case. While you have no taste for true piety, you are certainly under sentence of eternal wrath. You are every day traveling to execution. Yet you are asking for amusements! And what will be your reflections in the world of despair, to recollect that the season of hope was employed by you, not in seeking the salvation of the soul, and everlasting happiness—but in mere idle diversions, which were destroying you at the very time they amused you! Then will you learn, when the instruction will do you no good, that you voluntarily relinquished the fullness of joy which God's presence affords, and the eternal pleasures which are to be found at his right hand, for the joy of fools, which as Solomon truly says, is but as "the crackling of thorns beneath the pot." Before you think of amusement seek for true piety!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

ON THEATRICAL AMUSEMENTS

I do not hesitate for a moment to pronounce the THEATER to be one of the broadest avenues which lead to destruction. Fascinating, no doubt it is—but on that account the more delusive and the more dangerous. Let a young man once acquire a taste for this species of entertainment, and yield himself up to its gratification, and he is in imminent danger of becoming a lost character—rushing upon his ruin! All the evils that can waste his property, corrupt his morals, blast his reputation, impair his health, embitter his life, and destroy his soul, lurk in the confines of a theater. Vice, in every form, lives, and moves, and has its being there! Myriads have cursed the hour when they first exposed themselves to the contamination of the theater. From that fatal evening, they date their destruction. Then they threw off the restraint of education, and learned how to disregard the dictates of conscience. Then their decision, hitherto oscillating

between a life of virtue and of vice—was made for the latter. But I will attempt to support by arguments and facts these strong assertions.

The theater cannot be defended as an amusement; for the proper end of an amusement is to recreate without fatiguing or impairing the strength or spirit. It should invigorate, not exhaust the bodily and mental powers; should spread an agreeable serenity over the mind and be enjoyed at proper seasons. Is midnight the time, or the heated atmosphere of a theater the place, or the passionate, tempestuous excitement of a deep tragedy the state of mind, that comes up to this view of the design of amusement? Certainly not. But what I wish particularly to insist upon is, the immoral and anti-christian tendency of the theater. In order to judge of this immoral and anti-christian tendency, let us look at the precepts of God's word. Here I will select a few out of many passages of the Holy Scriptures.

Texts which relate to our conversation, or the right use of SPEECH—

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, who takes his name in vain. Exod. 20:7.

I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment, for by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned. Matt. 12:36, 37.

Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners. 1 Cor. 15:33.

Let no corrupt communications proceed out of your mouth—but that which is good to the use of edifying that it may minister grace to the hearers. Ephes. 4:29.

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt. Col. 4:6.

But above all things, my brethren, swear not. James 5:12.

It is evident then, from these passages, that the Bible forbids all conversation which is idle, impure, or obscene—and commands us to employ the gift of speech in no other way than that which is good and to the use of edifying. Now I confidently ask if there is scarcely one popular play ever performed which is not polluted, in very many places, with the grossest and most shocking violations of these sacred rules. What irreverent appeals to heaven, what horrible abuse of the thrice holy name of God, what profane swearing, what filthy conversation, what lewd discourse, are poured forth from the lips of almost every actor that comes upon the stage. Can it be a lawful entertainment to be amused by hearing men and women insult God by cursing, swearing, and taking his holy name in vain? It is nothing to say that this is only done by the actors and, not by the

spectators, because we are commanded not to be partakers, even by attendance and support, of other men's sins.

Passages which condemn all impurity of MIND and CONDUCT—

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Matt. 5:8.

I say unto you that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her already in his heart. Matt. 5:28.

Now the works of the flesh are these—sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, and envy, drunkenness, revellings, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21

It must be evident to every one who reads with impartiality the word of God, that the most remote approach to lewdness is forbidden by the scriptures, even the excursions of the imagination, and the wanton exercise of the senses. It is obviously the design of the Bible to form a character of the most elevated and refined purity, in which the lustful passions shall be in a state of entire subjection to undefiled piety. Now, I ask, is it possible to comply with this design, if we attend the theater, where, in every possible way, appeals are made to these carnal propensities of our nature? Will any man in his senses contend that a playhouse is the place where men are taught to be pure in heart, and assisted to oppose and mortify "those fleshly lusts which war against the soul?"

"It is as unnecessary to tell the reader, that the playhouse is in fact the sink of corruption and debauchery; that it is the general rendezvous of the most profligate people of both sexes; that it corrupts the neighborhood; and turns the adjacent places into public nuisances; this is as unnecessary as it is to tell him that the marketplace is a place of business."

Let me set before you also, a few passages which are given in scripture to regulate our GENERAL CONDUCT—

"Lead us not into temptation—but deliver us from evil."

"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

"If you live after the flesh you shall die."

"Flee youthful lusts."

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness."

"Pray without ceasing."

"Watch the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

"Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge temperance, to temperance patience, to patience godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, brotherly kindness charity."

"Let your affections be set on things above, and not on things on earth."

"To be spiritually-minded is life and peace—but to be carnally-minded is death."

From these passages it is evident that the spirit enjoined and the character to be formed by Scripture, consist of humility, meekness, purity, spirituality of mind, heavenliness of affection, devotion, watchfulness against sin, caution not to go in the way of temptation. Now it would be to insult the common sense of every one who is conversant with the theater, to ask if such dispositions as these are enjoined and cherished by dramatic representations. I suppose no one ever pretended, that these saintly virtues are taught by the tragic or the comic actor. If our Lord's sermon on the mount, or the twelfth chapter to the Romans, or any other portion of inspired truth, be selected as a specimen and a standard of Christian morals, then certainly the theater must be condemned. Light and darkness are not more opposed to each other, than the Bible and the theater. If the one be good the other must be evil; if the scriptures are to be obeyed, the theater must be avoided. The man who at church on the Sabbath day, responds to the third or the seventh commandment, "Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law;" who presents so often on that day the petition, "Lead us not into temptation—but deliver us from evil," is, to say the least of his conduct, the most glaring instance of absurdity in the world—if he on other days attends the theater.

The only way to justify the theater, as it is, as it ever has been, as it is ever likely to be, is to condemn the Bible—the same individual cannot defend both. The one is too strict, or the other is too lax.

Now the Bible, the Bible, my dear children, is the standard of morals. No matter by what plausible arguments a practice may be defended; no matter by what authority it may be sanctioned, if it be in opposition to the letter or the spirit of the Bible, it is wicked and must be abandoned. Even were the theater as friendly as its warmest admirers contend, to the cultivation of taste; if in some things it tended to repress some of the minor faults or vices of society—yet if, as a whole, its tendency is to encourage immorality—it must be condemned, and abandoned, and deserted! All I ask you is to weigh its pretensions in the balance of the sanctuary, and to test its merits by the only authorized standard of morals, the

Bible, and sure I am you will never hesitate for a moment, to pronounce it unlawful.

It is an indubitable fact that the theater has flourished most, in the most corrupt and depraved state of society—and that in proportion as sound morality, industry and true religion, advance their influence—the theater is deserted. It is equally true, that among the most passionate admirers, and most constant frequenters of the theater, are to be found the most dissolute and wicked of mankind. Is it not too manifest to be denied, that piety as instinctively shrinks from the theater, as human life does from the point of a sword, or the draught of poison? Have not all those who have professed the most elevated piety and morality, borne an unvarying and uniform testimony against the theater? Even the more virtuous pagans have condemned this amusement, as injurious to morals, and the interests of nations—Solon, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Livy, Valerius Maximus, Cato, Seneca, Tacitus—the most venerable men of antiquity—the brightest constellation of virtue and talents which ever appeared upon the hemisphere of philosophy—have all denounced the theater as a most abundant source of moral pollution, and assure us that both Greece and Rome had their ruin accelerated by a fatal passion for these corrupting entertainments.

William Prynne, a satirical and pungent writer, has made a catalogue of authorities against the theater, which contains every name of eminence in the heathen and Christian world—it comprehends the united testimony of the Jewish and Christian churches; the deliberate acts of fifty-four ancient and modern, general, national, provisional councils and synods, both of the Western and Eastern churches; the condemnatory sentence of seventy-one ancient fathers, and one hundred and fifty modern Christian authors; the hostile endeavors of philosophers and even poets; with the legislative enactments of a great number of pagan and Christian states, nations, magistrates, emperors, and princes.

The American Congress, soon after the declaration of Independence, passed the following motion: "Whereas, true religion and good morals are the only solid foundation of public liberty and happiness,

"Resolved, that it be, and hereby is, earnestly recommended by the several States, to take the most effectual measures for the encouragement thereof, and for the suppression of theatrical entertainments, horse-racing, gaming, and such other diversions as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of principles and manners."

Now must not this be regarded in the light of very strong presumptive evidence of the immoral tendency of the theater? Does it not approach as near as can be to the general opinion of the whole moral world?

But let us examine the average character of those productions which are represented on the theater. If we go to TRAGEDY, we shall find that pride, ambition, revenge, suicide, the passionate love of fame and glory—all of which Christianity is intended to extirpate from the human bosom—are inculcated by the most popular plays in this department of the drama. It is true, gross cruelty, murder, and that lawless pride, ambition, and revenge, which trample on all the rights and interests of mankind, are denounced—but I would ask, who needs to see vice acted, in order to hate it? or will its being acted for our amusement be likely to increase our hatred of it upon right principles?

As to COMEDY, this is a thousand times more polluting than tragedy. Love and intrigue; prodigality dressed in the garb of generosity; profaneness dignified by the name of fashionable spirit; and even seduction and adultery; these are the usual materials which the comic actor combines and adorns, to please and instruct his votaries. This department of the drama is almost unmixed pollution. How often is some profligate, dissolute person, introduced to the spectators, furnished with a few traits of frankness and generosity, to interest them by his wicked career; and who so far reconciles them all to his crimes, as to tolerate his atrocities—for the sake of his open hearted, good-humored virtues. Who can wonder that young women should be prepared by such stuff, for any intrigue with a bold and wily adventurer; or that young men should be encouraged to play the good-natured heroic profligate, which they have seen such a favorite with the public on the theater?

Besides, how saturated, as I have already observed, are both tragedies and comedies with irreverent appeals to heaven, profane swearing, and all the arts of falsehood and deception! What lascivious allusions are made, what impure passages are repeated! What a fatal influence must this have upon the delicacy of female modesty. Think too of a young man coming at the hour of midnight from such a scene, with his passions inflamed by everything he has seen, and everything he has heard; and then having to pass through ranks of wretched creatures waiting to ensnare him, and rob him of his virtue; does it not require extraordinary strength of principle to resist the attack?

I admit that modern plays are, in some measure, purified from that excessive grossness which polluted the performances of our more ancient dramatists. But who knows not that vice is more mischievous in some circles of society, in proportion as it is more 'refined'. The innuendos and double entendres of modern plays, "are well understood, and applied by a licentious audience; and the buzz of approbation, which is heard through the whole assembly, furnishes abundant proof that the effect is not lost." Little will be popular with the public in the shape of comedy, farce or opera—but what is pretty highly seasoned with indelicate sensual allusions. Hence it is that even the newspaper critics, whose morality is, in general, not of the most saintly character, so often mention the

too-barefaced indecencies of new plays. **Dramatic writers know very well how to cater for the public taste.**

How many sentiments are continually uttered on the theater, how many indelicate sensual allusions are made which no man who had any regard to the virtue of his sons, or the feelings of his daughters, would allow to be uttered at his table. Are not whole passages repeatedly recited, which no modest man would allow to be read before the family? Nothing but the approval of the public, could induce many females to sit and listen to that which they hear at the theater. Were any man to quote in company some of the expressions which are in constant iteration at the play-house, would he not be regarded as a person most dangerous to the virtue of others? And yet these nauseating exhibitions are heard with pleasure, when they are heard with the multitude.

Can this be friendly to modesty, to virtue, to piety? Must there not be an insensible corrosion going on under such an influence upon the fine polish of female excellence, and upon the moral principle of the other sex? Is this avoiding the appearance of evil? Is it in accordance with that morality which makes an unchaste feeling to be sin—and that injunction which commands us to watch the heart with all diligence?

Then remember all the **accompaniments** of the theater—the fascinations of music, painting, action, oratory—and say if when these are enlisted in the cause of fiction, they do not raise the passions above their proper tone—and thus **induce a dislike to grave and serious subjects, and a distaste for all the milder and more necessary virtues of domestic life.**

Add to this the people who are generally attracted to the theater. I do not say that all who frequent the theater are immoral—but I do affirm, that the most polluting and polluted people of the town are sure to be there. Is it not a fact that a person who could not wish to have his eyes and ears shocked with sights and sounds of indecency, must keep at a distance from the avenues of the theater? for these are ever crowded with the vilest characters of both sexes. Sir John Hawkins has a remark which strikingly illustrates and confirms what I have now advanced. "Although it is said of plays, that they teach morality, and of the theater, that it is the mirror of human life, these assertions have no foundation in truth—but are mere rhetoric. On the contrary, a play house, and the region about it, are the hot-beds of vice. How else comes it to pass, that no sooner is a theater opened in any part of the country, than it becomes surrounded by houses of ill-fame? Of this truth, the neighborhood of the place I am now speaking of has had experience. One parish has expended a great sum, for the purpose of removing these vile inhabitants, whom the play-house had drawn there."

The arguments against the theater are strengthened by a reference to the general habits of the performers, and the influence which their employment has in the formation of their character. And here I may assert, that the sentiments of mankind have generally consigned this wretched class of beings to infamy. The story of the unfortunate Laberius exhibits, in a strong point of view, the odium which was attached to the profession of an actor among the Romans. Compelled by Caesar, at an advanced period of life, to appear on the theater to recite some of his own works, he felt his character as a Roman citizen insulted and disgraced; and in some affecting verses, spoken on the occasion, he incensed the audience against the tyrant, by whose mandate he was obliged to appear before them. "After having lived," said he, "sixty years with honor, I left my house this morning a Roman knight, but shall return to it this evening an infamous theater player. Alas! I have lived a day too long!"

As to the feelings of modern times, is there a family in Britain, of the least moral worth, even among the middling classes of tradesmen, which would not feel itself disgraced, if any one of its members were to embrace this profession? I ask, if the characters of the actors is not in general so vile, as to make it matter of surprise to find one that is truly moral? A performer, whether male or female, who maintains an unspotted reputation, is considered as an exception to the general rule. Their employment, together with the indolent line of life to which it leads, is most contaminating to their morals. The habit of assuming a 'pretend character', and exhibiting 'unreal passions', must have a very injurious effect on their principles of integrity and truth. They are so accustomed to represent the arts of intrigue and gallantry, that it is little to be wondered at, if they should practice them in the most unrestrained manner.

Of the truth of this description of **the moral character of actors and actresses**, most convincing evidence is afforded by the disgusting disclosures which have been made in a court of law, in reference to two of the most celebrated performers of the day. In speaking of one of them, the Times paper observes, "The conduct of people who appear on the theater has ever been the most wicked; and it may be doubted whether such a mass of living vice as the actors and actresses but too generally present in their private lives, is not more injurious to public morals, than the splendid examples of virtue which they exhibit in their theatrical characters, are useful. It appears, however, that Kean, the defendant in the cause which was tried yesterday, is advanced many steps in profligacy beyond the most profligate of his sisters and brethren of the theater. Some of Kean's letters are of so filthy a description that we cannot insert them. Yet have the managers of Drury Lane Theater the effrontery to present, or to attempt presenting, such a creature to the gaze of a British audience. It is of little consequence to the nation whether the character of King Richard or Othello be well or ill acted—but it is of importance that public feeling be not shocked, and public decency be outraged."—Times Newspaper, Tuesday, Jan. 18th, 1825.

Doubtless our morals and taste as a nation will be wonderfully improved by such lectures and examples as these. These are the characters which young men and young women are sent to the play-houses to admire; which husbands and wives, and sons and daughters are to witness, as teaching not only by theory but by practice—the vices that corrupt the mind and pollute society. An admirable school for morals truly! When will the virtuous part of the community, with unanimous and indignant voice, condemn the play-house as a moral nuisance, which no wise and good man ought to tolerate? When!

I was visited some years ago by an individual who had been for a long time engaged as an actor—but who was then most anxious to be liberated from, what he had at length been brought to confess and to loathe—as a most immoral profession. In considerable distress, he implored me to assist him in endeavoring to flee from a situation, of which he felt it difficult to say whether the vice or the misery was the greater. Never did a captive more detest his fetters, or more covet to be free, than this poor creature did to be liberated from the thralldom in which he groaned.

To send young people therefore to the play-house to form their manners, is to expect they will learn truth from liars, virtue from profligates, and modesty from harlots.

Can it then be right, even on the supposition that we could escape the moral contagion of the theater, to support a set of our fellow-creatures in idleness, and in a profession which leads to immorality, licentiousness, and profligacy?

But, my dear children, I have not only arguments to bring in proof of the immoral tendency of the theater—but I have facts. It is useless to contend against these. I am distressed while I write, to think of the once promising young men, who, to my certain knowledge, have been utterly ruined by resorting to this scene of polluting amusement. I am not allowed to disclose the details, or I could unfold a tale that would shock every right feeling in your hearts.

Take warning then, and have nothing to do with the theater. Avoid it as one of the avenues to the broad road that leads to destruction. Do not run with the multitude to do evil. Do not be thrown off your guard, and enticed to sin, by being directed to some who have never been injured by such amusements. Would it be any inducement to you to venture near a plague-infested house, to be pointed to some person who had breathed an atmosphere tainted with the plague, without receiving the infection? I admit that the danger is not the same in all cases. Individuals, whose connections, habits, characters, are formed, may not receive so much injury as younger people—though the most virtuous and moral cannot, I am sure, escape all harm; even they must have their mental purity injured, and their imagination corrupted; they must acquire a greater and

greater distaste for true religion, and irreverence towards God. But to young people, and to young men especially, the danger is greater than I describe—to them the doors of the theater are as the jaws of the devouring lion!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

ON THE PERIOD WHICH ELAPSES BETWEEN THE TIME OF LEAVING SCHOOL AND THE AGE OF MANHOOD

Young people, while at school, generally look forward with much desire, and longing anticipation, to the happy time when they shall terminate their scholastic pursuits, throw off the restraints of the academy, and enter upon the engagements which are to prepare them for their future station in life. They are seldom aware of the immense importance of this period of their existence; and but rarely consider, that **it is at this time the character usually assumes its permanent form.**

I will suppose, my dear children, that you have now left the schoolroom, for the warehouse, the office, or the shop; exchanged grammars and dictionaries for journals and ledgers; and the researches of learning for the pursuits of business. All is new and all is interesting. Youthful feelings are subsiding into something like a consciousness of approaching manhood; and the comparative insignificance of the schoolboy is giving way to the incipient importance of the man of business. At this very point and period of your history, it behooves you to stop and reflect. Instead of being led on in joyous thoughtlessness, by the new scenes that are opening before and around you, and leaving your habits and your character to be formed by accident or by chance, I beseech you to ponder on the very critical circumstances in which you are now placed.

The period which elapses from fourteen to eighteen years of age, is indeed the crisis of your history and character. It is inconceivably the most eventful and influential term of your whole mortal existence. Comparing the mind to substances which, under the influence of heat, are capable of being molded to any form—it is at this period of its history that it is in the most suitable temperature and consistency to yield to the plastic influence of external causes, and to receive its permanent form and character—before this, it is too fluid and yielding, and afterwards too stiff and unbending. This, this is the very time, when the ever variable emotions, passions, and pursuits of boyhood, begin to exhibit something like the durable and settled forms of manhood.

In reference to the affairs of this life; if a young person ever become a good mechanic, or a good tradesman, he gains the elements of his future excellence about this period. So it is in poetry, painting, learning. Before this, the first decisive and unequivocal traits of genius sometimes appear, and even after this they are sometimes developed—but generally speaking, it is from the age of fourteen to eighteen, that the marks of future eminence are put forth. It is the 'spring season' of mind, and habits, and genius.

The same remarks will apply to the formation of character. Then the passions acquire new vigor, and exert a mighty influence; then the understanding begins to assert its independence, and to think for itself; then there is a declaration of its liberty on the part of the mind, and a casting away of the restraints of education; then there is a self-confidence and a self-reliance, which have received as yet few checks from experience; then the social impulse is felt, and the youth looks round for companions and friends; then the eye of parental vigilance and the voice of parental caution are generally at a distance. Then, in fact, the future character is formed. At this time, generally speaking, true religion is chosen or abandoned; and the heart is given to God or the world. Can anything be more awfully important, than such reflections to those who are yet about this age? You are now deciding for both worlds at once. You are now choosing to become a Christian on earth, and a seraph in heaven—or a worldling here, and a fiend hereafter! You are now setting out on a journey, which is to conduct you to glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life—or to the blackness of darkness forever! Yes, the starting point for the realms of eternal day—or the regions of eternal night—has generally been found to be within the period which I have named.

These remarks apply more strictly to young men than to young women; inasmuch, as females generally remain at home, under the eye, and voice, and example of parental piety, and are far less exposed than boys to the temptations and sins of youth. All young men, therefore, of this age, should pause and reflect thus—"I am now arrived at that period which must be considered as the most eventful era of my whole existence; when my character, both for time and eternity, will, in all probability, be formed; when I may be said to be commencing the career which is to terminate in heaven or hell; as well as that path which is to lead me to respectability and comfort—or to depression and poverty—in the present world. How critical my age! How important that I should consider wisely my situation, and decide aright!"

Permit me to give you a little **ADVICE**, in some measure suited to your circumstances.

1. Most sacredly observe the Sabbath, and constantly attend the means of grace.

Let nothing induce you to prostitute the hallowed day to worldly pleasure. Never listen to the enticements of a companion, who would tempt you, even once, to forsake the house of God. Abandon such an acquaintance. He is unfit for you, and will ruin you. Sabbath-breaking is a sin of most hardening tendency. When tempted to commit it, imagine you hear the dreadful voice of divine prohibition, followed with the loud deep groan of a holy father, and the exclamation of a pious mother, "Oh, my son! my son! do not pierce my heart with anguish." Attach yourselves to a sound, evangelical ministry, and listen not to those who subvert the very foundations of the gospel. Avoid those preachers who oppose all that is peculiar to Christianity.

2. Keep up attention to the private duties of true religion.

Never let a day pass without reading the scriptures and private prayer. While these practices are continued, I have hope for you—they show that piety has still some hold upon your heart. Secure some portion of every day, if it be but a quarter of an hour in the morning, and in the evening, for this most important duty. Should you not have a chamber to yourselves, let not the company of others prevent you from keeping up this practice. It would be better, however, in this case, to retire to your room, so you can be alone.

3. Be very careful in the selection of companions.

All that I have before said on the subject of company, applies with great force to this period of your life. It is now that the mischief of evil associations will be felt in all its devastating influence. One bad companion at this time, when the character is assuming its permanent form, will give a most fatal direction. Your company will probably be courted—but resist every overture which is not made by individuals of well-known, unbending virtue.

4. Strive to excel in the business or profession to which your life is to be devoted.

It is quite a laudable ambition for a man to aspire to eminence in his secular vocation. Be not satisfied with mediocrity in anything that is lawful. Even as a tradesman, you should endeavor to be distinguished. It will give you weight in society, and thus, by increasing your influence, augment the means of your usefulness. A dolt, however pious he may be, possesses but little weight of character. Give your mind, therefore, to business. Penetrate into all its secrets, comprehend all its principles, study all its bearings. Care nothing about pleasure—but find your recreation in your employment. It is astonishing how few rise to eminence in their calling, either in trade or in the professions. The summits are gained by a very small number; the multitude grovel below. Why? Because they did not seek nor begin to ascend, during their apprenticeship. They

did not give themselves wholly to these things during this important season. Excellence in any department of human affairs can be looked for only from diligent and early culture. Industry and close application will keep you out of the way of temptation. Let your mind be occupied with business, and there will be neither leisure nor inclination for polluting amusements.

5. If your attention to business leaves any free time, I advise you to carry on a course of reading.

Make companions of useful books, and you will need no other. And as it is every man's chief praise to excel in his own profession, let your reading bear a relation to that in which you are engaged. (The author hopes he shall be pardoned for the frequency with which he urges a taste for reading. He knows the importance of the subject.)

6. If you can find a pious and intelligent associate, embrace the opportunity of innocent and pleasurable companionship. "As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend." With such a friend carry on some course of intellectual improvement, and both give and receive the stimulus which fellowship affords.

Again and again, remember the tremendous importance which attaches to the period to which this chapter more particularly refers; and believing, as you must, that it is from fourteen to eighteen, the character, in relation to both worlds, is generally formed, judge what manner of people you ought to be at that time, if you wish to be a good tradesman, and real Christian upon earth, or a glorified and happy spirit in heaven.

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

PUBLIC SPIRIT

You are born, my dear children, in no common age of the world. You have entered upon the theater of existence, when some of the most interesting scenes of the great drama are being presented. There are eras, when the moral world seems to stand still, or to retrograde; and there are others, when it is propelled with accelerated movements towards the goal. Ours is of the latter kind. After the dark and stormy epoch, which was terminated by the glorious revolution of 1688, the churches of Christ, blessed with religious liberty, sunk to inglorious repose. Little was done, either to improve the moral condition of our own

population at home, or the state of heathen countries abroad. Whitfield and Wesley broke in upon this slumber, when it seemed to be most profound. From that time, the spirit of religious zeal awoke, and increasing its energies, and multiplying its resources until our days, it now exhibits a glorious array of means and instruments, from which in the long run, may be expected the conversion of the world.

Christendom presents at this moment a sublime and interesting spectacle in its Bible Societies, Missionary Societies, Tract Societies, with all the other institutions adapted to the moral needs of every class and condition of mankind. War is not only declared—but prosecuted with vigor, against the powers of darkness; the armies of the Lord are marching forth to the field of conflict; the sound of the trumpet is heard, and the call of warriors floats on the gale. Spiritual patriotism is breathed into the souls of all denominations of Christians. Instruments of the holy warfare are invented and distributed, which suit the hands of people of every rank, condition, stature, and strength; while females are invited to emulate the Spartan women of antiquity, and to assist in this conflict by the side of their fathers, husbands, and brothers.

All young people ought to enlist themselves in this cause. They should rise up into life, **determined to do all the good they can, and to leave the world better than they found it.** To see them reluctant to come forward, is an indelible disgrace to them. It is a poor, miserable kind of life to live only for ourselves; it is, in fact—but half living. It is an opposition both to reason and Scripture. He who does nothing to bless others, starves his own soul. You must therefore set out in life, my children, with a resolution, by God's help, to act the part of a religious philanthropist. "He who converts a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins." Aspire to this honor. Think how many things you can already do. You can instruct a class of ignorant children in a Sunday School. You can distribute religious tracts. You can join in the labors of Bible associations, or in the exertions of missionary societies to youth.

It is to the great dishonor of many young people in affluent circumstances, that they are retiring from our Sunday schools, and leaving the work to those who are in humbler life. Well, we must do without them—but let them remember that for their indolence, or pride, or whatever else be the cause of their secession, they must give an account at the bar of Christ.

Here, however, I must suggest a caution or two. Females who are employed in the labor of collecting gratuitous contributions to public societies of any kind, should be very watchful against the least infringement on that delicacy and modesty of character which is the chief ornament of their sex. Their exertions, I know, are the life's blood of some causes; be it so—but let their benevolence

flow like the vital fluid through the veins—unseen, unheard. I believe that in general the strictest rules of modesty have been observed by the female collectors of our Missionary Societies—but I have heard of instances very much to the contrary. Happily, such cases are rare. I think it quite questionable whether very young females, whose characters are scarcely formed, should be thus employed.

It would be a source of mischief and regret, if the present mode of employing females in collecting for public institutions should abate one jot of that retiredness of disposition, and love of home, which are so essential to the beauty and excellence of their character. A gossiping, unsettled, roving temper, that can be better pleased with wandering round the town from door to door, than performing the duties which fall to the lot of a grown-up daughter at home, is no present ornament, and affords but a forlorn hope of future worth. I confess I look with some degree of jealousy upon the efforts of female zeal, for if public spirit is to be maintained at the expense of private usefulness, the world will be no great gainer in the end. Exertions for the public should be regarded not as a substitute for—but a recreation from, the more stated duties of home.

It is more necessary still, perhaps, to caution young men against acquiring, by their activity—a bold, forward, obtrusive, and dictatorial temper. If zeal should render them conceited, vain, and meddling, it would be a heavy deduction from its clear amount of usefulness. There is some little danger lest Satan, perceiving it to be impossible to repress the ardor of youth, should attempt to corrupt it.

Observing these cautions, you cannot be too ardent in the cause of true religion, and the interests of the human race. Those who are likely to occupy the middling classes of society, who are the sons and daughters of people in comparatively affluent circumstances, and are likely, by the blessing of God, to occupy the same rank themselves, should feel most specially bound to consecrate their energies to the public welfare, inasmuch as they possess far more means of usefulness than others, and are likely to have greater influence in society.

But even the poorest can do something. There is no one who is destitute of all the means of doing good. In France, during the reign of the late emperor, the conscription law extended to people of all ranks in society; and in the same regiment, the sons of the rich and of the poor contended, side by side, for the glory of their country—nor did the former think themselves degraded by such an association; they felt that to fight under the imperial and victorious eagle, was an honor sufficient to annihilate every other consideration. How much more justly will this apply to people who are marshaled under the banner of the cross!

It is of the utmost importance that young people should begin life with a considerable portion of public spirit in their character; since it is rarely found that

this virtue, if planted late, attains to any considerable magnitude, beauty, or fruitfulness. The seeds of benevolence should be sown, together with those of piety, in the first spring of our youth; then may we expect a rich autumnal crop. The first lesson which a child should learn from his parents is, how to be blessed; and the second, how to be a blessing.

You have been taught this, my children, from the very dawn of reason—now then practice it. Live for some purpose in the world. Act your part well. Fill up the measure of your duty to others. Conduct yourselves so that you shall be missed with sorrow when you are gone. Multitudes of our species are living in such a selfish manner, that they are not likely to be remembered a moment after their disappearance. They leave behind them scarcely any traces of their existence—but are forgotten almost as though they had never been. They are, while they live, like one pebble lying unobserved among millions on the shore; and when they die, they are like that same pebble thrown into the sea, which just ruffles the surface, sinks, and is forgotten, without being missed from the beach. They are neither regretted by the rich, wanted by the poor, nor celebrated by the learned. Who have been the better for their life? Who are the worse for their death? Whose tears have they dried up, whose needs supplied, whose miseries have they healed? Who would unbar the gate of life, to re-admit them to existence; or what face would greet them back again to our world with a smile? Wretched, unproductive mode of existence! Selfishness is its own curse—it is a starving vice. The man that does no good, gets none. He is like the heath in the desert, neither yielding fruit, nor seeing when good comes; a stunted, dwarfish, miserable shrub.

We are sent into the world to do good; and to be destitute of public spirit, is to forget one half of our errand upon earth. Think what opportunity there is for the increase and operations of this noble disposition. We are in a world which abounds with evil. There are six hundred million immortal souls, yet enslaved in their minds by the chains of Pagan superstition or Mohammedan delusion—without God, and without hope in the world; there are one hundred and twenty million following the Papal Beast, and bearing his image; there are nine million Jews—wandering as vagabonds over the face of the whole earth, with the thick veil of unbelief upon their hearts. In our own country, many towns and villages are yet unblest with the faithful preaching of the gospel; multitudes of adults are still without Bibles to read, and myriads of uneducated children; and ignorance of the grossest kind, vice of the most abominable forms, are to be found in every street.

And then, as to express misery, what aboundings are to be seen in every collection of human abodes; where can we go and not hear the groans of creation ascending round us, and not see the tears of sorrow flowing in our path? Poverty meets us with its heart-breaking tale of want and woe; disease in

a thousand shapes appeals to our compassion; widows, orphans, destitute old men, and fatherless babes, with numbers ready to perish—are almost everywhere to be seen. Shall we live in the center of so much sin, ignorance, and wretchedness, and not feel it our duty to do good? What a wretch must he be, who, in such a world, is destitute of public spirit! For all that selfishness ever hoarded, may you, my children, never be cursed with an unfeeling heart. Here is something for all to do, and all should do what they can.

Consider the **FELICITY** of doing good. Public spirit is a perennial source of happiness in a man's own bosom. The miser is rightly named; the word signifies 'miserable'—and miserable he is. Benevolence is happiness. Its very tears are more to be desired than the most exulting smiles which avarice ever bestowed upon its accumulating treasures. Who does not covet that exquisite delight which Job must have experienced in the days of his prosperity, and of which he thus speaks—"All who heard of me praised me. All who saw me spoke well of me. For I helped the poor in their need and the orphans who had no one to help them. I helped those who had lost hope, and they blessed me. And I caused the widows' hearts to sing for joy. All I did was just and honest. Righteousness covered me like a robe, and I wore justice like a turban. I served as eyes for the blind and feet for the lame. I was a father to the poor and made sure that even strangers received a fair trial." Job 29:11-16. O tell me, what are all the pleasures of sense or appetite, all the mirthful festivities of worldly amusements, when compared with this? To do good, is to be like God in operation and bliss; for he is the blessed God, because he is the merciful God.

Public spirit is most **HONORABLE**. Even the heathen accounted a benefactor a most honorable character. Never does humanity appear adorned with so bright a crown of glory, as when distinguished benevolence, united with humble piety, enters into the character. When a young lady, instead of frittering away her time in frivolous pursuits, parties of pleasure, personal decorations, or scenes of vanity, employs her hours in visiting the cottages of the poor, alleviating the sorrows of the wretched, reading Scripture to the sick, how like an angel does she appear; and one can almost imagine that she is watched with exalted delight, on her visits of mercy, by the heavenly messengers who minister to the heirs of salvation, and who hail her as a co-worker in their embassies of love.

What is the most celebrated beauty that ever became the center of attraction, the object of voluptuous gaze, the subject of general envy to one sex, and of admiration to the other; when, amid the blaze of diamonds, and the perfumery of the East, she displayed her charms in the ball-room—compared with that modest and unostentatious young woman, who, in her woolen cloak and miry shoes, is seen on a cold wintry day at the sick bed of the poor expiring mother, first reviving the sinking frame of the sufferer with the cordials she has prepared with her own hands, then dispensing bread to the clamorous hungry babes, then

comforting the agitated mind of the departing wife with the consolations of true religion, and, last of all, soothing the troubled bosom of the distressed husband with the prospect of a country, where there shall be no more death!

Or what is the man of polished manners, affable address, sparkling wit, and endless anecdote, whose society is courted, and who is the life of every company into which he enters; who everywhere receives the incense of praise, and the worship of admiration; I say, what is this man, in real grandeur, utility, and moral beauty of character—compared with the unassuming youth, who though well educated and extensively read, and with a mind that could luxuriate in all the pleasures of literary pursuits, devotes a large portion of his time to the exercises of benevolence—who on a sabbath journeys to some neighboring village on foot, sustaining the storms of winter, and the sultry heats of summer, to teach a school of ignorant children, bound to him by no tie but that of our common nature, to read the word of God—who is often seen in the retired streets and alleys of his own town, checking the torrents of wickedness by the distribution of tracts, or the circulation of the Bible—who, when fatigued with business, would gladly seek the repose of home, or else, thirsting for knowledge, would gladly converse with books—yet instead of this, devotes his evening hours to assist in managing the business of Christian institutions!

Need I ask which of these two is the most honorable character? They admit of no comparison. The wreath of literary fame, the laurel of the warrior, the tribute of praise offered to superior wit—are empty and worthless compared with the pure bright crown of the Christian philanthropist. There is a time coming when the former shall be of no value in the eyes of their professors, or the world—but the distinctions of superior beneficence belong to an order which shall be acknowledged in heaven, and shall be worn with unfading brilliancy through eternity!

I exhort, therefore, my children, that you do all the good you can, both to the souls and bodies of your fellow-creatures—for this end, as I have already said, you were born into the world, and society has claims upon your attention, which you cannot neglect without disregarding the authority of God. Give your property for this purpose. Begin life with a conviction that every one ought to devote a fair portion of his worldly substance for the benefit of others. No man ought to set apart a less proportion of his income for the good of the public than a tenth. Whatever estate yours may be, whether great or small, consider that it comes to you with a reserved claim of one-tenth for the public. Consider yourself as having a right to only nine-tenths. Pay tithes of all you possess to the cause of God and man. Be frugal in your personal expenditure—that you may have the more to do good with. Waste not that upon unnecessary luxuries of dress or living—which thousands and millions need for necessities and religious instruction. The noblest transformation of property is not into personal jewels, or splendid household

furniture, or costly equipages—but into clothing for the naked, food for the hungry, medicine for the sick, knowledge for the ignorant, holiness for the wicked, salvation for the lost!

Give your **INFLUENCE**, whatever it be, to the cause of the public. We all have a circle of influence, and it is more extensive than we imagine. We are all, and always, doing good or harm. Two people never meet, however short the duration, or whatever be the cause of the meeting, without exerting some influence upon each other. An important transaction, a casual hint, a studied address, each and all may become the means of controlling the mind of those with whom we have to do. Let your influence be all thrown into the scale of the public good. Do your own duty, and endeavor to rouse others to do theirs.

Let your exertions in the public cause be the result of deliberate purpose, not of mere accident. Set yourselves to do good. Pursue a system, and act not from caprice. Let not your zeal be a blaze at one time, and a mere spark at another. Study your situation, circumstances, talents—and let your benevolence flow through that channel which Providence has more especially opened before you. All are not fitted for, nor are they called to, the same work. In the division of the labor of mercy, occupy that station, and be content with that work, to which you are obviously destined. Avoid the disposition which will be first in the front rank, or nowhere. This is selfishness, not benevolence. Be **anxious** to do good, though, like the ministering angels, your agency should never be seen—but only felt. Do not be **discouraged** by difficulty, nor **disheartened** by ingratitude; seek your reward in the approbation of conscience, and the smile of God—not in the acknowledgments of men. **Persevere** to the end of life; and be not weary in well doing. Be **diligent**, for the world is dying around you, and you are dying with it. You are young—but you are mortal. Your time of working may be short, and therefore strive to do much in a little time; for a man's life is to be measured not so much by the years that he lives, as by the work he does. You may die—but if you do good, your work lives; lives and multiplies its kind on earth, and then follows you to heaven, to live in your own remembrance, and the happiness of others through everlasting ages.

"As therefore we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith. And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

FEMALE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, VIRTUES, AND PURSUITS

As the perusal of this volume is intended for those who may be supposed to have finished, or are near the completion of scholastic pursuits, all that can be designed in this chapter, is to follow up the object of a good education, which, most probably, it has been the felicity of many of my female readers to receive; or, in the opposite case, to correct the faults, and point out in what way to supply the defects of a bad one.

"A young lady may excel in speaking French and Italian, may repeat a few passages from a volume of extracts; play like a professor, and sing like a siren; have her dressing-room decorated with her own drawings, tables, stands, screens, and cabinets—more, she may dance like Sempronia herself—and yet may have been very badly educated. I am far from meaning to set no value whatever on any or all of these qualifications; they are all of them elegant, and many of them properly tend to the perfecting of a genteel education. These things in their measure and degree may be done—but there are others which should not be left undone. Many things are becoming—but 'one thing is needful.' Besides, as the world seems to be fully apprized of the value of whatever tends to embellish life, there is less occasion here to insist on its importance.

"But, though a well-bred young lady may lawfully learn most of the fashionable arts, yet it does not seem to be the end of education to make women of fashion, dancers, singers, players, painters, actresses, sculptors, gilders, varnishers, engravers, and embroiderers. Most men are commonly destined to some profession, and their minds are consequently turned each to its respective object. Would it not be strange if they were called out to exercise their profession, or to set up their trade, with only a little general knowledge of the trades of other men, and without any previous definite application to their own peculiar calling?

"The profession of young ladies, to which the bent of their instruction should be turned, is that of daughters, wives, mothers, and managers of families. They should be therefore trained with a view to these several conditions, and be furnished with a stock of ideas and principles, and qualifications and habits, ready to be applied and appropriated, as occasion may demand, to each of these respective situations; for though the arts which merely embellish life, must claim admiration, yet when a man of sense comes to marry, it is a companion whom he wants—and not an artist. It is not merely a creature who can paint, and play, and dress, and dance—it is a being who can comfort and console him; one who can reason and reflect, and feel, and judge, and act and discourse, and discriminate—one who can assist him in his affairs, lighten his cares, soothe his

sorrows, purify his joys, strengthen his principles, and educate his children."
(Mrs. Hannah More)

This is sound reasoning and unquestionable discretion; it proceeds on the obvious and indisputable principle, that the excellence of means is to be judged of by their adaptation to the end to be produced; and the value of an instrument to be appreciated by its fitness for the work contemplated. That is a perfect female education, which best prepares women for the station in society which Providence has destined them to occupy. And what is that station? To be wives, mothers, and managers of families. Do not think that this is degrading woman below her just rank, or that such a station requires nothing more than an initiation into the mysteries of the kitchen, or a memory well stored with the responses of the "Cook's Oracle."

If to be the suitable companion of a sensible man; the judicious mother of a rising family; the neat and orderly and frugal manager of an extensive household; if to be qualified to counsel her husband in the intricacies of life, to soothe him in his troubles, to lighten his heart of half its load of care, to enliven his solitude with the charm of her conversation, and render his home "the soft green," on which his weary spirit shall love to repose; if to be qualified to train up her children in the paths of true religion, to form them to habits of virtue, to preside over their education, and the formation of their character, so as to multiply in them her own image of female excellence, and raise in each of them her second lovely self; if to be qualified to render her house attractive, both to its stated inhabitants, and the friends who may occasionally resort to it; I say, if this be a low station, and fitness for it be nothing more than base qualifications, where, in all this world, shall we find any one that is high, or noble, or useful?

For these sacred occupations has Providence destined the female sex, and say, what kind of education fits for such a scene of endearing and important duties? For such a circle of obligations, she should indeed be accomplished—"no term however has been more abused than this. 'Accomplishment' is a word that signifies completeness, perfection. But I may safely appeal to the observation of mankind, whether they do not meet with swarms of youthful females, issuing from our boarding schools, as well as emerging from the more private scenes of domestic education, who are introduced into the world, under the broad and universal title of accomplished ladies, of whom it cannot very truly be pronounced that they illustrate the definition, by a completeness which leaves nothing to be added, and a perfection which leaves nothing to be desired.

"This frenzy of accomplishments, unhappily, is no longer restricted within the usual limits of rank and of fortune; the middle orders have caught the contagion, and it rages downward with increasing violence, from the elegantly dressed but slenderly portioned curate's daughter, to the equally fashionable daughter of the

little tradesman, and of the more opulent—but not more judicious farmer. And is it not obvious, that as far as this epidemic mania has spread, this very valuable part of society is declining in usefulness, as it rises in its unlucky pretensions to elegance? And this revolution of the manners of the middle class has so far altered the character of the age, as to be in danger of rendering obsolete the heretofore common saying, 'that most worth and virtue are to be found in the middle station.' For I do not scruple to assert, that in general, as far as my observation has extended, this class of females, in what relates both to religious knowledge, and to practical industry, falls short both of the very high and the very low. Their new course of education, and the habits of life, and elegance of dress, connected with it, peculiarly unfits them for the active duties of their own very important condition; while with frivolous eagerness and second-hand opportunities, they run to snatch a few of those showy acquirements which decorate the great. This is done apparently with one or other of these views; either to make their fortune by marriage, or if that fails to qualify them, to become teachers of others—hence the abundant multiplication of **superficial wives**, and of incompetent and illiterate governesses." (Mrs. Hannah More)

By **accomplishments**, I believe, are usually intended, dancing, music, drawing, the languages, etc. etc.

As for **DANCING**, if it be allowable at all in a system of Christian education, it cannot be permitted to rise to a higher rank than that of a mere physical training, which should be strictly confined to the school, and laid aside forever when the school is left for home. Balls and dances of every kind, public and private, are in my judgment, reprehensible and injurious; and if our Lord's exposition of the seventh commandment be correct, I am perfectly sure that the dance room is no place for Christian morals—the half-naked costume there exhibited has the same effect as Montesquieu ascribed to the dances of the Spartan virgins, which taught them "to strip chastity itself of modesty." Piety looks round in vain, in a ball-room, for one single object congenial with its nature.

MUSIC has not the same objection. The acquisition of this pleasing science requires a vigorous exercise of that faculty of the mind which is the foundation of all knowledge—I mean attentiveness; and therefore, like the mathematics, is valuable, not merely for its own sake—but as a part of mental education. Besides this the ear is tuned by its Maker to harmony, and the concord of sweet sounds is a pleasant and innocent recreation. Music becomes sinful, only when too much time is occupied in acquiring the science, or when it is applied to demoralizing compositions. I am decidedly of opinion, that in general, far more time is occupied in this accomplishment than ought to be thus employed. Many pupils practice three, four, five hours a day. Now suppose four hours a day be thus spent, commencing from six years of age, and continuing until eighteen, then

leaving out the Sundays, and allowing thirteen days annually for traveling, there will be 14,400 hours spent at the piano—which, allowing ten hours a day for the time usually devoted to study, will make nearly four years out of twelve given to music.

Can this be justified, my female friends, on any principle of reason or Scripture? What ideas might have been acquired, what a stock of knowledge amassed, what habits of mental application formed in this time! And what renders this the more culpable is, that all this time is spent in acquiring a science which, as soon as its possessor is placed at the head of a family—is generally neglected and forgotten! If it be really true, therefore, that music cannot be acquired without practicing four hours a day, I do not hesitate to say that the sacrifice is far too costly; and females should forego the accomplishment, rather than purchase it at such a rate. If the great design and chief excellence of the female character, were to make a figure for a few years in the drawing-room, to enliven the mirthful scene of fashionable resort, and, by the freshness of her charms, and the fascination of her accomplishments, to charm all hearts, and conquer one—then let females give all their precious hours until they can play like Orpheus, or sing like a siren—but if it be what I have already stated, then indeed it will sound like a meager qualification for a wife, or a mother, to say—She is an exquisite performer on the harp or piano."

DRAWING, with all the fancy operations of the brush, the pencil, the needle, and the scissors, are innocent and agreeable, provided they are kept in the place of recreations—and are not allowed to rise into occupations. Of late years they have acquired a kind of hallowed connection, and FANCY has been seen carrying her painted and embroidered productions to lay on the altar of MERCY and of ZEAL. **These things are sinful only when they consume too much time, and draw the mind from the love and pursuit of more important, or more necessary duties.** They are little 'elegant trifles', which will do well enough to fill up the fragments of time—but must not displace the more momentous objects which require and occupy its larger portions.

The **LANGUAGES** are accomplishments, for which there is a great demand in the system of modern education. I confess plainly at once, that I rate the importance of French at a much lower value than many do. I believe not one in a hundred who pretend to learn it, ever derive the least advantage from it. The object of acquiring a foreign language is to converse with those who speak it, or to be as a key to all the literature which it contains. To be able to hammer out a few sentences, ill pronounced, and worse constructed; to tell what a table, or a house, or door is, or pass the usual compliments in French—is a miserable reward for years of learning the French language. If, then, you have begun French, or Italian, and still retain anything of what you have learned, give a moderate portion of your time to recover what else will soon be utterly lost; for

nothing is so soon lost from the mind as a little of a foreign language. Pursue the study until you can, at least, read it with nearly as much ease as your mother tongue. Perhaps the chief advantage from this accomplishment is, that it raises our reputation a little in elegant society, and so far increases our weight of character, and thus enlarges the sphere of our usefulness.

On the subject of **accomplishments**, then, my views are sufficiently explicit. The greater part of them I by no means condemn. Custom has rendered them necessary, true religion allows them to be innocent, and ingenuity can render them useful. Piety is not in a state of hostility with taste, and would not look more lovely in Gothic barbarity than in Grecian elegance. Provided she maintains all her sanctity, dignity, spirituality, and benevolence—she does not appear less inviting when attired by the MUSES, and attended by the GRACES. Females may play, and draw, and paint, and write Latin, and speak Italian and French, provided the time, the money, and the admiration lavished on these external acquirements, be all within reasonable limits; provided they are regarded as sources of private entertainment, not as arts of public display; are considered as recreations from more severe and necessary pursuits, not as the chief end of education; and are viewed as mere appendages of excellence, not its substitute.

It unfortunately happens, however, that the female who has in reality received the worst education, often makes the best figure in society. There are many schools which (to adopt a simile borrowed from the trades of my own town) instead of resembling the jeweler's workshop, where sterling gold and real diamonds are polished—are nothing more than gilders, varnishers, and platers, whose object is to give the brightest surface in the shortest time, and at the least expense. The paste and the gilt look very well, perhaps better than the gem and the gold, because more of it can be obtained for the same sum—but which will wear best, and last the longest? It requires much self-denial, sturdy attachment to solid excellence and nobleness of mind, for a female of few accomplishments—but many virtues, to go home from a company, where some gilded, varnished mind has received, for her music or singing, the tribute of admiration—and still to prefer the 'unostentatious excellence of character' to all the fascinations of exterior decoration.

But look onward in life. See the future career of both. The siren wins the heart, for which, as a prize, she has sung and played. She marries, and is placed at the head of a rising family. But, alas! the time she should have spent in preparing to be a companion to her husband, a mother to her children, a mistress to her servants, was employed at the piano, in qualifying her to charm the drawing-room circle. She succeeded, and had her reward—but it ended when she became a wife and a mother! She had neither good sense, nor information; neither frugality, order, nor system; neither ability to govern and guide her children. Her husband sees everything going wrong, and is dissatisfied; he caught the

'nightingale' to which he listened with such transport in her native bower—but she is now a miserable-looking, moping, silent bird in her cage! All is discontent and wretchedness, for both at length find out that she was better qualified to be a public singer than a wife, or a mother!

Far different is the case with the unostentatious woman of real moral worth. She too wins a heart more worth winning than the 'prize' last spoken of. Some congenial mind, looking round for an individual who shall be a help-meet indeed, sees in her good sense and prudence, in her well-stored understanding, in her sobriety of manners, in her sterling piety—the virtues likely to last through life, with foliage ever verdant, fruit ever abundant. They are united in marriage—the hopes of lovers, rational, unromantic, founded on kindred minds, and kindred hearts—are realized in all the fond endearments of wedded life. Although the first bloom and freshness of youthful affection fades away, its mellowness still remains, and mutual esteem still continues and grows. Their family increases, over which she presides in the meekness of wisdom, the order of system, and the economy, not of baseness—but of prudence. To her children, whom her husband trusts with confidence to her care, she is the instructor of their minds, the guide of their youth. Their father sees them rising up to prove the wisdom of his choice, when he selected a wife rather for 'virtues' than 'accomplishments'—their mother delights in a husband who is one with her in all her views, and approves of all her doings. They pass through life together, blessing and being blessed—mutual comforters, and mutual counselors, often saying, if not singing,

"Domestic happiness, you only bliss
Of Paradise that has survived the Fall!
You are not known where pleasure is adored—
That reeling goddess with the zoneless waist."

How true and how beautiful are the words of Solomon "Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? She is worth more than precious rubies. Her husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich his life. She will not hinder him but help him all her life. She extends a helping hand to the poor and opens her arms to the needy. She has no fear of winter for her household because all of them have warm clothes. She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs with no fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and kindness is the rule when she gives instructions. She carefully watches all that goes on in her household and does not have to bear the consequences of laziness. Her children stand and bless her. Her husband praises her: 'There are many virtuous and capable women in the world, but you surpass them all!' Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the Lord will be greatly praised. Reward her for all she has done. Let her deeds publicly declare her praise." Proverbs 31:10-31.

My young female friends, have you no ambition to answer, in future life, these beautiful patterns of female excellence? Have you no desire, that if Providence should place you at the head of a family, you may shine forth in all the mild radiance of domestic, feminine excellence? Is there not, as you read, some spirit-stirring desires in your soul? Does not all the glitter of mere external accomplishments, fade away into darkness before such effulgent virtue? Does not all the 'painted insignificance of mere drawing-room charms' dwindle into nothing before that solid excellence which is a "perpetual fountain of domestic sweets."

If so, and you would thus bless and be blessed, make up your mind deliberately to this opinion, and abide by it—that what is useful is infinitely to be preferred to what is dazzling—and virtuous excellence to be more ardently coveted than fashionable accomplishments. A right objective is of unspeakable consequence. **Whatever we propose as the grand paramount object, will form the character!** We shall subordinate everything else to it! May this be this your aim—to excel rather in the solid and useful attainments, than in external showy decorations!

Seek a large portion of what is usually denominated **GOOD SENSE**. It is very difficult to define what I mean, and perhaps it is not necessary, for every one knows what I intend, by this quality. It is that sobriety of character, that quick perception of all the proprieties of life, that appropriate discernment of what is **best** to be done in all the ordinary circumstances of human society, which shall enable us to act with nobility to ourselves—and comfort to others. It is a thoughtful, cautious way of judging and acting—and is equally opposed to that rashness which acts with haste—and that ignorance which cannot act at all. It is, in fact, prudence, accommodating itself to all the relations of life, and the ever-varying circumstances of society.

To store your mind with **USEFUL INFORMATION**. Read much, and let your reading be of a right kind. Reject with disdain, as you ought, the libel which has been circulated by some against your understanding—that poetry and novels are the books most adapted to the understanding and feelings of young ladies. On this topic I refer you to the chapter on Books. I cannot, however—but insert here a few additional hints on the subject.

To assist in the right formation of your character, I very urgently recommend the perusal of Mrs. Hannah More's "The Modern System of Female Education;" for although this work is more particularly intended for mothers, it may be read with immense advantage also by daughters. The views of this incomparable woman are so correct, and also enlarged, so accordant with reason, and what is still more important, so harmonious with Scripture—that you cannot look up to a better guide.

"Serious study serves to harden the mind for more trying conflicts; it lifts the reader from sensation to intellect; it abstracts her from the world and its vanities; it fixes a wandering spirit, and fortifies a weak one; it corrects that spirit of trifling, which she naturally contracts from the frivolous turn of female conversation, and the petty nature of female employments; it concentrates her attention, assists her in a habit of excluding trivial thoughts, and thus even helps to qualify her for religious pursuits."

Thus would I have a female qualified for her station as a wife, mother, and manager of a family—but this is not all; for mental improvement should be associated with **a correct knowledge of household affairs**. She who is to preside over a family, should be most intimately acquainted with everything that can preserve its order, or promote its comfort. That must be a most injudicious mother, who is not anxious to teach a daughter how to manage a family to the greatest advantage! And that must be a weak and silly girl, who is not willing to be taught. All the time, therefore, must not be given to books; for learned ladies, without neatness, without order, without economy, without frugality, "May do very well for maidens or aunts, but they'll never make good wives!"

A husband's home should be rendered comfortable for himself and his children—or else they are both very likely to wander from home for comfort. Cleanliness, neatness, frugality, order—are all of great importance in the habits of a wife, mother, and mistress, for the lack of which, no knowledge, however profound or extensive, can be a substitute. It is not at all requisite that a wife should be either an accomplished housemaid, or a perfect cook—but the lack of this ability has led many a man, who was blessed with a learned wife, to exclaim, with something between disgust and despair, "I now find, to my cost—that academic attainments, personal beauty, and ostentatious accomplishments—are poor a qualifications for a wife!"

Before I close this chapter, I must mention one or two **DISPOSITIONS**, which young females should assiduously cherish and unostentatiously exhibit.

The first is **FILIAL OBEDIENCE**; not that this is binding upon daughters only, for what son is he who honors not, loves not, comforts not, his father and his mother? Wherever Providence should cast his lot, or in whatever circumstances he should be placed, let him continue in every possible way to promote the happiness of his parents. Young people are but too apt to think, that the obligations to filial piety diminish in number and strength as years increase. I am afraid, that really one of the signs of the times, and it is no bright one—is the decrease of this amiable and lovely virtue. I think I see rising—I wish I may be in error—a spirit of independence, which is aiming to precede the period of manhood—the time when the yoke of parental control may be thrown off. This is neither for the comfort of the parents, nor the advantage of the children. It is

not obedience only that should not be refused; for where this is denied, there can be neither true religion nor virtue—but all that public way of showing them honor, and all that private way of promoting their comfort, for which, opportunities are constantly presented. There is no period in the life of a father or mother, when the obligation to be in some measure subject to them, and in all measure to promote their happiness, ceases.

The following is the description of a daughter which I have somewhere met with—"MARIA received her unhappy existence at the price of her mother's life, and at the age of seventeen she followed, as the sole mourner, the coffin of her remaining parent. From her thirteenth year, she had passed her life at her father's sick bed, the gout having deprived him of the use of his limbs, and beheld the arch of heaven only when she went forth to fetch food or medicines. The discharge of her filial duties occupied the whole of her time and all her thoughts. She was his only nurse and for the last two years. She prepared his scanty meal, she bathed his aching limbs, and, though weak and delicate from constant confinement, and the poison of melancholy thoughts, she had acquired an unusual power in her arms, from the habit of lifting her old and suffering father out of and back into, his bed of pain. Thus passed away her early youth in sorrow; she grew up in tears, a stranger to the amusements of youth, and its more delightful schemes and imaginations. She was not, however, unhappy; she attributed no merit to herself for her virtues—but for that reason were they more her reward. 'The peace which passes all understanding,' disclosed itself in all her looks and movements. It lay on her countenance like a steady unshadowed moonlight; and her voice, which was at once naturally sweet and subtle, came from her like the fine flute tones of a masterly performer, which, still floating at some uncertain distance, seemed to be created by the player, rather than to proceed from the instrument. If you had listened to it in one of those brief sabbaths of the soul, when the activity and discursiveness of the thoughts are suspended, and the mind quietly eddies round instead of flowing onward (as at late evening in the spring, I have seen a bat fly in silent circles round and round a fruit tree in full blossom, in the midst of which, as within a close tent of the purest white, an unseen nightingale was piping its purest notes,) in such a mood, you might have half fancied, half felt, that her voice had a separate being of its own—that it was a living something whose mode of existence was for the ear only—so deep was her resignation, so entirely had it become the habit of her nature, and in all she did or said so perfectly were her movements, and her utterance without effort, and without the appearance of effort. Her dying father's last words, addressed to the clergyman who attended him, were his grateful testimony, that during his long and sore trial, his good MARIA had behaved to him like an angel; that the most disagreeable offices, and the least suited to her age and sex, had never drawn an unwilling look from her; and that whenever his eye had met hers, he had been sure to see in it either the tear of pity, or the sudden smile expressive of her affection and wish to cheer him. 'God,' said he,

'will reward the good girl for all her long dutifulness to me!' He departed during the inward prayer, which followed these his last words. His wish will be fulfilled in eternity!"

What daughter can read this and not admire, and if need be, imitate the conduct of MARIA? Few are called to these self-denying acts of filial piety—but who would not do all they could to sweeten, as far as may be, the 'dregs of life' to an aged mother, or a blind father? It has been observed, that **a good daughter generally makes an exemplary wife and mother.**

SENSIBILITY, when blended with a sound judgment, and guided in its exercises by good sense and prudence—is a lovely ornament of the female character. By sensibility, I mean a susceptibility of having emotion excited by external objects; a habit of mind, in which the affections are easily moved, by objects calculated and worthy to produce feeling. Of course, this is an evil or an excellence, according as it is united with other mental habits. An **excess** of sensibility, is one of the most injurious ingredients which can enter into the formation of character. Where it is united with a weak judgment, and a wild imagination, it exposes its possessor to the greatest possible dangers, and opens in her own bosom a perpetual source of vexation, misery, and self-torment. If we were to trace to their source many of those quarrels which have alienated friends, and made irreconcilable enemies—those hasty and imprudent marriages which have terminated in total wretchedness; those acts of profligacy, suicide, and even murder, which have stained the annals of mankind—we should find the seed of all these mischiefs, in an **excess of morbid sensibility.**

Feeling, like fire, is a good servant—but a bad master—a source of comfort, and a means of usefulness—if well governed. But if left to rage without control—it is an engine of destruction, and a cause of misery. Every heart should have an altar, on which this fire should be perpetually kept burning—but then prudence should ever be on the watch, lest it should consume the temple!

Young females are in imminent danger of being led away by the representation, that an unfeeling woman, though she be pure as a statue of marble, yet withal, if she be as cold, is a most unlovely character. This I admit, and therefore I class a well-governed sensibility among the decorations of the female character. But then, the tendency of this remark is certainly mischievous, since, according to the spirit in which it is usually both made and received, it means, that an **excess** of feeling rather adorns than injures the character. It will be found, generally speaking, that young people rather force the growth, than check the luxuriance of their feelings; which is just in the inverted order of nature, since the affections generally grow without culture—the judgment scarcely ever.

The voice of flattery, also, is all on the side of feeling. A warm-hearted girl, carried away by her feelings, and misled by a wild and ardent imagination, will find many more admirers than the sensible, prudent, and reserved one—and for this plain reason, because there are more fools in the world than wise men. Follow out the history of the two characters. It is the end that proves all.

Imprudent attachments, rash friendships, misdirected anxieties, eccentric charities, fickle schemes, groundless anticipations, mortifying disappointments, harassing litigations, with innumerable other evils—come in the train of excessive and ungoverned sensibility. Let young women therefore remember, that the 'understanding' is the queen among the faculties of the soul, beneath whose despotic sway, the imagination and affections may be as active and as ardent as they please, so that they never offend against the laws of their sovereign.

With these limitations, I will admit that sensibility is an ornament of female character. A cold, unfeeling, heartless woman—who has no tear for sorrow, no smile for excellence—who has no power but that of niggardly calculation—and no emotions but those which, by a sort of centripetal force, are all drawn to self as the center of gravity—is a libel upon her sex. She may have prudence—but it is likely to degenerate into cunning; frugality—but it will in all probability soon become avarice; caution—but it will be changed to suspicion; intellect—but it will be proud, censorious, and cynical.

Pure sensibility is the soil in which the generous affections grow—it cherishes that mercy which is full of good fruits; gives birth to all the enterprises of benevolence, and when touched and purified with a "live coal from the altar," will give a keener taste for the spirit of true religion, a richer enjoyment of its privileges, and a quicker zeal in discharging its duties. But then it must be feeling associated with principle, and guided in all its exercises by a sound judgment.

A RETIREDNESS OF DISPOSITION is also an exquisite ornament of the female character. Even the most distant approach to whatever is forward in manner, and vain in conversation, should be most studiously avoided. Delicate reserve, without awkward bashfulness—is a great part of the loveliness of every young female; especially in all her conduct towards the opposite sex. A lady who takes pains to be noticed, generally gains her object without its reward—for she is noticed—but at the same time she is despised. Nothing can be more disgusting than a bold obtrusiveness of manners in a female, except it be that 'affectation of retiredness' which retreats only to be followed.

Flippancy and pertness are sometimes mistakenly substituted, by their possessor, for smartness and cleverness. These latter qualities never look well when they are studied—they are never tolerable but when they are natural; and are among the last things which we should seek to 'acquire'—for when obtained in this way,

they appear no better than ornaments stuck on, instead of being wrought in. I am not contending against that ease of manners which the most retiring female may and should adopt, even in the company of gentlemen—that artless and elegant freedom which is compatible with the most delicate reserve. But I deplore that obtrusive mode of address, which determines to attract attention.

A love of display has been thought to be among the blemishes which usually attach to female character in general. I do not now refer to the 'petty concerns of dress', for this is truly pitiable—and an individual silly enough to indulge such 'a butterfly, peacock taste' as this—is too weak to afford any rational hopes of having her follies corrected. Arguments are lost upon that little mind whose ambition cannot comprehend, or value, or covet—a distinction of greater worth, than a richer silk, a more graceful plume, or a more modern fashion. This Lilliputian heroine, armed at every point with feathers, flowers, and ribbons; supported by all her auxiliary forces of plumassiers, friseurs, milliners, mantua makers, perfumers, etc., etc.—contending for the palm of victory, on the arena of fashion, must be left to her fate, to conquer or to fall—I have no concern with HER.

But there is vanity of another kind, against which I would caution young females, and that is **a fondness for exhibiting their fashionable accomplishments or mental acquirements**. Ostentation in a man is bad enough—but in a woman is still worse. Few things are more offensive than to see a female laboring to the uttermost to convince a company, that she has received a good intellectual education, has improved her advantages, and is really a sensible, clever woman!

Now observe, I am not contending against a woman's acquainting herself with intellectual subjects—for I reject with indignation the calumny that the female mind is unequal to the profoundest subjects of human investigation, or should be restricted in its studies to more feminine pursuits. Much less am I anxious to exclude the stores of female intellect, and the music of female tongues, from the feast of reason and the flow of soul. No! Too long have the softer sex been insulted by the supposition, that they are incapable of joining or enriching the mental communion and conversation of the drawing-room. I most unequivocally, unhesitatingly say, that they have a much smaller share of conversational communion than their natural talents, and their acquired information, entitle them to.

All I am contending against is, that **love of display** which leads some to force themselves upon the attention of a company, which is not contented with sharing—but is ambitious of monopolizing the time and opportunities of rational discourse. Some silversmith and jewelers, who wish to attract public attention, make a splendid display of gems and jewels in their window—but their window

contains their whole stock, they have no store besides. There are others, who, making all proper exhibition, can conduct their customers from room to room within, each filled with stores of inestimable value. Not unlike the former, some people make a grand display in conversation—but their tongue, like the shop-window, exhibits all they possess—they have very little besides in the mind. But there are others who, like the latter tradesman, are not deficient in respectable display—but then, besides the ideas which they exhibit in conversation, they have a valuable stock of knowledge in the mind.

To conclude this long chapter, I must again remind you that **true piety** is the deep basis of EXCELLENCE; **sound morality** its lofty superstructure; **good sense, general knowledge, correct feeling**, the necessary furniture of the fabric; and **unaffected modesty** and **proper accomplishments** its elegant decorations!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

ON PRUDENCE, MODESTY, AND COURTESY

True religion, my dear children, is the first and the principal thing which I am anxious that you should possess—but it is not the only one. It is the basis of excellence which should be well laid, to bear whatever things are lovely, or of good report, or, changing the metaphor—it is that firmness and solidity of character which, like the substance of the diamond, best prepares it to receive a polish, and is rendered more beautiful and more valuable by being polished. The religion of some people is like the gem in the rough, the excellence of which is concealed and disfigured by many foreign adhesions—there is real principle at the bottom—but it is so surrounded by imprudence, crudeness, ignorance, slovenliness, and other bad qualities, that it requires a skillful eye to discern its worth. I most earnestly admonish you, therefore, to add to your piety

1. PRUDENCE. By prudence, I mean a calculating and deliberative turn of mind, as to the tendency of our words and actions; coupled with a desire so to speak and act, as to bring no inconvenience either upon ourselves or others. **It is that right application of knowledge to practice, which constitutes wisdom.** A person may have an immensity of knowledge, with scarcely a grain of prudence; and, notwithstanding the stores of his understanding, may always have his peace destroyed.

I am aware that prudence is too often regarded by the ardent and optimistic minds of the young, as a cold and heartless virtue; a sort of November flower,

which, though regular in its growth, and mild in color, has neither glow nor fragrance—but stands alone in the garden as the memorial of departed summer, the harbinger of approaching winter. Youth are captivated by what is exciting and impetuous, even when it leads to "Headlong Hall." If by prudence I meant mere cold reserve, or that selfishness which chills the ardor of kindness, and freezes the spring of benevolence in the heart, you might well beware of a disposition so unlovely.

But when I simply mean a habit of thinking before you speak or act, lest your thoughtlessness should prove injurious to the comfort of your own mind, or the comfort of others; when I only require you to exercise that judgment upon the tendencies of your conduct, which is one of the chief distinctions of a rational creature; when I merely call upon you to put forth the power of foresight which God has planted in your nature—surely, surely, there is nothing unsuited either to your age, or to the most generous mind, in this. That rashness of speech, or of conduct, which is always involving a person, and his friends too, in difficulties, inconveniences, and embarrassments, has little to commend itself to your admiration, with whatever good temper or mirthful liveliness it may happen to be associated; society must be a chaos, if all its members were formed upon this model.

You must have seen, my dear children, the mischiefs which imprudence has brought in its train. What strifes have been engendered by a rash, unguarded use of the tongue; by people giving a hasty opinion of the character, conduct, and motives of others—I believe that half of the quarrels which exist, may be traced up to this source. If then you would journey along through life in honor and in peace, I cannot give you a more important piece of advice than this—"**Be very cautious how you give an opinion of the character, conduct, or motives of others.** Be slow to speak. For one that has repented of having held his tongue, myriads have bitterly grieved over the imprudent use of it." Remember what Solomon says, "A prating fool shall fall;" and almost all fools do prate. Silence is generally a characteristic of wise men, especially in reference to the concerns of others. I know not a surer mark of a little, empty mind—than to be always talking about our neighbors' affairs. A collector of rags is a much more honorable, and certainly a far more useful member of society, than a collector and vender of tales.

But let your prudence manifest itself in reference to your conduct, as well as to your words. Never act until you have deliberated. Some people invert the order of nature and reason; they act first, and think afterwards; and the consequence very generally proves, as might have been expected, that first impressions are fallacious guides to wise actions. I scarcely know anything against which young people should be more seriously warned than this habit of acting from first impressions; nor anything which they should be more earnestly advised to

cultivate, than an almost instinctive propensity to look forward, and to consider the probable results of any proposed line of conduct. This calculating temper is to be preferred, far more than the knowledge of the rash; for it will preserve both the peace of its possessor, and that of others who have to do with him.

Multitudes, by a lack of prudence in the management of their financial affairs, have ruined themselves, plunged their families into poverty, and involved their friends in calamity. They have engaged in one rash speculation after another, and formed one unpromising connection after another; scarcely recovered from the complicated damage of one, before they were involved in the failure of the next—until the final catastrophe came in all its terrors, which might have been foreseen, and was predicted by everyone except the rash projector himself. When we consider that in such cases a man cannot suffer alone—but must extend the effects of his conduct to others, prudence will appear to be not only an ornament of character—but a virtue; and imprudence not only near to immorality—but a part of it.

Begin life, then, with a systematic effort to cultivate a habit of sound discretion, and prudent foresight; and for this purpose, observe attentively the conduct of others—profit both by the sufferings of the rash, and the tranquility of the cautious—render also your own past experience subservient to future improvement. I knew a person, who having imprudently engaged in a litigation which cost him a considerable sum of money, made the following entry in his diary, "March—Paid this day, one hundred and fifty pounds for wisdom." Experience, it has been said, keeps a costly school—but some people will not learn in any other, and they are fortunate who improve in this. I most emphatically recommend to you the diligent study of the book of **Proverbs**, as containing more sound wisdom, more prudential maxims for the right government of our affairs in this life, than all other books in the world put together!

2. MODESTY (that is, true humility) is a very bright ornament of the youthful character—without it the greatest attainments and the strongest genius cannot fail to create disgust.

Conceitedness, I have already stated to be one of the obstacles to youthful piety, and even where its evil does not operate so fatally as this, it certainly disfigures true religion. Young people should consider, that even if they have much knowledge—they have but little experience. Everything pert, flippant, obtrusive, and self-confident, is highly unsuitable in those who, whatever they may know of scholastic literature, have but little acquaintance either with themselves or mankind. Strong intellect and great attainments will soon commend themselves, without any pains being taken to force them upon our attention; and they never appear so lovely, nor attract us with such force, as

when seen through a veil of modesty. Like the blushing violet, which discloses its retreat rather by its fragrance than by its color, youthful excellence should modestly leave others to find out its concealment, and not ostentatiously thrust itself on public attention.

I do not wish to inculcate that extreme demureness which makes young people bashful and timid, even to awkwardness and sheepishness; which prevents even the laudable exertion of their powers; and which is not only distressing to the subjects of it themselves—but painful to others. Nothing can be further from my views than this; for it is a positive misery to be able neither to speak nor be spoken to, without blushing to the ears, and trembling to the very toes. But there is a wide difference between this bashfulness and genuine modesty.

"Modesty is a habit, or principle of the mind, which leads a man to form a humble estimate of himself, and prevents him from ostentatiously displaying his attainments before others—bashfulness is merely a state of timid feeling. Modesty discovers itself in the absence of everything pretended—whether in look, word, or action; bashfulness betrays itself by a downcast look, a blushing cheek, and a timid air. Modesty, though opposed to self-conceit, is not incompatible with an unpretending confidence in ourselves; bashfulness altogether unmans us, and disqualifies us for our duty."

Modesty shields a man from the mortifications and disappointments which assail the self-conceited man from every quarter. A pert, pragmatism youth, fond alike of exalting himself and depreciating others, soon becomes a mark for the arrows of ridicule, censure, and anger. While a modest person conciliates the esteem of all, not excepting his enemies and rivals; he disarms the resentment even of those who feel themselves most injured by his superiority; he makes all pleased with him by making them at ease with themselves; he is at once esteemed for his talents, and loved for the humility with which he bears them. Arrogance can neither supply the lack of talents, nor adorn them where they are possessed.

It is of importance to cultivate modesty in youth, for if lacking then, it is seldom obtained afterwards. Nothing grows faster than **conceitedness**; and as no weed in the human heart becomes more vigorous—so none is more offensive than this. I have known individuals, who, by their extensive information, might have become the delight of every circle in which they moved—have yet by their positive, dogmatical and overbearing temper, inspired such a dread, that their arrival in company has thrown a cloud-shadow on every countenance!

A disputatious temper is exceedingly to be dreaded. Nothing can be more opposed to the peace of society than that disposition, which converts every room into the arena of controversy, every company into competitors, and every diversity of sentiment into an occasion of discord. There are times when a man

must state and defend his own opinions; when he cannot be silent, when he must not only defend—but attack. But even in such cases he should avoid everything dogmatical and overbearing; all insulting contempt of others, and all that most irritating treatment, which makes his opponent appear like a fool. Our arguments should not fall and explode with the noise and violence of thunderbolts—but insinuate themselves like the light or the dew of heaven.

Take it, my dear children, as the result of nearly a quarter of a century's observation and experience in no contracted circle of human life, that verbal controversy in company produces very little good, and a great deal of harm. In such a situation men contend for **victory**—not for **truth**. And each goes into the war of words, determined to avoid, if possible, the disgrace of a public defeat.

3. COURTESY is a most valuable disposition. This is required not only by those authors who are the law givers of the social circle—but by Him who has published laws for the government of the heart.

"Be courteous," says the word of God. By courtesy, I mean that benevolence of disposition which displays itself in a constant aim to please those with whom we associate, both by the matter and manner of our actions; in little things as well as great ones. Crabbe, in his English Synonyms, has given us this definition of courtesy and amiability—"Courtesy in one respect comprehends more than amiability; it includes the manner, as well as the action; it is, properly speaking, polished amiability. On the other hand amiability includes more of the disposition in it than courteousness; it has less of the polish—but more of the reality of kindness. Courteousness displays itself in the address and the manners—amiability in direct good offices. Courteousness is most suitable for strangers; amiability for friends, or the nearest relatives. Among well-bred men, and men of rank, it is an invariable rule to address each courteously on all occasions whenever they meet, whether acquainted or otherwise. There is a degree of amiability due between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and members of the same family, which cannot be neglected without endangering the harmony of their communion."

It is my earnest desire, my children, that you should be both courteous and amiable. The union of both these constitutes true politeness. True politeness is excellence carried to its highest polish.

Life is made up for the most part of petty interactions—and is checkered more by the light and shade of minor pains and pleasures, than by the deeper hues of miseries and ecstasies. Occasions rarely happen, when we can relieve or be relieved by the more splendid efforts of benevolence; while not a day, scarcely an hour, passes without an opportunity of giving or receiving gratifications of amiability.

"Politeness is one of those advantages which we never estimate rightly but by the inconvenience of its loss. Its influence upon the manners is constant and uniform, so that like an equal motion, it escapes perception. Wisdom and virtue are by no means sufficient without the supplemental laws of good breeding, to secure freedom from degenerating into crudeness; or self-esteem from swelling into insolence—a thousand incivilities may be committed, and a thousand offices neglected without any remorse of conscience, or reproach from reason."

The true effect of genuine politeness seems to be rather ease than pleasure. The **power of delighting** must be conferred by nature, and cannot be delivered by precept, or obtained by imitation. But though it be the privilege of few to ravish and to charm, every man may hope, by rules and cautions, not to give pain, and may therefore, by the help of good breeding, enjoy the kindness of mankind, though he should have no claim to higher distinctions.

"The universal axiom in which all amiability is included, and from which flow all the formalities that custom has established in civilized nations, is—that no man shall give any preference to himself. This is a rule so comprehensive and certain, that perhaps it is not easy for the mind to imagine an incivility, without supposing it to be broken."

Do not think, however, that politeness is only to be acquired by frequenting what is called fashionable company, and places of public entertainment. Amiability is the offspring of benevolence, the tiny daughter of kindness; and this may be found in the cottage, where I have often seen as much real courtesy as ever graced a mansion. Hear the testimony of Dr. Johnson on this subject—"I have indeed not found, among any part of mankind, less real and rational amiability—than among those who have passed their time in paying and receiving visits, in frequenting public entertainments, in studying the exact measures of ceremony, and in watching all the variations of fashionable courtesy.

"They know, indeed, at what hour they may be at the door of an acquaintance, how many steps they must attend him towards the gate, and what interval should pass before his visit is returned—but seldom extend their care beyond the exterior and unessential parts of civility, nor refuse their own vanity any gratification, however expensive, to the quiet of another."

By a neglect of amiability, many people of substantial excellence have deprived their virtues of much of their luster, and themselves of much kindness—of whom it is very common to have it said—"Yes, he is a good man—but I cannot like him." Surely such people, by their unamiable disposition, have sold the attachment of the world at too low a price, since they have lost one of the rewards of virtue, without even gaining the profits of wickedness.

4. ON ADMIRATION OF THE CHARACTERS OF OTHERS, I think it important to say a few things. To observe, admire, and imitate the excellences of those around us—is no less our duty than our interest. It is a just tribute to their moral worth, and the means of promoting our own. It is of great consequence, however, that our admiration of character should be well directed. For as we naturally imitate what we admire, we should take care that we are attracted and charmed only by real excellence. Do not be led astray, my children, by a mere spuriousness—or showiness of character. Let nothing be regarded by you as worthy your admiration, which is not in connection with moral worth. Courage, frankness, heroism, politeness, intellect, are all valuable—but unless they are united with genuine principle, and true integrity, they only render their possessor more dangerous, and invest him with greater power to do harm. Do not allow your imagination to be captivated by the dazzling properties of a character, of which the substantial parts are not approved by your judgment; **nothing is excellent which is not morally so.**

The polished dissolute person, the generous profligate, the witty and intelligent skeptic, are to be shunned as serpents, whose colorful and beautiful skin should have no power to reconcile us to their venom. You may be charged with lack of taste, or coldness of heart, for withholding your approbation—but it is a far sublimer attainment, and certainly a more difficult one, to have a taste and ardor only in the cause of holiness. Be cautious to examine every character which is presented to you for admiration, to penetrate the varnish of exterior accomplishments; and if you find nothing of genuine integrity and holiness beneath, withhold the tribute of your approbation, regardless of the sneers of those shallow minds who have neither the power to test the things that differ, nor the virtue to approve only such as are excellent.

It is a very important hint to give to young people, just setting out in life, to **analyze character before they admire it**; remembering that, to borrow an allusion from chemistry, a deadly poison may be held in solution by the most beautifully-colored liquid which the eye can behold.

5. AN EXTREME DREAD OF SINGULARITY, arising out of a morbid sensibility to shame—is a dangerous disposition of mind, to which young people are very liable.

There are some who are so ambitious to be thought singular, that they pretend distinction in folly, or even in vice. They can even bear to be laughed at, if it may be admitted that they are singular; and are content to be persecuted, provided it be for the sake of their singularity. These 'martyrs to strangeness' are in one extremity of character—of which the other is that **great dread of being ridiculed as singular**, which tries a man's attachment, even to the cause of virtue. There are some so acutely, so morbidly sensible to the least sneer, that

they are put in dreadful peril of forsaking the cause of righteousness and morality, rather than take up the cross in the face of laughter. I have already in part considered this, and stated it to be one of the obstacles to early piety—but it not only obstructs the entrance—but the subsequent path of piety, and should therefore be most vigorously opposed by all who are subject to its influence.

A sense of shame, when felt in reference to what is wrong, is one of the guardians of virtue—in this meaning of the phrase, it can never be too acute, nor can it be too delicately susceptible of impression. When any one has ceased to be ashamed of doing what is wrong, and the last blush with which a tender conscience once suffused the countenance has vanished—the progress of sin is nearly completed, and the sinner may be considered as near the end of his wicked career. But when a person is so morbidly sensible to ridicule, that he shrinks from it, even in the performance of that which is right, he not only lets down his dignity—but endangers his principles.

There is something noble and heroic in that disposition, which can dare to be singular in the cause of true religion and morality; which with a mind conscious of doing right, can fight, single-handed, the battles of the Lord, against the army of scorers by which it may be surrounded. It is not a part of virtue to be indifferent to the opinion of others, except that opinion be opposed to the principles of truth and holiness—then it is the very height of virtue to act above it, and against it!

Ridicule is certainly not the test of truth—but it is one of the most fiery ordeals of that courage by which the truth is professed and supported. Many have been vanquished by 'scorn', who were invulnerable to 'rage'; for men in general would much rather have their hearts reproached than their heads, deeming it less disgraceful to be weak in virtue than deficient in intellect. Strange perversion! the effect of that pride which, being injected into our nature by the venom of the serpent in Paradise, still continues to infect and destroy us! Let us oppose this working of evil within us, and crucify this lust of the flesh. Let no ridicule deter us from doing what is right or avoiding what is wrong. Let us emulate the sublime example of the apostle, who exclaimed, "We are fools for Christ's sake." This is the noblest effort of human courage, the loftiest achievement of virtue to be "faithful found among the faithless," and willing to bear any ridicule rather than act in opposition to the convictions of our judgment, and the dictates of our conscience.

It is infinitely better to be scorned for doing what is right, than applauded for doing what is wrong. From the laughter of the wicked you may find a refuge in the approbation of your conscience, and the smile of your God. But in what a miserable situation is that poor cowardly wretch, whose dread of singularity has led him to sacrifice the convictions of his conscience, and

who has nothing to comfort him under the frowns of Deity but the applause of fools!

Neither in little things, nor in great ones, allow your dread of singularity to turn your feet from the path of integrity. Arm yourself with this mind-set, to do what is right, though you can find neither companion nor follower!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

REDEEMING TIME

It was a very important admonition which Paul delivered to the Ephesian church—"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." The context in which it stands is equally striking—he had just admonished those to whom he wrote, not to walk as fools; thus implying that a man can give no greater proof of folly, nor more effectually act the part of a fool, than to waste his time—while on the other hand, a just appreciation and right improvement of time are among the brightest displays of true wisdom.

Seneca has somewhere observed that we are all of us complaining of the shortness of time, and yet have much more than we know what to do with. We are always mourning that our days are few, and yet acting as though there would be no end of them. This plainly proves that we neither value time correctly, nor improve it diligently. The late Henry Martyn was known at the University by the designation of "The man who never wasted an hour." Nothing can better explain what I mean by improving time; it is never wasting it—but always appropriating it to some useful purpose. Many considerations, my children, urge this upon us.

Time is the most precious thing in the world. In the bestowment of it, God differs from the manner in which he distributes most of his other gifts; in the latter he is profuse, in the former miserly. He can, of course, give us but a moment at a time—but that he does without ever promising another; as if to teach us highly to value, and diligently to improve the present moment, by the consideration that for anything we know, it may be the last.

Time, when once gone, never returns. Where is yesterday? "With the ages beyond the Flood," and we could as soon hope to bring back one as the other. We talk of fetching up a lost hour—but the thing is impossible. A moment once lost is lost forever; we could as rationally set out to find a sound that had expired in the air, as to find a lost moment.

There is much of our time which can be applied to no purpose—except preparing us for improving other portions of our existence. How much goes away in sleep, and in all the other demands of nature, for its refreshment and invigoration—this is not lost, if the subsequent periods be rightly applied, and diligently employed, any more than the time spent in oiling the wheels of a carriage impedes the journey, because the vehicle goes the faster afterwards. But then, if we sleep at night, it is that we might be busy in the day; if we eat and drink, it is that we might be better able to work; and certainly a recollection of the great portion of our time that is necessary for refreshment and repose, should be a stimulus to us to employ the remainder with the greater diligence. We should regard it as an infirmity of nature, that so much sleep and time for eating and drinking is necessary, and endeavor, by diligence in our waking working hours, to improve the surplus.

Then add to this the portions of time which are irresistibly engrossed by the 'tyranny of custom'—all that passes in regulating the superficial decorations of life, or is given up in the reciprocations of civility to the disposal of others; all that is torn from us by the violence of disease, or stolen imperceptibly away by lassitude and languor; that large portion which is spent amid the toys of childhood, and afterwards amid the imbecility of old age. I say, add up these things, and when you have subtracted the amount from the gross sum of man's life, how small is the remainder! Even the active and busy part of mankind apply a very little more than a third part of their existence to any valuable purpose. By this mode of calculation, the old man of eighty has lived but little more than twenty-six years; and the man of forty—but little more than thirteen. A most cogent reason for not wasting an hour!

We should never forget that our time is among the talents for which we must give account at the judgment of God. Time being not the least precious of these, will be required with a strictness proportionate to its value. Let us tremble at this idea, as well we may. We must be tried not only for what we have done—but for what we had time to do, yet neglected to do it. Not only for the hours spent in sin—but for those wasted in idleness. Let us beware of that mode of spending time which some call killing it, "for this murder, like others, will not always be concealed—the hours destroyed in secret will appear when we least expect it, to the unspeakable terror and amazement of our souls—they arise from the dead, and fly away to heaven, where they might have carried better news, and there tell sad tales of us, which we shall be sure to hear of again, when we hold up our hands at the bar, and they shall come as so many swift witnesses against us!"

It might stir us up to diligence in the improvement of our time, to think how much of it has been already misspent. What days, and weeks, and months, and years, have already been utterly wasted, or exhausted upon trifles totally unworthy of them. They are gone, and nothing remains of them but the guilt of

having wasted them. We cannot call them back if we would; and all we can do is to let their memorial, like the recollection of any other dead friends whom we treated improperly while they lived, lead us to value more highly, and to use more kindly, those that remain.

How much of our time is already gone—and how little may be yet to come? The sands of our hour-glass may be almost out, without the possibility of having it turned. Death may be at the door. When you begin a day, you don't know that you shall end it! When you lie down, you don't know that you shall rise up! When you leave your house, you don't know that you shall ever return!

For what is your life? it is even as a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes! Life is a bubble that rises, and shines, and bursts! We know not in any one period of our existence—but that it may be the last. Surely, surely, we should then improve our time, when we may be holding, for anything we know, the last portion of it in our hands! With the absolute certainty of a life as long as Methuselah's, not an hour should be wasted!—how much less when we know not that there is a day in reserve for us!

But what are the PURPOSES for which time should be redeemed?

For the **SALVATION OF THE SOUL**, the business of true religion, the preparation for eternity. You are immortal creatures, my children, and must live forever in torment or in bliss; and certainly you cannot be forming a right estimate of the value of time, nor be rightly employing it, if the soul be forgotten, salvation neglected, and eternity left out of consideration! "For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" A man may attain to the science of Newton, to the genius of Milton, to the learning of Bentley, to the wealth of Croesus, and to the fame of Alexander—but if the salvation of the soul be neglected, he will through eternity confess and curse his folly—in losing his time! Our great business in this world is to prepare for the next; time is capital given us to trade with for eternity; and that man who goes off the 'theater of life' without having attended supremely to the great business of true religion, will appear to the inhabitants of the unseen world, as well as to himself, an object of amazement for his unparalleled folly in wasting his time upon matters, which, compared with eternal happiness, were utterly insignificant!

We must redeem time for the pursuits of business, for it is ordained that men shall gain their bread by the sweat of their brow; for the improvement of our mind, so far as circumstances will allow, in all useful knowledge; and for the exercise of benevolence. These are the objects which we must ever keep in view, as the claimants who make their demands for the years and the days which God has given us upon earth.

And FROM WHAT is our time to be redeemed?

From **SLOTH**. How much of it is consumed by this lazy, slumbering, monster! How many golden hours are wasted upon the downy pillow! Late rising is the enemy of piety, of knowledge, of health, of affluence; and the cause of ignorance, irreligion, and poverty. Shall true religion, wisdom, benevolence—my dear children—be found knocking at your chamber door morning after morning, exclaiming, "Awake, you who sleep, and arise!"—and receive no other answer than, "a little more sleep, and a little more slumber!" A habit of early rising has, in many cases, been a fortune to the pocket, and in many more, a fortune to the mind. Reckoning that a day consists of ten hours' active employment, the difference of life between an individual who rises at six o'clock, and another who rises at eight o'clock, is, in the term of sixty years, no less than equal to twelve years, and those the best years of a man's existence. There is in this calculation that which proves late rising not only to be a loss—but a crime! It is so much deducted from a man's existence—and actually given to his grave!

Many of the most distinguished characters in the literary world, owe their eminence to early rising. It is recorded of Buffon, the celebrated natural historian, that wishing to acquire the habit of early rising—both from his love of knowledge and of fame—he promised to pay his servant extra money, for every morning which the servant would be able to get Buffon out of bed by a given time. The servant went most resolutely to work, under the commission that authorized him to drag Buffon, if necessary, out of bed—and, in spite of threats and ill-usage, which he often had to endure from his somnolent master, succeeded in getting him from his bed by the stipulated hour. And Buffon informs us, that to the unwearied perseverance of his servant, the world is indebted for his work on Natural History.

It is a most injurious practice to invert the order of nature, and sit up late instead of rising early. Nocturnal studies rapidly undermine the strongest constitution. Dr. Owen, a name dear to all who love sterling piety and profound theological learning, used to say, when suffering through his excessive application to study, "That he would gladly give up all the knowledge he had acquired after ten o'clock at night, if he could recover all the strength he had lost by studies carried on after that hour."

Let your sleep, then, be necessary and healthful—not idle and wasteful of time, beyond the needs and conveniences of nature; and sometimes be curious to see the entrance which the sun makes, when he is coming forth from his chambers in the east.

Redeem time, from the vain pursuits of personal adornment and DRESS. This applies chiefly, though not exclusively, to the softer sex. It is

shocking to think how much precious time is wasted at the mirror, in the silly ambition of rivaling the butterfly and the peacock! What a reproach to a rational creature, is it to neglect the improvement of the soul, for the adornings of the body! This is like painting the outside of a house, while the interior is left to be dark, damp, disheveled, and filthy.

Unprofitable reading is another consumer of time which must be avoided. Worldly amusements, and parties of pleasure, are also injurious. I do not by this mean to condemn the occasional communion of friends in the social circle, where the civilities of life are given and received, the ties of friendship strengthened, and the mind recreated, without any injury being done to the spiritual or moral interests. But the theater, the card-table, the billiard-room, are all to be avoided as vile thieves, which steal our time and hurt our souls! Pleasure parties in general are to be watched with care, and resorted to but seldom, for they seldom pay for the time that is spent. "There are a multitude of people in the world, who, being idle themselves, do their best endeavors to make others so—in which work, partly through a disposition in those others to be made so, and partly through a fear and false shame, which hinders them from fraying away such birds of prey, they are too often allowed to succeed. An assembly of such people can be compared only to a slaughterhouse, where the precious hours, and often the characters of all their friends and acquaintance, are butchered without mercy!"

We must redeem time from the TRIFLING CONVERSATION and gossip of IDLE COMPANIONS, "for no man," says Jeremy Taylor, "can be provident of his time, that is not prudent in the choice of his company; and if one of the speakers be vain, tedious, and trifling—he who hears, and he who answers, are equal losers in their time." "There are always some drones in society, who make much noise—but no honey." We should avoid all those who talk much—but say little, and watch against people whose conversation is like the buzz of moths and caterpillars, not only disagreeable—but carrying on a system of spoliation; and who eat into an hour before we are aware that the mischief is commenced. Such people should consider, that in consuming a man's time, they are committing a felony upon his property, for time is a part of his capital. And all others should retire from such people—for idleness is contagious!

EFFICIENCY. If you would redeem the time, you should not only avoid absolute idleness, or doing nothing—but a slow and sauntering habit of doing anything. To use an old proverb, "We ought not to make greater haste, than good speed." There are some people who are always in a hurry, and all they do, bears marks of haste. Everything they do is half done, or badly done. But there is a wide difference between habits of efficiency—and bustling hurry. A thing is not better done for having twice as much time consumed upon it, as it needs. There are individuals who seem always to creep to an engagement, and almost to slumber

over it. As it respects general habits, a parent can scarcely teach a child a more valuable art than efficiency without bustle—nor can any one that values his time, cultivate a more desirable one for himself.

ORDER and **PUNCTUALITY** are essential to a right improvement of time. I mention these things together, because they are so closely connected, and have such a mutual influence on each other. One, indeed, is the order of 'place', the other is the order of 'time'. The best, and indeed the only rules, which any man can with propriety prescribe for himself, are these—"A **time** for everything—and everything in its time. A **place** for everything—and everything in its place." A habit of order may be fairly said to lengthen a man's life, not by multiplying its hours—but by enabling him more advantageously to employ them. Disorderly habits are perpetually wasting our time. When a person has no one place for any one thing—but lays everything down, just wherever he may happen to be, he is sure to spend his life in confusion. He never knows where to find what he needs. Let such a person conceive what an amount of time would be made up by all the minutes and hours which he has employed during his life in looking for misplaced articles; to say nothing of the trouble he has endured, and the inconvenience in which others have been involved. In business, order is property, and every tradesman deficient in this virtue, ought, in taking stock, to have this item on the loss side of the balance-sheet, "So much lost for lack of order." And, as disorderly habits waste our time, they are not only improper—but actually sinful.

PUNCTUALITY is another habit very important to a right improvement of time. Fix your time—and then keep it. Perhaps you know some people who are always behind-hand. The clock is to them an article without use—they do all things as if by whim or impulse. They are thus mischief-makers, without malice; and as far as in them lies, bring a chaos into human affairs. An individual who keeps a company of twelve people waiting for him but five minutes, wastes an hour! "Punctuality," says an elegant writer, "is a quality which the interest of mankind requires to be diffused through all the ranks of life—but which many seem to consider as a vulgar and ignoble virtue, below the ambition of greatness, or the attention of wit; scarcely requisite among men of gaiety and spirit, and sold at its highest rate when it is sacrificed to a frolic or a jest."

Punctuality has another reference besides our time, I mean to our **word**. To promise without intending to perform, is absolute falsehood. But we ought to be very cautious how we bind ourselves by a promise, which is subject to contingencies beyond our foresight, or above our control. Many a man has subjected himself to the reproach of a liar without intending to deceive. Some people make all engagements with their eyes shut, and no sooner open them than they find it impossible to fulfill their word. We should always pause before we issue these verbal promissory notes, and calculate whether we have the means to meet them when they are presented for payment.

Nothing can be more unjust or cruel, than a willful lack of punctuality in pecuniary transactions. It is unkind to keep, through our delays, a cook stirring a dinner in the kitchen. To thwart the expectation of a tradesman, dependent, upon our punctuality, is a species of inhuman cruelty.

A good method, wisely arranged and punctually observed in the distribution of our time, would materially assist us in rightly employing it. True religion, business, mental improvement, the exercises of benevolence, ought all, so far as the ever-varying circumstances of life will admit of it, to have their proper allotments. Each hour should know its proper employment, and receive its proper care in its season. No one should leave his days to be occupied by whatever accident or chance can seize them; for then, trifles being more common and clamorous than other things of greater importance, are likely to run off with the greatest share.

Have always some work in hand, which may be going on during the many spare intervals, for there will be many spare intervals in both of business and recreation. Pliny, in one of his letters, where he gives an account of the various methods he used, to fill up every vacancy of time, after several employments which he enumerates, says, "Sometimes I hunt—but then I carry with me a book, that while my servants are busied in disposing of the nets and other matters, I may be employed in something that may be useful to me in my studies; and that if I miss of my game, I may at the least bring home some of my own thoughts with me, and not have the disappointment of having caught nothing all day."

This is the way to excellence and wisdom; and it is a road open to all. Carry about with you, therefore, some book, or subject, which shall gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost; for these fragments, like chips of diamond, or fragments of gold—are too precious to be thrown away. It is with our property as with our time, when we look at it in the gross, we spend freely because it seems as if it would never be exhausted; and when we have hours, half hours, or quarters, we squander them because they are not worth keeping.

There is a proverb which our frugal ancestors have taught us, "Take care of the shillings, and the pounds will take care of themselves." So in reference to our time I would say, "Take care of your hours, and the years will take care of themselves." A man that is thrifty with his money, will grow rich upon what another throws away, as not worth saving; so a man that is thrifty of his time, will grow wise by those small vacancies which intervene in the most crowded variety of employment, and which many are foolish enough to squander upon trifles—or saunter away in idleness!

Avoid procrastination. Do at once what at once ought to be done. Let not the season of action be spent in the hesitancy of skepticism, or the purpose of future effort. Do not let tomorrow be perpetually the time when everything is to be done, unmindful that the **present** time alone is ours—as the **past** is dead—and the **future** yet unborn.

A right improvement of time, then, my dear children, is the way to knowledge, which does not in every case require uninterrupted leisure; only keep the mind open to receive ideas, and diligently employ every spare moment in collecting them, and it is astonishing how rapidly the accumulation of mental treasure will go forward.

But it is chiefly in reference to eternity that I exhort you to redeem the time. Too many attempt to justify their neglect of true religion by pleading a lack of opportunity to attend to its high concerns. But how inadmissible such a plea is, the subject of this chapter plainly proves—for, as we have formerly shown, true religion is a right disposition of mind towards the great and blessed God, and we now see that such a disposition, besides the more solemn seasons of public and private prayer, will pour its influence over the whole of a man's life, and fill the vacancies which are left between the most crowded occupations, with short petitions to heaven, and the aspirations of a soul panting after God, and the anticipations of a renewed mind looking towards eternity.

Remember then, above all things, that time was given you to repent of sin, to pray for pardon, to believe in Christ, to work out your salvation, to lay up treasures in heaven, to prepare for the solemnities of judgment, and secure that happiness which is not measured by the revolution of years—but is, in the strictest sense of the word, ETERNAL!

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

ON THE CHOICE OF A COMPANION FOR LIFE

The first piece of advice I offer is, not to think of this all-important affair too soon, nor suppose it necessary that a young person of eighteen or nineteen should begin to pay or receive particular attentions. Do not court the subject, nor permit your imagination to be forever dwelling upon it. Rather put it from you, than bring it near. Repress that visionary and romantic turn of mind, which considers the whole space that lies between you and the marriage altar, as a dreary waste, all beyond it as a paradise—in innumerable instances the very reverse has been the case, and the exchange of a father's for a husband's house

has been like the departure of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden to a wide uncultivated wilderness.

It is on this ground that novels, the most pernicious mental poison the press can disseminate, are so much to be depreciated; they inflame the imagination with visionary scenes and adventurous exploits, on a subject which the heart ought never to approach—but under the guidance of a sober judgment. Young people should be cautious in their social communion of converting this subject into matter of merriment, much more should they beware of aiding and abetting each other in the formation of such connections. Never, never be the confidant of individuals who are engaged in an affair of this kind unknown to their parents; nor be the medium of communication between them. Third people, who have been ambitious of the honor of match-making, have often done mischief to others, which, however they afterwards lamented, they were never able to repair. I know some whose lives have been embittered, and ever will be, by seeing the rueful consequences of those ill-fated unions, of which they were, in great measure, the authors.

My next admonition is, Take extreme care of hasty entanglements. Neither give nor receive particular attentions, which cannot be mistaken, until the matter is well weighed. Keep your affections shut up at home in your hearts, while your judgment, aided, by prudence, prepares to make its report.

When the subject comes fairly before your attention, make it immediately known to your parents. Conceal nothing from them. Abhor the very idea of clandestine connections, as a violation of every duty you owe to God and man. There is nothing heroic in a secret correspondence. The silliest girls and the weakest men can maintain it, and have been most frequently engaged in it. Spurn the individual who would come between you and your natural guardians—your parents. Harken to the opinion of your parents with all the deference which is due to it. Rare are the cases in which you should act in opposition to their wishes.

Be guided in this affair by the dictates of prudence. Never think of forming a connection until there is a rational prospect of temporal provision. I am not quite sure that the present age is in this respect more prudent than the past. It is all very pretty and pleasing for two young people to sing of love in a cottage, and draw picturesque views of two affectionate hearts struggling together amid the difficulties of life—but these pictures are seldom realized. **Marriages which begin in imprudence generally end in wretchedness.** Young people who marry without the consent of their parents, when that consent is withheld, not from caprice—but discretion, often find that they are not united like two doves, by a silken thread—but like two of Samson's foxes, with a firebrand between

them. I call it little else than wickedness to marry without a rational prospect of temporal support.

Right motives should ever lead to this union. To marry for property only, is most sordid and vile. We are informed that in some parts of the East Indies, it is thought no sin for a woman to sell her virtue at the price of an elephant; and how much more virtuous in reality is she who accepts a man for the sake of his fortune? Where there is no affection at the altar of marriage, there must be perjury of the most awful kind; and he who returns from church with this guilt upon his conscience, has brought with him a curse to his habitation, which is likely to make his prize of little worth. When such people have counted their money and their sorrows together, how willingly with the price of their slavery would they buy again their liberty; and so they could be released from each other, give up all claim to the golden fetter which had chained them together.

Personal attractions alone are not enough to form a ground of union. **Few things are more superficial or fleeting than beauty.** The fairest flower often fades the soonest. There ought to be personal attachment I admit—but that attachment should be to the mind as well as to the body. Except we discern something lovely that will remain when the color of the cheek has faded, and the fire of the eye is extinguished, and the symmetry of the form has been destroyed—we are engaging our affections to an object which we may live to witness only as a sort of ghost to that beauty which we once loved. There should be temper, and qualities of mind which we think will please us, and satisfy us—when the novelties and charms of personal attractions have faded forever.

In the case of pious young people, neither personal nor mental qualifications, nor both together, should be deemed a sufficient ground of union in the absence of true religion. The directions of Scripture on this head are very explicit. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness; and what communion has light with darkness? or what part has he who believes with an infidel?" 2 Cor. 6:14, 15. "She is at liberty to marry whom she will—but only in the Lord." 1 Cor. 7:39. This is a declaration of the will of God. It is a clear unequivocal annunciation of his mind on the subject. Viewed as advice, it is wise, for it is given by one who is infallible—but it is more than advice, it is the command of one who has authority to govern, the right to judge, and the power to punish. He who instituted marriage, has thus laid down the law, as to the principles on which it is to be conducted. Pious young people are here commended to unite themselves only with those who appear to be partakers of similar dispositions. An infraction of this law is followed with many evils—

It displeases others—it discourages ministers, grieves the church, and is a stumbling block to the weak. It is a source of inexpressible regret to parents. "At

the age of forty, Esau married a young woman named Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite. He also married Basemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite. But Esau's wives made life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah. Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living." This is deeply affecting, and it is but the feeling of every truly Christian parent concerning his children when they act as Esau did.

But consider the influence of an unsuitable marriage on yourselves. We all need helps, not hindrances to heaven. Our personal religion requires props to keep it up, not weights to drag it down. In this case, not to be helped is to be hindered. The constant companionship of an ungodly husband, or wife, must be most injurious. The example is always near—it is the example of one we love, and which has on that account the greater power over us. Affection is assimilating—it is easy to imitate, difficult to oppose those we love. Your own religion is put in awful peril daily. But if you should escape unhurt, still what sorrow will such an association produce. What a dreadful, heart-rending idea—to love and live with those from whom you fear you shall be separated forever; to be moving hourly to a point, when you shall be torn from each other for eternity! How sweet the consciousness which lives in the bosom of a pious couple, that if separated tomorrow, they have an eternity to spend together in heaven—but the reverse of these feelings will be yours, if you marry not "in the Lord."

Besides, how many interruptions to marital felicity will you experience. Dissimilarity of taste, even in lesser matters, sometimes proves a great bar to happiness. Between those who are so nearly related, and so constantly together, there should be as great a likeness of disposition as possible. But to be unlike in the most momentous of all concerns, in an affair of perpetual recurrence! Is this the way to be happy? Will the strongest affection surmount this obstacle? or ought the experiment to be made?

And then, think on the influence it will have on all your domestic arrangements, on your CHILDREN, should you have any. You will be left alone, and perhaps counteracted in the great business of family religion. Your plans may be thwarted, your instructions neglected, and your influence opposed. Your offspring, partaking of the evil nature common to their species, are much more likely to follow the worldly example, than the spiritual one.

The Scripture is replete with instances of the evil resulting from the neglect of religious marriages. This was the sin which filled the old world with wickedness, and prepared it for the deluge. Some of Lot's daughters married in Sodom, and perished in its overthrow. Ishmael and Esau married ungodly people, and were both rejected and turned persecutors. The first captivity of the Jews, after their settlement in the Holy Land, is ascribed to this cause. (Judges 3). What did

David suffer from this evil? The case of Solomon is a warning to all ages. This was the sin that Ezra and Nehemiah so grievously lamented, so sharply reproved.

But I need not go to Scripture for instances of this nature—they stand thick all around us. What misery, what irregularities, what wickedness, have I seen, or known to exist in some families, where the parents were divided on the subject of true religion.

Young people often attempt to persuade themselves on very insufficient grounds, that the objects of their regard are pious. They evade the law of God by considering them as "hopeful". But are they decided Christians? In some cases they wish them to enter into church fellowship, as a kind of proof that they are godly. At other times they believe that, although their friends be not quite decided in their religious character, yet, by being united with them, they will become so. But are we to do evil, that good may come? Is marriage to be considered one of the means of grace? It is much more probable that such a connection will do injury to the pious party, than good to the unconverted one. I have seen the experiment often tried—but scarcely ever succeed, of marrying an unregenerate person with the hope of converting him. Dr. Doddridge says, he never knew only one instance in which this end was gained.

I do not mean to say that true religion, though indispensable, is the only prerequisite in the individual to whom you should unite yourselves. Temper, age, rank, mind, ability to preside over domestic cares, should all be taken into the account. Many, when expostulated with on their being about to form an unsuitable marriage, have replied, "O he is a very good man, and what more would you have?" Many things—a good disposition, industrious habits, a probability of supporting a family, a suitableness of age and station, a congeniality of general taste. **To marry a person without piety, is sinful—to marry for piety alone, is foolish!**

Again I entreat you to recollect that the marriage union is for life; and, if it be badly formed, is an evil from which there is no refuge but the grave—no cure but in death! An unsuitable marriage, as soon as it is found to be so, throws a gloom, not merely over some particular periods of your time, and portions of your history—but over the whole—it raises a dark and wide-spreading cloud, which extends over the whole horizon of a man's prospect, and behind which he sees the sun of his prosperity go down forever while it is yet noon. It is a subject on which the most delicate reserve, the most prudent caution, and the most fervent prayer, are indispensably necessary. It is not, as it is too frequently thought and treated, a mere sportive topic to enliven discourse with, or an enchanted ground for the imagination to rove in, or an object for a sentimental mind to court and dally with—it is a serious business, inasmuch as the happiness

of many is concerned in it; their happiness not for a part of their lives—but for the whole of it; not for time only—but for eternity. And, therefore, although I would not surround the marriage altar with scarecrows, nor invest it with shadows as deep as those of the sepulcher, which men are more afraid than eager to approach; so neither would I adorn it with the garlands of folly until I have rendered it as frivolous as the ball-room, where men and women are paired for the dance with no regard to congeniality of mind, with no reference to future happiness, and no object but amusement.

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE GREAT END OF LIFE

Never was there a more rational, or a more important question proposed for the consideration of the human understanding, than "**What is man's chief end?**" This, I say, is a most rational, and a most important inquiry; for every thinking being should certainly ask himself, "What is the great end of my existence? I find myself in a world where innumerable objects present themselves to my notice, each soliciting my heart, and each claiming to be most worthy of its supreme regard. I have faculties of mind capable of high pursuits. I perceive, by universal experience, that my stay in this world will be very short, for I am only a stranger and a sojourner here upon earth, as all my fathers were; and as I am anxious not to go out of the world without answering the end for which I came into it, I would wish to know the chief purpose for which I exist." Such a reflection is what every one should make—but which very few do make. Would they fritter away their lives as they do, on the most contemptible trifles, if they seriously inquired for what purpose their lives were given?

What, then, is the CHIEF end of man? You will perceive, I lay all the stress of the inquiry on the adjective; for there are many ends to be kept in view, many purposes to be accomplished, many objects to be sought. We must provide for our own sustenance, and the comfort of our family; we should store our mind with useful knowledge; endeavor to be useful, ornamental, and respectable members of society; and there are many other things which may be lawfully pursued—but we are now considering that ONE GREAT OBJECT, which is paramount to all others, to which all others must be subservient, and the loss of which will constitute life, whatever else we might have gained, a lost adventure.

There are five claimants for this high distinction, this supreme rank, in the objects of human pursuit—the pretensions of which shall be separately examined.

1. RICHES, with peculiar boldness, assert their claims to be "the one thing needful," and multitudes practically confess the justice of the demand. Hence, there is no deity whose worshipers are more numerous than Mammon. We see many all round us who are obviously making this world the exclusive object of their solicitude. Wealth is with them the main chance. For this they rise early, and sit up late, eat the bread of anxiety, and drink the water of affliction. This is their language, "I care for nothing if I may but succeed in business, and acquire property. I will endure any fatigue, make any sacrifice, suffer any privation, so that I at last may realize a fortune!" It is perfectly evident that beyond this they have neither a wish nor an object. Money, money, money, is their chief good, and the highest end of their existence. God, true religion, the soul, salvation, heaven, hell, are as much forgotten as if they were mere fables, and all the energies and anxieties of their soul are concentrated in wealth. Is this rational?

Consider the **uncertainty** which attends the pursuit of this object. FORTUNE has been often described as a capricious goddess, not always bestowing her golden gifts on those, who by their prudence and industry seem most to deserve them. "The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." The wisest and most industrious worldling sometimes ends in poverty. And shall we seek that as the end of life, which after all, we may never gain? Shall we deliberately devote existence to secure that which after all, we may never secure? How many miserable creatures are going down to the grave, confessing that they have spent their lives in courting fortune, and have scarcely obtained a smile—while others, who have hardly asked a favor, have been loaded with them. Poor creatures! they may say in reference to the world, what Wolsey did, "Had I served God with half the zeal that I have served Mammon, he would not now have forsaken me in my old age."

But even granting that the end is secured, do riches bring all the pleasures in their train which they promise? It is a very true remark, that a **man's happiness is not in proportion to his wealth**. "A man's life," said Christ, "consists not in the abundance of things which he has;" and yet many act as if they denied the truth of the sentiment. Do you think that all rich men are happy, and that all poor men are miserable? As to mere animal enjoyment, does the affluent man receive a larger share than his poor neighbor? Whose head aches less, for the costly plume that waves on the brow? Whose body enjoys the glow of health more for the rich velvet which enwraps it, or the lace which adorns it? Whose sleep is sounder because it is enjoyed on down? Whose palate is more pleased because it is fed with many dishes instead of one, and from silver instead of delft? Whose bosom is more free from pain because of the diamond which sparkles there? Do riches multiply the number of the senses, and give other inlets of sensation to the soul, or increase the power of those we already possess? Do they add to the just and natural appetites, or afford greater gratifications to those we already feel? Do they insure health, keep off disease?

Nothing of the kind! Numerous servants, splendid clothes, rich furniture, luxurious living—add very little to a man's happiness! We may say of these things as Pliny did of the pyramids of Egypt, "They are only proud proclamations of that wealth and abundance which their possessor knew not how to use."

Anxious care is the shadow of possession, and the magnitude of the shadow will always be in proportion to the dimensions of the substance. Great wealth certainly makes a man many anxieties. What shall I do? is a question often asked by affluence, as well as by poverty. There is nothing in earthly things suited as a portion to the desires of the human mind. The soul of man needs something better for its provision than wealth. It is on this account, partly, that our Lord brands the rich man in the gospel for a fool, who, when he surveyed his treasures, said to his soul, "You have goods laid up for many years in store; eat, drink, and be merry."

Then how precarious is the **continuance** of riches. They appear to us as in a dream; they come and are gone; they stand by us in the form of a golden image, high in stature, and deeply founded on a rock—but while we look at them they are transformed into an eagle with wings, and when we are preparing to embrace them, they fly away! What changes have we witnessed even within our own circles of observation. How many do we know, now suffering in poverty, who formerly rolled in affluence! They set out in life in the full sunshine of prosperity—but the storm overtook them, and blasted every comfort they had in the world!

But if riches continue to the end of life, how uncertain is life itself. How often do we see people called away by death in the very midst of their prosperity. Just when they have most reasons to desire to live, then they must die. Their industry has been successful, their desires after wealth have been gratified, they build houses, plant gardens, and when preparing for many years of ease and enjoyment, they leave all—for the grave! And then, whose shall those things be which they have amassed? "It is recorded of Saladin, the Saracen conqueror, that after he had subdued Egypt, passed the Euphrates, and conquered cities without number; after he had retaken Jerusalem, and performed exploits almost more than human, he finished his life in the performance of an action that ought to be transmitted to the most distant posterity. A moment before he uttered his last sigh, he called the herald who had carried his banners before him in all his battles; he commanded him to fasten to the top of a lance, the shroud in which the dying prince was soon to be buried. "Go," said he, "carry this lance, unfurl this banner, and while you lift up this standard, proclaim, This, this is all that remains to Saladin the Great, the Conqueror, and the King of the Empire, of all his glory!"

Yes, and that piece of shroud in which his perishing remains shall be enwrapped, is all that will be left of his wealth, to the rich man when he leaves the present world. Not one step will his riches go with him beyond the grave. What a sad parting will that be when the soul shall leave all its treasures behind in this world, and enter upon another state of existence, where it cannot take a penny, and where it would be useless if it could take it all. Then the miserable spirit, like a shipwrecked merchant, thrown on some strange coast after the loss of all his property, shall be cast on the shore of eternity, without one single comfort to relieve its pressing and everlasting necessities.

Can riches then substantiate their claims to be the chief end of man? What, when it is so doubtful whether, after all our endeavors, we shall possess them; when the possession of them contributes so little to our real felicity; when their continuance is so uncertain; their duration so short; their influence upon our eternal destiny worse than nothing? Will any reasonable creature have the folly to assert that the chief end for which God sent him into this world is to amass property, to build a splendid house, and to store it with furniture equally splendid, to wear costly clothes, and feed on rich food; to live in affluence, and die rich?

2. PLEASURE. The next pretender to the distinction of being the supreme good, and man's chief object of pursuit, is **pleasure**. To this many have devoted their lives; some are living for the sports of the field, others for the gratification of the appetites, others for the enjoyment of the round of fashionable amusements. Pleasure, in one form or other, is the object of pursuit with myriads. As to the gratification of our animal appetites, few will think it necessary to have much to persuade them, that to sink to the level of the brute creation, and hold communion with swine, and goats, and rats, cannot be the chief end of a rational being!

Who would not be ashamed to say, and even deliberately to think, they were sent into the world to consume so much property; to devour the produce of so many men's labor; to eat and drink away the little residue of wit and reason they have left; to mingle with this 'high and distinguished employment', their impure and vulgar jests—that they may befriend one another in proving themselves to be yet of human race, by this almost only remaining demonstration of it—that they can laugh as well as eat and drink. Surely, surely, that cannot be the chief end of man which sensualizes, brutalizes his nature; which drowns his reason, undermines his health, shortens his life, hurries him to the grave!

And then, as to what are called the pleasures of the sports of the field—will any man say that God sent him into the world to ride after dogs, to run after birds, or torture fish upon a hook? Are all the high faculties of the soul to be wasted, all

the precious moments of life to be consumed, in seeing how many foxes, hares, pheasants, and trout, we can kill

Fashionable amusements seem to be with many, the end of life. Multitudes live for pleasures of this kind. Ball succeeds to concert; the private party to the public assembly; the card party to the dinner party; and in this busy round of fashionable follies does the life of many pass away. Can it then be the high object of existence to sing, and play, and dress and dance? Do not these things, when we reflect upon them, look more like the pursuits of butterflies and grasshoppers, and canary birds, than of rational creatures? Is it not melancholy to see beings with never-dying souls, sinking to the amusements of children; and employing time as if it were given them for nothing but mirth; and using the world as if it were created by God only to be a sort of playground or tennis court for its inhabitants?

Does this kind of life satisfy those who pursue it? Far, very far, from it! Can any person, in reality, be farther from happiness than they who live for pleasure? You shall hear the testimony of a man who will be admitted by all to be no incompetent judge—I mean Lord Chesterfield. The world was the god of his idolatry, he tendered his service to act as high priest for this divinity, published its liturgy, and conducted its ceremonies. What happiness he found in the worship of his deity, and how fair he recommends others to the shrine, you shall learn from his own pen. And by the way, this language furnishes the most powerful antidote to the poison contained in his trumpery volumes, that was ever published.

"I have run," says the man of the world, "the silly rounds of business and pleasure, and have done them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world, and consequently know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value, which is, in truth, very low; whereas those that have not experienced, always overrate them. They only see their mirthful outside, and are dazzled with the glare. But I have been behind the scenes. I have seen all the coarse pulleys and dirty ropes, which exhibit and move the gaudy machines; and I have seen and smelled the tallow candles, which illumine the whole decoration, to the astonishment and admiration of an ignorant audience. When I reflect back upon what I have seen, what I have heard, and what I have done, I can hardly persuade myself that all that frivolous hurry, and bustle, and pleasure of the world, had any reality. But I look upon all that has passed as one of those romantic dreams which opium commonly brings about; and I do by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose for the sake of the fugitive dream. Shall I tell you that I bear this melancholy situation with that delight and resignation which most people boast of? No! for I really cannot help it. I bear it—because I must bear it, whether I will or no. I think of nothing but of killing time the best way I

can—now that time has become my enemy. It is my resolution to sleep in the carriage during the remainder of the journey."

Poor, wretched, forlorn Chesterfield, and was it thus you did close your career? Is it thus that the worldling, in his last moments, feels and acts, looking back upon the past with disgust, and forward to the future with despair? Then, O God, in your mercy, "save me from the men of this world—who have their portion in this life!"

In alluding to the case of Chesterfield, Horne says, "When a Christian minister speaks slightly of the world, he is supposed to do it in the way of his profession, and to decry, through envy, the pleasures he is forbidden to taste. But here I think you have the testimony of a witness every way competent. No one ever knew the world better, or enjoyed more of its favors than Chesterfield. Yet you see in how poor, abject, and wretched a condition, at the time when he most needed help and comfort—the world left him—and he left the world. The sentences above cited from him, compose, in my humble opinion, the most striking and affecting sermon on the subject ever yet preached to mankind. My younger friends, lay them up in your minds, and write them on the tables of your hearts; take them into life with you; they will prove an excellent preservative against temptation. When you have duly considered them, and the character of him by whom they were uttered, you shall compare them, if you please, with the words of another person, who took his leave of the world in a very different manner. 'I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day.' Say, shall your lot be with the Christian, or the man of the world; with the apostle, or Chesterfield? You will not hesitate a moment—but, in reply to those who may attempt to seduce you into the paths of vice and error, honestly and boldly exclaim, every one of you with Joshua, Choose this day whom you will serve—but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"

You will also call to remembrance, my dear children, that passage in the Life of Colonel Gardiner, whose history you have read, or should read, in which he tells us, that when living in all kinds of wickedness, and when complimented for the external gaiety of his demeanor, he was in reality so totally wretched, and so entirely disgusted with his mode of living, that, on beholding the kennel of his dog, he wished he could change places with the ignorant animal.

Is pleasure then the chief end of life? Yes, in Doddridge's explanation of it, in his beautiful stanza—

"Live while you live, the epicure will say,
And take the pleasure of the present day!
Live while you live, the holy preacher cries,
And give to God each moment as it flies!
Lord, in my view, let both united be—
I live in pleasure when I live to Thee."

3. FAME is with some, the great end of life. This is an object which comparatively few can hope to obtain, and therefore for which few contend. Still there are some; and if they were honest, they would tell you that 'vanity', which is another name for 'the love of fame'—is a passion, which, like the venom of a serpent injected into its own body, tortures itself. The pursuit of fame is attended with a state of mind, which is the most remote from happiness.

"When fame succeeds, it degenerates into arrogance; when it is disappointed, (and it is almost always disappointed,) it is exasperated into malignity, and corrupted into envy. In this 'theater of fame', the vain man commences with envy—he detests that excellence which he cannot reach. He lives upon the misfortunes of others; the vices and miseries of his superiors are his element and his food. The virtues, talents, and genius of the eminent, are his natural enemies, which he persecutes with instinctive eagerness and unremitting hostility. There are some who doubt the existence of such a disposition—but it certainly issues out of the dregs of disappointed vanity; a disease which taints and vitiates the whole character, wherever it prevails. It forms the heart to such a profound indifference to the welfare of others, that 'whatever appearance he may assume', or however wide the circles of his seeming talents may extend, you will infallibly find the vain man in his own center. Attentive only to himself, absorbed in the contemplations of his own perfections, instead of feeling tenderness for his fellow-creatures, as members of the same family, as beings with whom he is destined to act, to suffer, and to sympathize—he considers life as a theater on which he is acting a part, and mankind in no other light than spectators. Whether he smiles or frowns; whether his path is adorned with the rays of beneficence, or his steps are dyed in blood; an attention to self is the spring of every movement, and the motive to which every action is referred."

When therefore we consider that perpetual restlessness of mind, that mortification, arising from disappointed hopes; that envy, which is increased by the success of competitors, that feverish excitement, which is kept up by the intense desire of victory; the love of fame will appear too torturing a state of mind to be the end of man's existence; it is plunging into a kind of purgatory for the mere chance of reaching a celestial summit.

Should the effort to gain distinction be successful, will it then reward the pains that have been expended to gain it? We have a striking illustration of the

emptiness of the rewards of fame, in the memoirs of Henry Martyn. He tells us that after a severe contest with many distinguished competitors, for the prize of being the highest mathematical honor which the University of Cambridge can bestow upon its students, the palm was awarded to him; and having received it, he exclaims, "I was astonished to find what a 'shadow' I had grasped." Perhaps there never yet was a candidate for fame, whatever was the particular object for which he contended, who did not feel the same disappointment. The **reward of fame** may be compared to the garlands in the Olympic games, which began to wither the moment they were grasped by the hand, or worn upon the brow, of the victor!

How often do we see the aspirants to a place in the Temple of Fame cut off by death! Some, just when they have begun the difficult ascent—others when half way up the hill—and a few when they have gained the summit, and tread upon the threshold of the sacred temple! An **explorer** thinks to gain immortal renown by tracing the unknown course of a river, laying open a new continent, discovering a new island, or describing the remains of ancient cities—but dies in the very midst of his discoveries. A **warrior** enters upon a military or naval life, and hopes to gather his laurels on the bloodied field of conflict; and falling in the hour of victory, receives the crown upon his coffin, instead of his brow; and leaves his monument, in lieu of himself, to receive the tribute of his country's praise! The **scholar** and the philosopher pursue some new object of science or literature, and hope, by their success, to gain a niche for their shrine in the Temple of Fame. But just as they have established their theory, and are about to receive their honor, they are removed, by death, to a world where the rewards of talent have no place, and where virtue constitutes the sole distinction.

Those distinctions which now excite the desires, and inflame the ambition of so many ardent minds; which absorb the time, the energies, the interest, the health of their impassioned admirers and eager pursuers—are all of the earth, earthly! All terminate with the present world, and in reference to the eternal destiny of their possessors, have not the place of an atom, nor the weight of a feather. In the admiration and gratitude and applause of their fellow-creatures; in the records of the journalist, the biographer, and the historian; in the acknowledgments of the present generation, and the remembrance of posterity—the envied individuals have their reward. But if they possessed not true piety—in these things alone their object terminates. "Verily, verily I say unto you, they have their reward in full." But the smile of an approving God, the hope of eternal life, the possession of everlasting happiness, is no part of it. The star of their glory is among the number, which, at the last day, shall fall from the heavens, and set in the blackness of darkness forever!

The astonishing works of Shakespeare, Bacon, Newton, Milton, Locke, which have surrounded their authors with such a radiant crown on earth—will not be

mentioned in the judgment; nor procure so much consideration as a cup of cold water, which was given to a disciple of Christ out of love to his Master.

What is earthly renown to a man that is in eternity? If he is in **heaven**, the praises of the whole globe cannot add one jot to his felicity! If he be in **hell**, they do not lessen one pang of his misery—he is unconscious of all—inaccessible to all. To a lost soul in hell, who had sunk to perdition under a weight of earthly honors, what a dreadful sting must such a reflection as this give to all his sufferings! "Alas! Alas! while my memory is almost idolized on earth—I am tormented in this flame!"

4. KNOWLEDGE presents itself to some as the end of life. To store up ideas, to amass intellectual treasures is the end and delight of their existence. They are never satisfied with what they know, and are always seeking for something which they do not know. They are literary misers. They labor in the world of mind. These, I admit, are far more rational than the others, in selecting their chief end of existence. But still they are far from wisdom. Solomon, the wisest of men has told us, "I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom, concerning all things that are done under the sun. I communed with my own heart; lo, I have gotten more wisdom than all those who have been before me in Jerusalem—yes, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. I perceive that this also is vexation of spirit—for in much wisdom is much grief; and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh."

Will knowledge comfort its possessors amid the ills of life? Will it soothe them in the agonies of death? Will it avail them at the day of judgment? However it may dignify and delight them on earth, will it entitle them to heaven—or prepare them for its bliss? No! No! Knowledge alone will raise no man to the celestial city in which God dwells. It may elevate them to earth's pinnacle—but will leave them at an infinite distance from heaven's threshold! It may lift them high above the scorn and contempt of men below—but still leave them all exposed to the wrath and curse of God from above! There is something ineffably dreadful in anticipating the loss of any human soul—but the sense of agony is increased, when we think of the eternal ruin of a mind, which had accumulated all the stores of the most varied knowledge. It is painful to see the least and lowest spark of intelligence fluttering to extinction over the marshes of sensuality—but it is most painful to see one of the highest order of minds, darting, like a falling star, into the blackness and darkness of eternal night! It is dreadful to follow such a spirit into the unseen world, and to behold, in imagination, the 'despicable damned', whom he spurned on earth as a vulgar herd, taking up against him the ancient taunt, "Have you also become like one of us?" "How are you fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning."

5. DOMESTIC COMFORT is with many the chief, the only end of life. They aspire not to **riches**, they pace not the giddy round of **pleasure**, they have no ambition for **fame**, they have no taste for science or **learning**; to marry happily and live comfortably; in moderate competency, is the limit of their prospects and pursuits.

But is this all? Is this the chief end of life! Consider, much that has been said of riches will apply to this. Although you seek it—it is uncertain whether you will succeed! Should you gain your object—how soon it may be taken from you again! Your trade may be ruined; the partner of your joys and sorrows may be removed by death; your health may be impaired. If none of these things happens, you yourself may be removed to the eternal world—just when the one you now inhabit may appear most enchanting. Or if spared to old age in undiminished enjoyment, how dreadful is the thought of going from a state of such comfort, to another, in which not a ray of peace will ever fall upon you through everlasting ages!

None of these things which I have mentioned, therefore, are worthy to be the objects of our supreme solicitude, or ultimate pursuit. They may be all taken up as inferior and subordinate objects. We may in moderation, and by honest industry, not only endeavor to obtain a competency—but even affluence. We are allowed to desire to seek a comfortable settlement in the world. We may enjoy, in measure, the lawful pleasures of life. We may endeavor, if our motives are right, to establish our reputation, not only for virtue—but for talents. We may, to the widest extent, pursue our researches after knowledge. All this is allowed not only by reason—but by Scripture. True religion is not the enemy of one single excellence of the human character—nor opposed to any of the lawful possessions of the present world.

But the question to be decided is—What is the CHIEF end of man? Now the definition which I would give of this is as follows—

1. It must be an object suited to the nature of man as a rational creature.
2. It must be an object which, if sought in a right manner, shall with absolute certainty be obtained.
3. It must be an object which shall not interfere with any of the necessary duties of the present state.
4. It must be an object which, when obtained, shall not only temporarily please, but satisfy the mind.
5. It must be an object which shall prepare us for our eternal state of existence.

6. It must be an object which accompanies us to the unseen world as our portion forever.

All these things must enter into the chief good—the great end of life—the ultimate object of pursuit. There is but one thing in the universe to which this will apply, and to that one, it will in all parts of the definition most strictly apply—and this is **the salvation of the soul**.

You are immortal creatures, lost sinners, capable of enjoying eternal happiness, yet exposed to the sufferings of eternal death! What can be the chief end of an eternal being short of ETERNAL LIFE? Once admit that you are going on to eternity—and it would be idiotism to deny that anything less than eternal happiness should be your great aim! The Catechism has defined the chief end of man to be, "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." This is strictly true, and accords with what I have said. For to glorify God is to believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the soul; and under the influence of this faith, to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world. And thus glorifying God on earth, we shall be taken to enjoy him forever in that state of ineffable felicity which he has prepared for those who love him!

The salvation of the soul is a good which—

1. Suits our rational nature.
2. Is absolutely certain to those who seek it in the right way.
3. Rather insures than interrupts, all the other duties of life.
4. Satisfies and delights the mind, giving consolation under its troubles, and contentment to its desires.
5. Fits us for our eternal state.
6. Goes with us to glory as our portion forever.

But there are many who accept this in theory—yet they neglect it in practice! And therefore I must now exhort you to keep this end of life constantly in view. Every man, when he sets out on a journey or pursuit, should have a definite object, and constantly keep it in view. My dear children, you are setting out on the journey of life, you know the chief object of that journey, and now, ever keep it before your mind! Let this conviction not only be written on your understanding—like a picture drawn on ice, or an impression produced on the snow, which thaws beneath the next sun—but be engraved on your heart, like chiselings on a rock, which nothing can efface—that **your main business on earth is to obtain the salvation of your immortal soul!**

Let this conviction lie at the bottom of your whole **character**—let it be thoroughly wrought into the fabric of all your **mental habits**—let it be the main wheel in the whole machinery of your **conduct**. It is recorded of a pilgrim on his way to Jerusalem, that in passing through Constantinople, when that city was in its glory, he met with a friend, who, wishing to detain him in the eastern metropolis, took him about to see the beauties of that celebrated place. "Very splendid," exclaimed the pilgrim, "but this is not the holy city." So should we say to everything which would limit and detain our hearts on earth, "Very good in its place—but it is not salvation!"

Often inquire of yourselves, and examine your hearts, whether you are keeping in mind this **one thing needful**. At the close of every division of your time—of your years, your months, your weeks—ask yourselves the question, "Is my eye upon the supreme summit of Christian desire and expectation—or am I beginning to lower my aim, and sink my pursuit?"

Regulate all your feelings of admiration and pity, in reference to the conduct and situations of others by this object. If you see the **rich** man accumulating wealth, the **scholar** increasing the stores of learning, the **philosopher** adding to the discoveries of science, the man of **military** or **literary** renown, gathering laurels to decorate his brow—but, at the same time, neglecting the claims, and despising the blessings of true religion—view them rather as objects of pity, rather than of envy! And rank them among the individuals who are losing sight of the great end of a rational creature's existence! On the other hand, wherever you perceive an individual, however obscure in station, limited in acquirements, or afflicted in his circumstances—but who is yet glorifying God, and preparing to enjoy him forever—there realize a character who is keeping before him the great end for which God sent him into this world, and who is fairly entitled to your highest estimation!

Keep this in view in the selection of employments and the formation of friendships. Are you just starting out in life? Accept of no employment, however advantageous in a worldly point of view it may appear, where you are likely to be cut off from the means of grace, and the helps to a life of faith and holiness. Bring the rule of eternal life to it, and ask—Will it help or hinder me in the pursuit of salvation? Let this direct you in choosing the place of worship you attend, and the minister you hear. Inquire not where the people of fashion go, or who is the most eloquent preacher—but where the most instructive, awakening, and soul-improving ministry of the word is to be enjoyed; and where you are likely to be kept most steadily in the pursuit of eternal life.

In your Christian life, dwell most on the plain, and obvious, and important truths of the gospel, such as are most intimately connected with the life of piety in the heart. Do not turn aside to novelties, speculations, and religious curiosities. In

selecting your vocation in life, keep this in mind, and if there be any calling which, in your judgment, necessarily takes off the mind from true religion, choose another in preference. In accepting or selecting a companion for life, let not this subject be put out of view—but consider how much you will be assisted or opposed, in seeking eternal salvation. In choosing your residence, inquire not only what is the weather, or the facilities for trade or pleasure—but what are the means of grace, the helps to true religion, the ministry of the word in the neighborhood. In short, let it appear in all you do—that the salvation of your soul is the one thing needful, the chief business of life.

Act, in reference to eternal salvation and the affairs of this life, as a man, who most tenderly loves and ardently longs for his home, does upon his journey, in returning to that home. He selects as comfortable an inn, as he can honestly afford—he enjoys the prospects which present themselves to his eye, he is pleased with the company he meets with on the road, he gains as much knowledge as he can accumulate by the way, he performs the duties of his calling as diligently, and secures as much profit as he equitably can—but still his eye and his heart are at home! For his comfort at home—and not his pleasure abroad, he is supremely concerned. So far as he can promote, or not hinder his prosperity at home, he is willing to gain knowledge, to take pleasure, to secure respect abroad—but HOME is his great object! To reach home, and prepare for its increasing comfort, is his aim and his hope.

So act, my children, towards the salvation of the soul. This, this is the end of life! Keep it constantly in mind! Never lose sight of it! Gain all the knowledge, all the comfort, all the fame, all the wealth, you can—in subordination to this once great business. But remember that whatever subordinate ends you may pursue, the paramount object which you must seek, is to **glorify God and enjoy him forever!**

The Christian Father's Present to His Children

by John Angell James, 1825

THE MEETING OF A PIOUS FAMILY IN HEAVEN

The strength of our social feelings, and the pleasure which we derive from the indulgence of them, have very naturally originated the question, "**Will those who were known to each other on earth, renew their acquaintance in heaven?**" The feelings which prompted the question, have led us to answer it in the affirmative. It might, indeed, be enough to satisfy our hopes in reference to eternal happiness, to be assured that—nothing shall be **present** which could operate as an alloy—nothing be **absent** that shall be felt as a defect. We know

that the manifold wisdom of God is employed under the impulse of infinite love, in preparing a place for us; and we are also assured that God "is not ashamed to be called our God, because he has prepared for us a city." All that is most essential to a state of perfect and everlasting felicity is exhibited and promised in the word of God—the beatific vision of God and the Lamb; complete resemblance in body and soul to the Lord Jesus; the light of perfect knowledge; the purity of perfect holiness; the glow of perfect love; the eternal exclusion of sin and of the sinner; the company and converse of the spirits of just men made perfect, and the myriads of holy angels; the absence of pain and sickness, care and labor, sorrow and sighing, death and the curse—all of which are explicitly assured to the believer in the gospel of Christ. These form a heaven which might entirely satisfy us, as a state of felicity seemingly incapable of addition. This is glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life. And, yet, in view of all this, our social nature often prompts that one me question, "Shall we know each other in the celestial world?"

The scripture, I admit, has not, in so many words, replied to the question, nor relieved the concern which asks it; and in this very reserve, we see a proof of the wisdom of God. Had the scriptures been explicit and diffuse on such topics; had they said much about the social communion of the unseen world; had they represented its felicity as arising in a great degree from the renewal of those friendships which were formed on earth but suspended by death—how many would have concluded, in the total absence of all pious feeling from their hearts, that they were fit for such an inheritance as this. Whereas, the Bible, by representing no part of the happiness of heaven but that which arises from sources strictly devotional, has given no countenance to delusion, nor furnished occasion for self-deception. None of the splendid visions which lie behind the veil are manifested—but such as tend to impress us with the conviction that, in order to behold and enjoy them, we must be holy even as God is holy.

These considerations, while they account for the reserve which is maintained by the Scripture on this subject, do not, by any means, disprove the sentiment. Though I would not say with Iraenaeus, one of the earliest fathers of the church—that Christians will retain the likeness and figure of their **bodies**, so that they may still be known thereby in the other world—though I by no means pretend even to speculate on the precise manner or means whereby glorified immortals will attain a knowledge of each other, whether by Scripture or information—by any resemblance in the newly raised body, to what they formerly were—or by that intuition which will, no doubt, be the way in which many things will be known. Yet still I think that, in some way or other, this knowledge will be obtained.

1. The enjoyments and occupations of heaven are uniformly represented as social—but where is the charm of society without mutual knowledge.

2. Heaven is uniformly represented as perfecting all our faculties—is it then probable that it will diminish **memory**, one of the most important of them? And if memory be still retained in full vigor, and if it be perpetually employed, as it inevitably must be, on the past scenes of our earthly existence, is it likely that the friends and companions of that existence—now inhabiting the same celestial world with us—will be unknown to us?

3. The chief grace that will be increased in the regions of the blessed, next to love to God, will be love to our companions in glory. But will not one of the most pure, elevated, and delightful exercises of this holy passion be lacking, if we are ignorant of our glorified relatives?

4. In the general judgment, which is appointed to vindicate the ways of God to man, it is nearly certain that individuals will be known to each other; and if this be the case, is it likely that their mutual knowledge will be immediately obliterated?

5. Is it likely that individuals, whose names and labors bear such a close and extensive connection with the redemption and history of the church, as those of the prophets and apostles, will be unknown? And if they are known, may it not be inferred that others will be?

6. During our Savior's abode upon earth, he afforded to the three favored disciples a glimpse of the heavenly glory; he himself was transfigured, and Moses and Elijah descended in celestial brilliancy. These two eminent servants of God were known by the astonished apostles; and if known on Mount Tabor, is it not likely they will be known in the New Jerusalem?

7. Our Savior, in one of the most impressive of his parables, represents the rich man in torments, as knowing Lazarus and Abraham in glory; now though it be a parable, and though the whole scenery of a parable is not to be considered as conveying some moral sentiment, yet certainly nothing materially and obviously at variance with the truth is ever taught by even the appendages of the chief parabolic idea.

8. We find the apostle Paul very frequently consoling himself under the sufferings and persecutions which he had to endure, by the prospect of meeting in heaven those who had been converted by his ministry on earth. His address to the believing Thessalonians is especially in point. "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming?" I do not see how these Christians could be Paul's crown of rejoicing in that day, if they were not known to him.

These are some of the reasons which led me to suppose, that in heaven the saints will know each other.

I am aware that it is felt by some as an objection to this sentiment, that if we shall know those of our friends who were present in glory—we shall, of course, **know that our unsaved beloved friends and relatives are forever lost.** And that, if we derive pleasure from the former consideration, we shall experience as much distress from the latter. The only way of solving this difficulty, is to realize that a perfect knowledge of God, and of the wisdom and justice of all His designs and operations, will constitute a chief part of the happiness of heaven. We shall be so convinced of the equity of His dealings towards the wicked, so divested of all the weakness of 'human sentimentalism', so absorbed in the love of what is right to be done, that the absence of our loved ones from the world of glory, will cause no interruption of our heavenly bliss! This, I acknowledge, is now hard to conceive. The day shall reveal it. "Now we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." 1 Cor. 13:9-10

Assuming then the fact, that saints will know each other in the celestial state, let us imagine, my dear children, if indeed the imagination is equal to the effort, what must be the joy attendant on the final meeting of a pious family in heaven. One of the most exquisite delights which we ever experience on earth, is the enjoyment which springs from the first interview with a friend, from whom we have been separated; and this delight is in proportion to the length of time, and greatness of distance, and magnitude of danger, which have intervened between the separation and the meeting. What language can describe the thrill of transport, the almost agony of rapture which the wife experiences in that moment, when she receives a husband back again to her arms—who has been away from home for months, who has been separated from her by half the circumference of the globe, and threatened to be torn away from her forever, by the dangers of shipwreck or of battle? Or who shall set forth that scene of domestic bliss, which is exhibited when the sailor boy, after having been absent for years, returns from the dangers of the sea, and the horrors of captivity, to the bosom of his family, and exchanges ecstatic greetings with his parents, and his sisters, and his brothers, until all seem ready to dissolve with excess of joy?

What then must be the meeting of these same relatives in heaven, after having been separated by worlds and ages; that meeting, when the mother receives her children to the skies, from this degenerate earth; and the father hails his offspring from the world of death, to the region of life and immortality! Here imagination confesses its weakness. It is a scene we have never witnessed ourselves; nor have we ever conversed with one who has. My heart, while I write, seems to beat quicker at the thought; and the very anticipation, my dear

children, raises a commotion of pleasurable feelings in my bosom, which no words could enable me to express.

Then remember this meeting is not for a mere transient meeting—but for an **eternal fellowship!** It is to take place in a world, where adieus and farewells are a sound unknown. What an interruption does it now form to the enjoyment of domestic communion, that the different branches of the family cannot always live beneath the same roof, or in the vicinity of their parents. One member after another goes from the paternal abode, and settles at a distance, until counties and kingdoms separate them from each other. Rarely does it happen, where the children are numerous, and grown to maturity, that they can all meet together. Occasionally this does happen, perhaps on a parent's birthday, or at the festive season of the year, and then home puts forth all its charms, and pours out in copious streams its pure and precious joys; such a circle is the resort of peace and love, where friends and near relations mingle into bliss. The parents look with ineffable delight upon their children, and their children's children—and see their smiles of love reflected from the faces of the happy group.

Piety gives the finishing touch to the picture, when, before they part, they assemble round the domestic altar, and after reading in that Book, which speaks of the many mansions in our Father's house above, where the families of the righteous meet to part no more; and after blending their voices in a sacred song of praise to Him, who has united them, both by ties of nature and of grace, they receive the benedictions, and join in the prayers of their saintly and patriarchal father, who over the scene which surrounds him, feels a divided heart, one moment thinking he has lived long enough in that he has been permitted to witness it—but the next breathing an aspiration to heaven for permission to witness it a few years longer.

This scene, and it is not an uncommon one, is one of the purest to be found on earth. It is, as nearly as it can be, paradise restored! or if it be, as it certainly is, still without the gates of Eden, it is near enough to the sacred enclosure, to receive some of the fruits which drop over the wall. What is wanting here? I answer, Continuance. It is bliss only for a season. It is a day that will be followed with a night. And the heart is often checked in the full tide of enjoyment, in the very meridian of its delights, by looking at the clock, and counting how rapidly the hours of felicity are rolling away, and how soon the signal of parting will be struck. But the meeting in heaven shall be eternal. The family shall go no more out forever from the mansion of their Father above. Their fellowship shall not be measured nor limited by time. They shall meet for one day—but then that day will be everlasting, for "there is no night there." They shall spend eternal ages together. Neither the fear nor the thought of parting, shall ever pass like a cloud over the orb of their felicity, nor let fall a passing shadow to disturb the sunshine

of their bosom. "We are met," shall they say one to another, "and we shall part no more. Around us is glory! Within us is rapture! Before us is eternity!"

Then add to this, **the happy circumstances under which they meet, and in which they will dwell together forever.**

They will meet as spirits of just men made perfect. The best-regulated families on earth will sometimes experience little interruptions of their domestic enjoyment. We all have some imperfection or other, some infirmity of temper, or some impropriety of manner, from which, through lack of caution on one part, or lack of love or forbearance on the other—occasional discords will be heard to disturb the harmony of the whole. We see that others are not altogether perfect, and we feel that we are not so. We lament the failings of the rest, and still more lament our own. This prevents perfect domestic bliss—but in heaven we shall all be perfect. We shall see nothing in others to censure—nor feel nothing in ourselves to lament. We shall have all that veneration and love for each other, which shall arise from the mutual perception of unsinning holiness. We shall mutually see reflected the image of God from our character. There will be everything lovely to attract esteem—and the most perfect love to show it. Everyone will possess the virtue which is loved, and the satisfaction by which it is beloved. Everyone, conscious of unmingled purity within, approves and loves himself for that divine image, which in complete perfection, and with untarnished resemblance, is stamped upon his character. Each, in every view which he casts around him, beholds the same glory shining and brightening in the circle of his parents, his brothers, and his sisters. Out of this character grows a series ever varying, ever improving, of all the possible communications of beneficence, fitted in every instance only to interchange and increase the happiness of all. In the sunshine of infinite satisfaction, the light of the New Jerusalem, the original source of all their own beauty, life, and joy—this happy family will walk forever.

The joy of that meeting will arise from seeing each other in the possession of all that happiness which God has prepared for those who love him. In a family where genuine affection prevails, the happiness of one branch is the happiness of the rest—and each has his felicity multiplied by as many times as there are happy members in the circle. In heaven, where love is perfect, how exquisite will be the bliss of each, arising from being the constant witness of the bliss of all—where the parents will see the children basking in the sunshine of divine love; receiving the warmest expressions of the favor of Christ—shining in the beauties of unsullied holiness—and bounding in the fields of uncreated light; and where the children shall see the parents, and each other, in the same happy circumstances; where each shall see all the rest in the full possession of the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which does not fade away—the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory.

How, amid all this unrevealed and inconceivable splendor, will the joy be increased by a recollection and enumeration of the benefits conferred by one party, and the obligations incurred by the other. What must be the delight of parents in thus seeing the fruit of their prayers, instructions and concerns, constantly before their eyes, in the honor and felicity of their glorified children. How happy and grateful will they feel, that their solicitude on earth was chiefly exercised in reference to the spiritual and eternal welfare of their offspring—and not wasted upon trifles which had no connection with piety and immortality!

With what thrilling emotions of delight will they hear these children ascribing all their salvation, so far as instruments are concerned, to them; and giving a high place in their anthems of praise, to the names of their father and mother. While, on the other hand, it will raise the felicity of the children to the highest pitch, to see those parents near them, to whom they owe, under God, their possession of heaven. With what mutual interest will both parties retrace the winding ways of Providence, which led to such a termination of the journey of life. How will they pause and wonder at those mysterious links, now invisible—but then plainly seen, which connected the events of their history, and united them into one perfect whole. Especially, with what intense excitement will they mark each effort of parental concern for the salvation of the children, and see the individual and collective results of all. The revolutions of empires, the fate of armies, will then have less to engage and charm the attention, than the influence of any one piece of advice which was ever delivered on earth, and which had the smallest influence in impressing the heart, awakening the conscience, converting the soul, or forming the character.

What felicity will arise from the sublime converse and employment of such a state. Conceive of a family even on earth, where of all the numerous branches of which it is composed, each one for dignity was a prince, for science a philosopher, for affection a brother, for purity a saint, for meekness a child, all meeting in sublime and affectionate fellowship; all employed in exploring together the secrets of nature, and tracing the streams of knowledge; blending, as they proceeded, the ardor of love with the light of truth. But this, what is it—compared to the heavenly state, where with **minds** inconceivably more capacious than that of Newton's, when he weighed the gravity, and measured the distance of the stars; with **hearts** perfect in holiness; and ages endless as eternity; we shall converse on all the highest themes which the universe can supply. Think of studying together the laws of creation, the history of all God's providential dealings with mankind, the wonderful scheme of human redemption, the character of the great Jehovah, the person of Jesus Christ, with all that stands connected with the whole range of universal being, and the manifestation of the First Cause.

What a view does it give us of the felicity of heaven, to think of parents and children engaged with millions all around them, in sounding the depth of that 'fathomless ocean of eternal truth', which is as clear as it is deep; and eternally employed in acts of worship, exercises of benevolence, and other pleasurable pursuits, now unknown, because unrevealed; and perhaps unrevealed, because not comprehensible by our present limited faculties.

But after all, my dear children, I seem as if I were guilty of presumption in thus attempting to describe that which is quite inconceivable. It does not yet appear what we shall be. We now see through a glass darkly. The Scriptures tell us much of the heavenly state—but they leave much untold. They give us enough to employ our faith, raise our most lively hopes, and produce a joy unspeakable, and full of glory—but they offer nothing to satisfy our curiosity. "They bring before us a dim transparency, on the other side of which the images of an obscure magnificence dazzle indistinctly upon the eye; and tell us, that in the economy of redemption, and the provisions of immortality, there is a grandeur commensurate to all that is known of the other works and purposes of the Eternal. They offer us no details, and man, who ought not to attempt a wisdom above that which is written, should be cautious how he puts forth his hand to the drapery of the impenetrable curtain—which God, in his mysterious wisdom, has spread over that region, of which it is but a very small portion that can be known to us."

In this state, amid all this glory, honor, and felicity—it is my sincere desire, my ardent prayer, my constant endeavor, my supreme pursuit—that your journey, my dear children, and my own, should terminate. Everything else appears, in comparison of this, as nothing. In the view of this, thrones lose their elevation, crowns their splendor, riches their value, and fame its glory! Before the effulgence and magnitude of celestial objects, their grandeur dwindles to an invisible point, and their brightness is but as the shadow of death. Did we not know the depravity of our nature, and that the natural man knows not these things, because they are spiritually discerned, we must indeed wonder, and inquire what bewildering influence it is, that is exerted on the human mind, by which its attention is so fatally diverted from things unseen and eternal—to the shadowy and evanescent forms of things seen and temporal. It is only on this ground that we can account for the folly, the madness—of neglecting the great salvation, and seeking anything in preference to eternal glory. Dreadful madness! which, though it indulges in the miscalculations of insanity, has none of its excuses. What but this moral insanity could lead men for any object upon earth—to neglect the pursuit, and resign the hope of eternal life?

My children! my children! whom I love with an affection which can be equaled only by that solicitude for your welfare to which it has given rise, and which never sleeps nor rests—receive my admonition, and make eternal happiness the

end of your existence. Look at that heaven, which, though but partially revealed, is revealed with such pure brightness on the page of eternal truth, and "on the description of which, so to speak, the Holy Spirit employs and exhausts the whole force and splendor of inspiration"—look at it, that state of inconceivable, infinite, eternal honor, and bliss—and is there anything on earth, anything of pleasure or of gain, for which you will deliberately resign that crown of unfading glory.

I am anxious, as I have already informed you, that you may live in comfort and respectability on earth. I would have your mind cultivated by learning and science; your manners polished by affability; your industry crowned with success; in short, I would be thankful to see you living in comfort, respected, and respectable. But above everything else, I pray, I desire, I long—that you may partake of "that faith, without which it is impossible to please God," and that "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." I have fixed my aim for you, high as heaven; and covet for you everlasting life. I love your society on earth, and wish to enjoy it through eternity in the presence of God. I hope I am traveling to that goodly land, of which God has said, he will give it to us for an inheritance, and I want you to accompany me there. Reduce me not to the mere consolation of David, who said, "Although my house be not so with God, yet has he made with me an everlasting covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure." Rather let me have to say with Joshua, "As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord."

May it be granted me to see you choosing the way of wisdom and piety, and remembering your Creator in the days of your youth—giving to all your virtues that stability and beauty which can be derived only from true religion—first receiving by faith, and then adorning by holiness, the doctrine of God your Savior. Then will my highest ambition, as a parent, be gratified—my most painful solicitude relieved. I shall watch your progress amid the vicissitudes of life, with a calm and tranquil mind—assured that your piety will be your protector amid the dangers of prosperity; or your comforter amid the ills of adversity.

If called to follow your coffin, and weep upon your sepulcher, I shall only consider you as sent forward on the road, to await my arrival at our Father's house! Or if called, according to the order of nature, to go down first into the dark valley of the shadow of death, I shall find the agonies of separation assuaged, and the gloom of the dying chamber irradiated by those bright visions of glory, which connect themselves with the prospect of the meeting of a pious family, in the heavenly world!