

THE DREADFUL SIN OF SUICIDE



A

SERMON

PREACHED AT

THE REV. DR. WINTERS MEETING HOUSE,

NEW COURT, CAREY STREET,

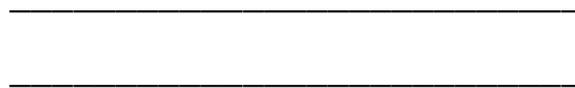
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By GEORGE CLAYTON.

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Advertisement

IT is not from a consciousness of any superior skill in the treatment of this subject, that the Author is induced to print the following Discourse. The publication of it originated in the unanimous request of the Ministers and Gentlemen, who composed a considerable part of the respectable auditory, before which it was delivered. While he solicits from his readers the exercise of that friendly candor, with which it was at first heard; he cannot dismiss these pages, without earnestly imploring those celestial influences, which alone can ensure their best success.

A
SERMON,
&c.

Acts xvi. 28.

And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, DO THYSELF NO HARM.

How excellent is thy loving kindness, O Lord! This exclamation well becomes us when we consider the universal care and superintendence which God exerciseth, over the various parts of his vast dominion. He preserves the order and consistency of the inanimate creation, upholding all things by the word of his power. It is by his continual agency, that the sun shineth in his strength, that the moon walketh in her brightness, that the rain and the dew descend in their more gentle distillations or more fruitful exuberance, that the seasons return in their beneficial succession, so that the pastures are clothed with flocks, the valleys stand thick with corn, and the little hills rejoice on every side. From things without life, we may ascend to the animated world, and mark the kind attention of heaven to reptiles and to worms. “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father. He heareth the ravens when they cry, and the young lions when they ask their meat from God. He openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.” But above all other living creatures, man is indulged with an extraordinary share in the divine condescension. Made but a little lower than the angels, and originally constituted the head of the visible creation, he was crowned with glory and honor. And though he abode not in his primitive integrity and happiness, yet even now, through the kindness and forbearance of God, his interests are not slighted nor overlooked. To this

day, we may, with propriety, adopt the language of the psalmist, and cry out with admiring gratitude, Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him! or the son of man, that thou shouldst visit him! Infinite have been the exertions of divine love, to restore the ruined *soul* of man, from guilt, depravity, and death. A God in counsel, a God incarnate, a God in powerful agency has been revealed to us, as contriving and effectuating the scheme, and as applying the great blessings of redemption. This is a subject, which, though profoundly mysterious, cannot be too frequently contemplated. It is a source of the highest pleasure, and the most abiding advantage. “Into *these things* the angels desire to look.” And let it be observed also, that while the immortal soul of man has participated, in so distinguished a manner, the thoughts and cares of the Most High, the subordinate interests of his mortal, corruptible body have not been forgotten. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.” “ My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.” He who formed the animal mechanism, and set it in motion by the breath of life, has provided for its preservation. And that, not merely by furnishing the appropriate means of subsistence, but by issuing express laws and prohibitions, which encompass and fortify the life of man, as with an impregnable guard. The human existence is a principle of so superior, so sacred a nature, that it seems reserved for the more immediate custody of God himself.” In his hand our breath is, and his are all our ways. He who gave the Law, in tremendous grandeur, from Mount Sinai, failed not to introduce, among other declarations of his will, graven with his own immortal finger, that memorable precept — “Thou shalt do no murder.” And that same voice which has since proclaimed the Gospel from Mount Zion, has been heard by us this morning, saying, in tones sufficiently distinct and audible, “Do thyself no harm.” The subject

appointed for our consideration, this day, is “the dreadful sin of Suicide.” A subject, as I humbly conceive, *never* unsuitable for pulpit discussion. Why should not this point have its turn in our public ministrations, since it stands connected with so considerable a portion of God’s revealed will? But, as it happens, the *topic* is remarkably applicable to the *times*. And one might almost be tempted to imagine, that the minister who procured the insertion of the subject, in our Monthly Meeting List, now fourteen months ago, had been gifted with a foresight and prescience of those melancholy occurrences which have lately arisen to our notice. [Particular allusion is, here, made to the murders of unparalleled enormity, recently perpetrated in Ratcliffe Highway and Wapping, by which two entire families (those of Marr and Williamson) were most barbarously destroyed. The culprit Williams, who is understood to have been concerned in these crimes, hanged himself in prison, after his second examination before the magistrates; thus aggravating the guilt of taking away the life of others, by laying violent hands upon his own. His accomplices, it is generally believed, are already discovered, and will shortly receive the due reward of their deeds. Besides these more daring outrages, an extraordinary, and perhaps, an unexampled number of other offences against the peace of society, and the life of individuals, has marked the close of the last, and the commencement of the present year.] The atrocious murders, and especially the many mournful instances of suicide, recently perpetrated, have attracted the public attention. The reports of them have occasioned “our ears to tingle,” and our eyes to weep. They have supplied a general subject of conversation, and have spread consternation and dismay, not only in the metropolis and its environs, but throughout the kingdom at large, The vigilance of the magistrate has been awakened, and the activity of the police augmented. Housekeepers have been excited to adopt additional measures of defense and security. And amidst this extended agitation of public feeling, shall the ministers of the sanctuary alone be silent and unmoved? Is it not high time for them to work, when men have so daringly made void the divine law? Shall not they lift up their voice like a trumpet, to enter their open protest against such unparalleled enormities? Shall not they employ the bloodless weapons of their spiritual warfare, in

counteracting the encroachments of such flagitious crimes? Shall not they, in the ravages of this moral distemper, seize, each one, his censer, and stand up between the dead and the living, that so the plague may be stayed? I sincerely wish that the service of protesting this day against a crime lamentably frequent in its occurrence, and by many persons ingeniously palliated, had fallen into abler hands. But, as it is, favour me with your candid attention, and affectionate intercessions, while I offer you some observations on this awful, but not, as we hope, unprofitable theme. The words of the text are the advice of St. Paul, addressed to the almost frantic jailor, when on the verge of self-destruction. In what follows I shall notice,

I. The crime which is here forbidden.

II. The causes and occasions by which men are ordinarily impelled to the commission of it.

III. Shall adduce some considerations to enforce the apostolic dissuasion — “Do thyself no harm.” And afterwards attempt to improve the subject, by suggesting some profitable cautions, by confirming some important doctrines, by detecting some modern sources of the frequency of this offence, by exprobrating some kindred or collateral iniquities, by exciting some devotional feelings, and, finally, by addressing various classes of persons in this audience.

I. The crime here forbidden.

The prohibition might bear to be extended to every species and mode of self-injury, of which man is capable, either as it regards his body or his soul. For, alas! there are those, who may be fitly termed murderers of their own souls. But it is expedient to confine our attention to the crime of suicide, or the destruction of our own life by violent means. Allow me to premise, before I enter on this discussion, that there is a certain class of objects who do not come within the compass of our present equities; I mean lunatics, and persons decidedly insane. If they be beside themselves,

they are not responsible agents; and I beg this to be carefully noted, in order that I may not aggravate the distresses of those, (should any such glance these pages,) whose relatives or friends may, in the desperate paroxysms of mental distraction, have put an end to their own existence. In other cases, the criminality of this sin will appear by observing —

1. That it is a direct violation of the principle of self-preservation, which is an established law of nature. An instinctive dread of death, and an anxious concern to prolong its being, seem very obviously to characterize everything that has life. It is a propensity interwoven with the very texture of animated existence. The meanest insect, a fly, or a worm, is directed by this principle to avoid whatever is destructive, and to repel, so far as its powers of resistance avail, every external violence which threatens to extinguish its being. Even wild beasts, of the most ferocious disposition, though they prey without remorse on each other, and on more defenseless animals, are never observed, designedly, to pursue measures detrimental to their lives. It is a blindness as to consequences, which emboldens the horse to defy the dangers of the field. “He rusheth into the battle, *not knowing* that it is for his life.” Every man is conscious to himself, that the extinction of his natural life is abhorrent to his every feeling. He instantaneously acknowledges, without resorting to a train of logical argumentation, that position in the book of Job, “Skin for skin — all that a man hath he will give for his life.” We read in the gospels, of one, who, to remove the pressure of disease, and to perpetuate her life, spent all she had upon physicians, in the hope of a cure, even her entire livelihood. And many instances daily occur, in which men are content to lose a portion of themselves, in order to keep alive, for a few years, the feeble spark of life. They submit to the amputation of their limbs, and to operations still more exquisitely painful. They yield to the caustic and the knife — for what end? To retain their animal being. The suicide must therefore reason himself down to a level inferior to that of the brutes, and must obliterate the plainest principles of nature, before he can venture on the dreadful deed.

2. It is as contrary to the law of God, as to the unsophisticated dictates of nature. The commandment, which is intended to restrain men from crimes of blood, is clear and: explicit. “Thou shalt do no murder.” It is expressed in such general terms, as to render it precisely applicable to the sin of which we are treating. It extends not only to the taking away the lives of others, but our own also. The spirit of this command breathes in many other passages of holy writ, which might easily be cited. What words can contain a more lucid prohibition of the offence than the text before us, “Do thyself no harm?” All truly wise and good men have, therefore, unquestionably, considered the practice of suicide in the highest degree unlawful. Though, in the extremity of their distresses, many of them would have chosen death rather than life, and some have even proceeded so far as to wish themselves out of the world, as Elijah, Job, and Jeremiah, yet they have not dared to make their exit of their own accord. What bitter agonies, what accumulated woes might they have escaped, could they have deemed it safe or right to venture on this expedient: they might have evaded the fury of the fiery furnace, the den of lions, the dungeon, and the chain. They might easily have eluded the cruel arts, and disappointed the malignant rage of the persecutor. But, no. They patiently endured the trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were roasted at a slow fire, they were harassed, afflicted, tormented; because they dared not voluntarily to overleap the boundary fixed by the all-determining hand of God. They revered the mandate, “Thou shalt not kill.” This sin is not only levelled at the direct and positive command of God, but it militates equally against the standard which he has set up as the rule and measure of our duty to others. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” “As, therefore,” to borrow the words of an excellent English prelate, “we may not murder another, so much less may we murder ourselves. And those who are hurried to this impious act, as they do actually destroy themselves, so they do virtually and interpretatively murder and destroy the whole world; and are as guilty before God, as if,

together with themselves, they had murdered their parents, their children, their nearest relations, and all mankind besides; and that, because they destroy that fundamental law, which should regulate their love to their neighbours, and which is the stated rule, according to which they should endeavour after their welfare and preservation.”

3. It is an impious invasion of the prerogative of God. “The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth low, and raiseth up.” See, now, that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal.” He is the sovereign arbiter of life and death. He holds the keys of the invisible world. He openeth, and no man hath a right to shut. He shutteth, and no man hath authority to open. He determines when it is proper we should enter the world, he assigns to each his post, and he only can give the signal of retreat. It is rebellion to say, “I do not choose to continue any longer in the world. Duty is burdensome, and trouble is insupportable, I will shelter myself in the darkness of the grave.” Nor is it only rebellion against the divine appointments, but an absolute usurpation of the regal authority of God. It is seizing the reins of government. It is vaulting into the chariot of heaven. It is a rash and treasonable occupation of the almighty throne. Beside all this, it would go to defeat the designs of God in the government of mankind, and in the economy of redemption. If every man were at liberty to destroy himself, the whole species might become extinct, the world might be depopulated, and the church be annihilated. Where then would be that august display of the perfections and character of God, which will form the foundation of his praise to everlasting ages?

4. This act discovers the utmost distrust, petulance, and impatience. Distrust of God’s power, or of his mercy, is a libelous reflection on the Deity. It represents him as incapable of affording help, or as sternly insensible to the sufferings of his creatures. Why should we make the dreadful plunge, while there exists a being whose wisdom nothing can confound, whose arm can effect everything, and whose tender mercies are

over all his works? It argues a most unseemly petulance; a peevish fretfulness; an unwarrantable irritation. For on what object does this unhallowed anger terminate? on God himself, as said the wife of Job, “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? *curse God, and die.*” How much of impatience also mingles with this act. Every man knows that he must die; that time is gradually wearing away; that every passing day inevitably shortens the period of his existence here — and what? shall he dare to curtail a life already short, and always uncertain? A life which is aptly compared to a span — a hand breadth — a transient mist or vapour? Shall he presume to accelerate the flight of time, than whom none travels with more amazing rapidity? Is it any great stretch of patience to wait our appointed time, seeing our days are determined, and the number of our months is with God? Especially as our change must come certainly, and may come soon. To hurry out of life before we have reached the appointed boundary, is surely an unjustifiable impatience.

5. This crime involves in it a hardened infidelity of the future state, and a daring defiance of the tremendous consequences of death. Can it be supposed that the self-murderer has any sincere belief of immortality? That he entertains any sober conviction of the certain existence of a heaven, and of a hell? Or can he be so lost to every sense of religious truth, or moral fitness, as to dream of a heaven for murderers? No, he must willfully shut his eyes to the dread solemnities of the world he is about to enter; he must contrive to steel and fortify his heart against every serious impression; he must have learnt to bid defiance to the tribunal of God’s justice, to the terrors of his vengeance, to the power of his anger, and to the instruments of death ordained against transgressors. He must have dared to contend with that angel, the last messenger of mercy, who was commissioned to meet him with a flaming sword, in the narrow pass of death, and to tell him, “that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him,”

We proceed,

II. To the causes or occasions by which men are ordinarily impelled to this unnatural deed.

1. Powerful and overwhelming convictions of sin. Sin is the worst of evils; the fruitful parent of innumerable woes: and a self-sought death is not infrequently found to form a part of its wages. When conscience is awakened from its slumbers, and sin presses upon the mind, in all the weight of its guilt, and in all the terror of its consequences, the affrighted transgressor is, for a time at least, completely overwhelmed. Such is the forlorn estate of the convinced sinner who has no competent knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that he sees no hope; he feels himself condemned; and anticipates, in the torments of the lost, his only portion. When with the insupportable recollection of his past offences, he begins to be sensible of the gnawing of that worm which never dies, and to sustain the fierce gleams of that fire which shall never be quenched, he is, to use an expression of the psalmist, “at his wits end.” He looks above, and behold, an angry God preparing to take vengeance on him. He looks beneath, and the pit opens her mouth to receive him. He looks around him, and realizes a world in flames. Ah! he now confesses that the imagined pleasures of sin are but for a season, and that afterwards it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. These oppressive convictions of guilt seem to have had no small share in prompting the jailor to this criminal deed. His anguish arose not entirely from the apprehension of temporal misery, as appears from the question he addressed, with fear and trembling, to the apostles, whom he had lately treated with so merciless a rigour. “Sirs, what must I do to be *saved*?” Convictions of sin are sent either in judgment or in mercy. When they approach as the harbingers of mercy, the grand relief is always provided. The same hand which inflicts the wound, supplies also the balm; and the alarm occasioned by a discovery of the disease, only prepares for the reception and application of the remedy. I have heard of many eminently pious persons, who, in the initiatory stages of their religious progress, have, from this cause, been harassed by grievous temptations to self-murder. They have, however,

been preserved in Christ Jesus, (and some of them almost miraculously,) till at length, by faith in the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world, their anxieties have terminated in a peace that passeth all understanding. When convictions are sent in righteous judgment, they are well characterized as “the sorrow of the world, which worketh death.” The agitated subject of them, becomes indeed a Magor-missabib — a terror to himself and to others. The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear? Of this description was the repentance of Judas, who, smitten with the keenest remorse, and unable to bear up under the reproaches of his own conscience, “went away and hanged himself; and bursting asunder in the midst, his bowels gushed out.” *Thus* miserably perished the traitor, an awful monument of the bitterness of sin, and the sad example of the burden of an accusing conscience.

2. Unsanctified calamities have often hurried men to this rash, this fatal deed. Man is naturally proud, selfish, and willful. Too haughty to brook control — too habitually addicted to the indulgence of self-love, patiently to relinquish his favourite objects — and too obstinate in his determinations, to submit to disappointment: he has often, under some afflictive pressure, voluntarily rushed into the future state, to lodge his complaints in person at the divine footstool. The prophet Jonah, though doubtless a good character, presents to our view points of glaring impropriety; and how nearly he bordered on the spirit of this crime upon one very trying occasion, you may judge, by consulting the fourth chapter of his prophecy, from the fourth to the end of the ninth verse. Who has not discovered in his own mind; under vexatious circumstances, some strong tendencies to this unhallowed impetuosity? When our projects are defeated, our purposes broken, our airy schemes of happiness demolished, then how intensely do we loathe life, and hastily long for death, merely as a screen from the storms of adversity. The truth is, that the present life is a state of discipline. It is the main intention of God, to crucify us to the world, that we may seek a better rest, and secure a more valuable and enduring inheritance. Hence the long train of evils which attend us from

the cradle to the tomb. Hence the decay of our health, and the ruin of our fortunes. Hence the destruction of our fond enterprises, and the innumerable mortifications to which we are subjected. There are some who consider, that it is meet to say unto God, “I have borne chastisement; I will offend no more.” But there are others who do not choose to submit themselves to the plans of divine government. Like bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke, they are galled into impatience, without being subdued, as they ought, to tractable acquiescence. They kick against the pricks, and thereby goad and chafe themselves into a state of most dangerous irritability. When trials befall them, heavy, complicated, long continued, and (as they imagine) ill adapted to their corrupt humour, they say, “What should I wait for the Lord any longer? Why should I bear a load, which I may so easily decline? I will not accept a life so embittered by the terms on which I hold it — I will cease to be.” Crafty politicians, whose devices have been confounded. as were Ahithophel’s, when employed against David; God’s ambitious heroes, whose affairs have been unexpectedly checked by misfortunes; lovers, unsuccessful in their suit; and scheming speculators, whose plans of aggrandizement have failed; have severally adopted this very perilous expedient.

3. An inordinate love of the world is another specific cause of this crime. Covetousness is a vice which, above many, brings its own punishment along with it. He, therefore, who has an exorbitant valuation for the unrighteous mammon, while he is called in the scripture an idolater, is termed in society a miser. He is pitiful, uncomfortable — a *very wretch*. In illustration of this part of the subject, I must beg again to refer to the case of Judas. Covetousness was his ruling passion. He bore the bag, and loved what was put therein. For thirty pieces of silver he betrayed his Lord, and for a season, probably, was amused and delighted with this accession to his former hoard, which was now considerably augmented. But soon his tempter becomes his tormentor; he throws back the accursed object of his idolatrous regard, saying, “I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood.” And forthwith, he went out and hanged

himself. With the utmost truth it may be affirmed, that the love of money is the root of this, as well as of all other evil. We have witnessed the adoption of this dreadful measure, by persons in the advance of life; who, possessing not only a competence, but a confluence of earthly good, could not, according to their habits, and judging by the ordinary ratio of human existence, have consumed their property, had they attacked it in the bulk during their few remaining years. And yet, from the dread of penury, they have ventured on this sin. “In the fulness of their sufficiency, they have been in straits.” But there is another class of worldlings — I mean those who, without the parsimony I have described, are “greedy of gain.” They enter upon large ventures, immense hazards, unwarrantable and wicked speculations. Sometimes with capital, and sometimes without it, they place themselves between the wide extremes of absolute ruin and perfect opulence. Events transpire contrary to their expectation, and destructive to their calculations. In the chagrin and rage produced by the unwelcome discovery of their irremediable folly, they dare the dreadful leap, and precipitate themselves into an eternal world. The end of these things is death. There are still more, perhaps, who bring themselves to this end by extravagant courses. The love of gaiety, splendour, and indulgence, an expensive struggle for importance, an affectation of retinue, equipage, and state, a love of company, and a vanity of display, have involved them in pecuniary difficulties, from which, neither their own ample resources, nor their “dear five hundred friends,” have been equal to extricate them. Their finances have been squandered, their estates exhausted and encumbered, their creditors have become impatient and clamorous, till they, wearied with importunity, and worn down with anxiety, have sought a refuge in the grave. How often have we seen this jovial, dashing, sumptuous life, terminated by a razor, a pistol, or a halter. “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

4. The fear of man bringeth this snare. It is not courage, but pusillanimity, which disposes men to this deed of desperation. It was fear, agitation, and dismay which drove the keeper of the prison to this act of violence; “he

drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, *supposing the prisoners had been fled.*” Tracing the probable consequences of their escape, in his own confinement, punishment, and disgrace, he was willing to become his own executioner, rather than to encounter so much infamy as would inevitably result from a public trial, an open condemnation, an ignominious and criminal execution. This principle operated in a similar way upon Saul, that ill-fated monarch; for, “when the battle went sore against him, and the archers hit him, he said unto his armour-bearer, draw thy sword and thrust me through therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me (or mock me). But his armour-bearer would not, for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.” Many, in like manner, to avoid detection, shame, and infamy, have resorted to this method of concealment. They have resolved to die, hoping that their guilty secrets would be buried with them. Who can doubt that a late inhuman monster, to escape the ordeal of future interrogatories, the merited fury of the populace, and a disgraceful execution, effected his own destruction? Yes, this fear of man, poor, feeble, dying man, has in it a torment, to the endurance of which, many have thought death itself preferable.

5. Habitual indolence, or the want of useful occupation, has been productive of this mischief. Idleness is, without doubt, the seedplot of evil. It is the soil most favorable to the infernal agriculturist, who avails himself of every opportunity for diffusing his pernicious influence, and goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. It has been well observed, that an industrious man may be tempted of the devil, but the idle one actually tempts the devil to tempt him. He solicits, he courts the baneful presence of the arch destroyer. “Study to be quiet, and to do your own business; not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;” are maxims, which, if duly regarded, would prevent, or cure, most of the crimes and the miseries which have overspread the world. It would effectually banish gloom, and preclude lassitude, to propose to ourselves some laudable and important object, and to pursue it with vigorous

activity. For what, I ask you, is life, divested of its pursuits, its duties, its utilities? A mere shadow, an insipid vapour, a gloomy blank, yea, an insufferable load. He who is habitually unoccupied, will find, that his life sinks into a dull sameness, relieved by no breaks, interspersed with no varieties. This uninteresting mode of existence is regarded first with indifference, then follows fatigue, then restlessness, then disgust — then death.

He who renders himself a cipher in society, feels that he not only stands in every body's way, but that he is reduced to a state of unmeaning insignificance, which is tantamount to intellectual and moral non-entity. He has ceased to exist, as to all the purposes of a rational and active being, and feels that the transition is comparatively easy, from such a state, to the annihilation he hopes for in the grave. We must, my brethren, embody life with some useful realities, some sober enjoyments, or it will cease to present an aspect interesting to ourselves or others. What the French call *ennui*, an indescribable listlessness of feeling, has, I verily believe, proved a cause of suicide. The mind looks back with infinite discontent and weariness on a guilty, exhausted, and unprofitable life; and, urged by a thirst for novelty and change, forcibly disengages herself from the body, and tries the invisible, the eternal state.

6. The harsh and unfeeling treatment, which persons of great constitutional sensibility have sometimes received, has urged them to this most unreasonable and dreadful deed. There is such a thing (though one would hope it is oftener talked of than realized) as a *broken heart*; and when it is unhappily connected with a weak understanding, an ill-informed judgment, and ungoverned passions, it will often occasion this melancholy catastrophe. We have seen the tears of the oppressed, while on the side of their oppressors there was power. We have heard their distant groans, without having been able to throw in mitigations, or to afford redress. We have at length been informed of their end. We read that “oppression will make even a *wise* man mad.” It will either rouse his

spirit to fury and frenzy, or break it with melancholy and grief. What then will be its effect on weak minds, furnished with strong and susceptible feelings? Is there no wretched female, who, having been first corrupted, and afterwards betrayed and deserted, has sought to conceal her faults, and her injuries, in the same grave — thus practicing a tremendous species of revenge on her seducer and herself? Are there no parents, whose extreme rigour and unrelenting severity, have well-nigh produced this desperate resolution in the minds of their children? Are there no masters and mistresses, who have ground their servants by unreasonable exactions, and teased them by their continual contentions, till their souls have chosen strangling and death, rather than life? Are there no Christian pastors, who have been driven into a state of considerable temptation, by the wayward tempers, the malicious tongues, the unprovoked attacks, and the cruel ingratitude of those, who, at one period, would have almost plucked out their own eyes to have given to them? Are there none who have fallen martyrs to the ill usage of pretended friends, and who, impelled to this unjustifiable measure, have left in the very scars they have made in their own persons, that sentiment legibly engraved — “These are the wounds wherewith they have wounded me in the house of my friends?”

“ Ah, this! I exclaimed, is the pitiless part,
Some act by the delicate mind;
Regardless of wringing and breaking a heart,
Already to sorrow resign’d.”

Remember I am not, in the least degree, palliating the guilt of this practice; I am merely stating the causes and the occasions which contribute to its existence.

III. Let us endeavour to enforce the dissuasion in the text, in order to deter from the commission of the crime. — “Do thyself no harm.”

1. Consider that the animated structure of the human frame is the curious and exquisite workmanship of God. “The Lord God formed man out of

the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves. Let us make man, said he, in our image, in our own likeness. He upholdeth our soul in life; for in him we live, and move, and have our being.” I am “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and am I at liberty impiously to demolish the admirable mechanism of God? Who would possess the temerity, if he had the power, to annihilate the universe? Who would presume to quench the sun in the firmament — to blot the moon from her orbit — to scatter the stars of heaven — to dry up the waters of the ocean — and dissolve the fabric of the globe? And if no such extravagant enterprise can be harboured, for a moment, even in distant thought, with respect to the great world, why shouldst thou, O man, take injurious freedoms with thyself — a world of wonders — a world in miniature? Who gave thee permission to quench that eloquent eye in the darkness of death? By what warrant dost thou reduce those active limbs to an incapacity for motion and exertion? Who granted thee license to dissolve the earthly house of thy tabernacle with thine own hands? Touch, at thy peril, a single pin. Loosen, if thou darest, the minutest cord. Are not the ravages of time alone sufficiently expeditious? Reverence thyself; thou art an awful, a mysterious compound — thou art the resemblance of thy God. — Do thyself no harm.

2. Reflect how much the human nature has been honoured by the assumption of the Son of God, and by being called into union with the divinity. “He who was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, yet made himself of no reputation, and took on him the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man. He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.” He is, at the same time, very *God*, and very *man*; and by this stupendous union of distant natures, he has infinitely exalted and adorned humanity. The body of grief which he wore, an exact counterpart of our own, and in which he submitted to an unexampled agony, and an opprobrious death, has been raised in incorruption and glory, and is now seated at the right

hand of God; angels, and principalities, and powers, being made subject unto him.” And shall I defile or destroy a nature thus allied to Deity, thus glorified in the resplendence and authority of supreme dominion? God forbid! Christians, what words are these, “ye are members of his, of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones!” — Do thyself no harm.

3. Remember that the body is capable of a joint participation with the soul, in the inestimable blessings of redemption. By the apostacy of the first Adam, the body suffered essential detriment, as well as the soul. And shall the second Adam only partially repair the ruins of the first? No, the analogy shall be accurately preserved; “for *as* in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.” The correspondence of things is maintained. The whole person is redeemed. All the powers of the soul, all the senses and members of the body, are to be recovered unto God. The body is to be presented a living sacrifice. The body is to be reclaimed as a vessel unto sanctification and honour. The body is to be the temple of the Holy Ghost; and this is the apostles prayer — “And I pray God, your whole spirit and soul and *body* be preserved blameless unto the coining of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

4. Represent to yourselves, the distinguished honour, and illustrious association, to which the human frame is destined in a happy immortality. I might, indeed, observe, that in the obscure mansion of the grave, the slumbering dust of the saint is an object of solicitude to God. Yes, so precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints, that while they are the repast of corruption and the worm, they are placed under the guardianship of his power, and the inspection of his eye. “Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.” And when the year of release shall arrive, to what unutterable glories shall the quickened dust awake. “It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.” Jesus Christ “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body,

according to the working whereby he is able also to subdue all things unto himself.” Then shall our refined frame become a meet associate with our redeemed kindred, with holy angels, yea, with God, the Judge of all. An association more dignified, more pure, more brilliant, it is impossible to conceive. Do thyself no harm. Do no violence to a structure reared for immortal honours.

5. To adopt the fatal measure I am combatting, is but a cowardly retreat from the ills of life. There is certainly something magnanimous and heroic in bearing up against the storms of this *vain, vexing world*. There is something nobly brave in facing danger, and in supporting adversity. The encomiums so lavishly pronounced on “the much enduring man” of Homer, belong with more evident propriety to the *submissive* believer, who has learned to endure hardness, and gives occasion, by the undaunted exemplification of Christian grace in hours of suffering, for God himself to say, as with marked approbation, “Here is the patience of the saints.” You all admire the soldier, who, in his country’s service, maintains with steady valour an arduous and perilous post, ashamed to flee, and not afraid to die. But with what merited contempt and obloquy is he loaded, who deserts his station, and runs from the field of danger, to take refuge in inglorious flight. Such is the sneaking and dastardly retreat of every man, who, by an act of his own, seeks a refuge from the troubles of life, in the valley of the shadow of death.

6. There is prodigious cruelty as well as cowardice in this remedy for inevitable evils. You make your exit, it is true, but who do you leave on the stage of action and of suffering? The aged parent, whose grey hairs are brought down with sorrow to the grave. The tender and defenseless wife, whose confidence has been woefully deceived, and who finds only grief and dishonour where she was entitled to expect support, protection, and consolation. The helpless family, who, though they may not be able to appreciate the enormity of a father’s guilt, must feel a father’s loss, and swoon, or shudder, at the sight of a father’s blood. How must every feeling

of their gentler nature be harrowed up? Hark! their piteous and pathetic bleatings must penetrate the hardest heart. These sheep, what have they done? Besides this legacy of suffering, there is also a legacy of shame bequeathed, by the self-murderer, to all his surviving relatives and friends. The fatal wound entails a reproach and dishonour not soon or easily effaced. There is, moreover, the cruelty of the example. It supplies a dangerous mass of pernicious materials, on which the minds of the wavering and the tempted will operate, perhaps, to their ruin. If, too, there were any traits of character morally good and amiable in the deceased, so much the worse, as it regards the influence of the example. Persons will be found, first to justify, and then to imitate, the delinquent. The brother points out the dangerous road to his brother, who soon follows him. The friend encourages his friend to bear him company in this uncertain journey, or soon to come after him. The leader of this forlorn hope will be joined by others of a desperate mind, and where the mischief may end, who shall calculate? Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before unto the judgment; and some men they follow after, in a long train of multiplying transgressions and unheard of miseries.

Lastly, It is a vain and irretrievable expedient. It is vain, because, so far from relieving our distresses, it aggravates them. How falsely do they argue, who calculate, that in the most accumulated sorrows of this earthly state, God has done his *worst*; and that they cannot possibly occupy a position *more* wretched than they now hold. Let them know that hell is no fable. "Tophet is ordained of old, by the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it." And surely it is a poor relief, to rush from the pains and penalties of a short life on earth, to fiercer flames below. Were there the least rational prospect of annihilation, the tremendous deed might admit some shadow of apology. But, oh! how different is the fact. Death is *not* an eternal sleep; but the introduction to a new, an endless series of being, in the inexpressible felicities of heaven, or the unimaginable woes of the damned. And to

which of these abodes the murderer, dying in all the guilt of blood, is of necessity consigned, is alas! abundantly plain. He who is assimilated to satan in the moral qualities of the mind, will be the companion of that abandoned spirit, and his fallen angels, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. And the mischief is irretrievable. The deed once done, can be recalled no more. It admits of no repentance, no reparation, no retraction. From that land, whither the suicide has most unadvisedly passed, no traveler returns. He has shot the gulf, and shall never re-cross it to correct his mistakes, or to recant his errors. He, therefore, who takes away his own life, contracts a double guilt; for he not only inflicts a mortal wound on his body, but he plunges a dagger into his soul, and gives a wound to his best, his dearest interests, which is irremediable and eternal.

I am now to attempt some farther improvement of this awful subject.

1. By suggesting some profitable cautions. Such, indeed, is the crime of suicide; and I persuade myself that the larger proportion of my present auditory, have never laboured under the temptation to commit it; have never harboured for a moment, even in their most secret purpose, the foul atrocity. But we cannot be too much on our guard. It is well to watch against the remotest tendencies to evil, and to preserve the utmost distance from everything which *borders* on this offence. There are some who would start back with horror from this deed, presented in its grosser form, and yet are chargeable with it, indirectly and by implication. A sin may be virtually perpetrated, even when the *overt* act is avoided. Let me be allowed to caution you against a criminal *negligence* of the means of preserving life, and health. These are cleanliness, care, determined exercise, and well-chosen relaxations. If we are to do ourselves no harm, we shall surely be found guilty of a culpable omission, should it appear that we have shortened our days through habitual neglect, inertness, or injudicious seclusion. Let those, who, by an unwarrantable eagerness in the pursuit of secular business, or in the researches of polite literature, are

sacrificing their being, or wellbeing, to a mistaken sedulity, receive this admonition, ere they become a prey to their ill-confirmed habits. In case of sickness also, medicine and timely advice should be resorted to. Multitudes have fallen victims to the obstinacy of their own prejudices against the compounds of the apothecary, and the practice of the healing art. Let these remember the sage observation recorded in Ecclesiasticus, “The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth; and he that is wise will not abhor them.” On this part of the subject also, let me lift up a warning voice against those injurious modes of *female attire*, which not only occasion an indelicate exposure of the person, but are also destructive to the lives of those who adopt them. Many a fair and delicate form has thus been immolated by the priestess of vanity on the altar of depraved fashion. Having first dispensed with that blushing modesty, which is the chief ornament of their sex, they have, at length, in their tenacious adherence to the system of NUDITY, contracted some fatal sickness, which has issued in a premature death. In vain often do parents advise, in vain do physicians caution, in vain do ministers expostulate, so deeply rooted is this pernicious folly. Let facts, however, be attended to, and they will lead to this result, that if excessive caution, and habits of luxurious softness, have slain their thousands, the system against which I am inveighing, has slain its tens of thousands. To give greater weight to these remonstrances, I beg to submit a few observations of an able but ancient theologian, which, if they should chance to meet the eye of those whose manner of dress, or rather of *undress*, they are intended to reprove, will, I hope, be seriously considered, and practically regarded. “It is a horrid cruelty to our frail bodies, to expose them to those injuries against which God has provided a remedy, to gratify pride, or to humour any vanity. And however our fashionables hope to keep themselves warm, and to shelter their sin under the screen of their own foolish proverb, Pride feels no cold, yet God has oftentimes made their sin to become their punishment, whilst, by an obstinate striving with the inconveniences of an ill-contrived mode, they have hazarded, if not lost, their health, if not their lives, by a ridiculous

compliment to some new fashion. But how they will stand before the righteous judgment-seat of God, when he shall arraign and try them, as guilty of *self murder*, in the great day of scrutiny, they may do well timely to advise upon, and consider.” A *presumptuous confidence* in our physical strength, also, should be carefully suppressed. “We have observed,” says a learned and admired writer, “the most acute pains, and the severest maladies, amongst those, whom a confidence in the force of nature has led into excessive exertions; and that superfluity of strength, which was at once their boast and their snare, has had no other use than to lengthen out their existence in impotence and anguish.” “Let not the strong man glory in his strength, nor the mighty man in his might.” There are some who defy danger, and ridicule precaution. They fondly imagine that they are impregnable to disease, and invulnerable to accident. They boastingly affirm, “that nothing hurts them;” till, at last, they lose a life of which they have been criminally prodigal. Whenever we have a clear call of duty, we may boldly advance, though at the peril of our lives, confiding in that animating promise, “as thy day is, so shall thy strength be.” But even in these cases, as the age of miracles is past, we must avail ourselves of every mean of security we may be able to command. We are not to *tempt* the Lord our God, though it is our privilege to *trust* him. Here I will venture to propose a query. — Have not some congregations, by their injudicious fondness for *public* services, (which, in our day, it is to be feared, operate too seriously against secret and private duties,) hurried their ministers to a premature grave? They have never been content but when beholding their teachers in the pulpit; and the consequence has been, that they have taken an early leave of them at the mouth of the tomb. And then, will tears revive them? The religious public, as it is called, has more to answer for, in this respect, than they may be willing to allow; in that they have, by unkind partialities, and rude and cruel entreaties, urged on their willing servants in their chosen career, with such a merciless violence, as to curtail their usefulness, and to shorten their lives. Let young ministers, and their admirers, ponder well the prohibitions, “Do

thyself no harm — Thou shalt not kill.” Let it not be supposed, that I am advocating the cause of clerical indolence: we are not set apart as loiterers, but as labourers; we are to be instant in season, and out of season; we are to be always abounding in the work of the Lord. But let it be remembered,, that as there is a time for fishing, so, also, for mending our nets. The mower, in the harvest field, is not accused of wasting his time, when he pauses to whet his scythe. There is a wise expenditure of strength and spirits, and there is a profuse and impolitic exhausture of them. It is, as we are sometimes reminded, hateful to *rust* out; but let us then *fear* out; for it is irreligious to harass and tear ourselves in pieces, though we may suppose we are doing God service. The Master who employs us, is *too great* to need such excessive efforts, and *too good* to require them. According to the strength bestowed, we will very gladly spend and be spent for you.

I would, in the next place, warn you against *vicious excesses*, as obviously prejudicial to health and longevity. The slaves of sin, the votaries of dissipation, do as effectually, though not so instantaneously, destroy themselves by their evil courses, as if they resorted to the murderous weapon of the suicide. The bloom of health, and the vigour of an excellent constitution, have frequently been lost and impaired in the circles of gaiety, and in the round of vicious pleasures. Unnatural hours, full tables, and midnight revellings, are as noxious, though not so immediate in their operation, as the poison and the steel. Excess, even in the indulgence of lawful appetites, will denominate the intemperate man, a suicide. Gluttony and intoxication will unbrace the best toned constitution, and completely unnerve the man. How often do you hear it said of the sot, “he died of drinking;” of the epicure, “he dug his grave with his teeth;” and of the emaciated debauchee, who could not sustain the ravages of fever, “he might have lived through it, if he had not made too free with himself.” Permit me to add, beware of *indulging melancholy images*. Some minds are of a pensive cast, a dolorous conformation; and to them melancholy musings form a high species of luxury. So far from encouraging such a

predisposition, it should be resisted and counteracted. Habitual gloom is an atmosphere favourable to the commission of this deed. By activity, by reading the scriptures, and, above all, by prayer, we should endeavour to acquire a better temperament of mind, and aim to banish those brooding recollections, or foreboding anticipations, which dishearten and depress the spirits. Against these approaches to this crime, but especially against the more direct causes of it, let us diligently watch and fervently pray.

2. We are to aim at confirming some *important doctrines*. From the foregoing premises, how easily may we infer the *fall of man*, and the total depravation of his nature by sin. Let those who harangue on the dignity and moral goodness of human kind, satisfactorily account for this catastrophe, if they are able. How comes it to pass, that man can perpetrate such crimes as these; crimes against nature, against reason, and against God? Alas! the cause is plain. “How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! God made man upright, but he has sought out many inventions.” The corruption of the tree is the only scriptural mode of accounting for the corruptness of its productions. “They are all gone out of the way; they are altogether become unprofitable; there none that doeth good, no, not one. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their paths.” It is obvious that the *heart* of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; because, saith he, who knew what was in man, and could not err in any of his decisions. “Out of the *heart* proceed *evil thoughts, murders.*” The doctrine of *Satanic agency*, may be derived from a retrospect of our subject. The reality of his being, and the activity of his influence, have been points much disputed, and are, I believe, erased out of some modern creeds as irrational dogmas. We are told, that all the passages of holy writ, in which mention is made of the devil, and satan, are mere personifications, allegories, and eastern figures; metaphoric and dramatic ornaments, which form no essential part of the inspired testimony. Thus, at one stroke, is the *Gospel* undermined, “which,” to use the words of Dr. Doddridge, “has its foundation in the combat of Jesus Christ with the prince of darkness, and his victory over

him.” It is certain that the indictments in our courts of law, are more orthodox than the creeds of some fashionable Christians. The former make a formal recognition of diabolical agency, when they represent the murderer as instigated by the devil; which the latter, of course, deny. Some persons, in the plenitude of their *rationality*, have presumed to mutilate Dr. Watt’s Hymns for Children, substituting the term folly in place of *Satan*; thus our babes in the nursery must drink in skepticism with their hymns, or at least be kept in profound ignorance of an enemy, against whom they cannot be too early warned, or taught to combat. It cannot be doubted, that he who is a murderer from the beginning, prompts to self destruction. “Therefore be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” The *immateriality* of the soul may be inferred from the act of suicide. The animal nature is, as we have seen, averse from its own destruction. Is there not, then, some higher power, some superior principle, distinguishable from the body, which dictates this crime, and which overcomes the repugnance of struggling nature? And what is this but immateriality and intellect — the immaterial part of man subduing the weaker resistances of his material system? There is a spirit in man. Again, a judgment to come, is inferable from the crime we have been considering. It is true, the self murderer, by becoming his own executioner, eludes the severity of earthly justice, and makes himself an *outlaw* from human *jurisdiction*. But shall he escape the just judgment of God? He is gone, and nothing is left behind but his guilt and his senseless corpse; but this very circumstance would lead to a belief, that there is a state of equitable retribution beyond the grave; that there is an appointed day in which God will judge the world. The high sanctions of religion should be much insisted on. They have an authority and solemnity peculiarly salutary, and vastly binding upon the conscience.

3. I am to account for the frequency of this crime, in modern times, for it will hardly be denied that it is mournfully prevalent. A defective plan of education may, perhaps, be considered as the primary source of this vice

amongst us. Children are allowed to grow up in ignorance of themselves, as to the great ends of their being, the important duties they are sent into the world to discharge, and the high destinies which await them in the world to come. They are not sufficiently accustomed to distinguish between right and wrong, between the evil and the good. The great lines of moral demarcation are not made familiar enough to their minds; and they enter into life accomplished, but not wise; shining in the tinsel of external embellishments, but without the riches of the understanding, — sterling truths, and sound maxims. Principle, my hearers, moral and religious principle, is the only solid basis of a good education. To inform the judgment, to subjugate the will, to curb and govern the passions; to plant in the bosom the habit of self-denial; to *give* a just estimate of the present life; to induce an abiding conviction of responsibility; and to fix and fill the soul with the grandeurs of eternity; this, this is education. It has been observed, that instances of suicide and murder have been rarely or never found amongst that class of people called Quakers; and may not this be ascribed, at least principally, to the strictness and simplicity of their educational habits, together with the wholesome restraints and self renunciations to which they are early accustomed. Let but the *Bible* be the head master in our schools, and the chief director in our houses, and the enormities which disgrace our age will inevitably be diminished. The zealous diffusion of infidel publications in this country, of late years, has, in no small degree, contributed to the evil we complain of. We have seen the most daring attempts made, by some in every walk of life, to discredit the divine revelation, and to relax the obligations to moral and relative duty. Writers of this stamp affect to doubt everything that is sacred, and attempt to ridicule everything that is awful. They would fain persuade us, that there is no hereafter, no day of future audit; no state of punishment beyond the confines of the present world. They uniformly speak of death with unbecoming levity; and of suicide, as a last resort, rather laudable and magnanimous than otherwise. This is the sum of their system — “We are independent agents, entirely freed from any superior restraint; our lips,

our lives are our own, who is lord over us? Why need we stay longer in the world than we choose? We entered it without our consent, and need not continue in it if we please to make our exit. Where is the crime of diverting a few ounces of blood from their natural channel?" And these are the licentious ideas, which, being set afloat, go to the multiplication of this and many other crimes.

Works of imagination, it must be confessed, are, for the most part, calculated to promote the same end. The trash of circulating libraries has sharpened the ill-destined steel of the suicide, and has doubly primed the fatal piece, the purposed instrument of death. The visionary schemes, the unmortified pride, the incontrollable passions, the rueful adventures, the accursed exits, of which the general run of novels make the exhibition, have all this tendency — I mean, to *depreciate* the value of human existence, and to *lessen* the guilt of bringing it to a close. Some *songs*, also, which I have heard sung by young people, in the hours of amusement, or on set seasons of display appointed by their mistaken parents, have amounted to a palatable justification of the crime of self murder.

But there is another, and a more serious mistake in the education of young persons, which, at a very early age, engages their sanction and approbation on the side of self murder. I refer to the assiduous, but unrestricted and unguarded study of the Greek and Roman Classics, which have long been considered as the essential basis of a learned and elegant education. We imbibe, even in our boyhood, the most false and dangerous notions of *honour*; we are taught to form erroneous conceptions of glory, and are dazzled with the shew of imaginary greatness. It must be confessed, that the crime we are combating, met with many abettors, under the reign of Pagan darkness. Some of the wisest philosophers and most admired heroes of antiquity, not only practiced it without remorse, but even prescribed it as an excellent remedy. I say, *some* of them, for all were not of this mind. Amongst the most enlightened, there were those who

employed the best force of their reason against the pernicious deed. No argument, however, in favour of the practice, can be fairly deduced from the example of those who adopted it, in that midnight obscurity, which no gleam of divine revelation had as yet relieved. Shall we take occasion from their mistakes, to justify actions which our superior light discovers to be criminal and detestable? If this be allowed, self murder is not the only offence against nature, which will seek shelter, and gather consequence from their writings and their example. Light is come into the world, and they who are children of the light and the day, should blush to extenuate the works which they carried on, without compunction, in the dark. But to return to the point immediately before us, it is surely much to be regretted, that the moral impressions, which it is so desirable to form in the minds of our youth at the earliest period of life, should be counteracted by the introduction of opposing sentiments and hostile principles. Why should we supply materials, taken from the ancient classics, to feed the unhallowed flame, which it is the express design of Christianity to extinguish? Let any man, with a serious and unprejudiced mind, attend to the beatitudes recorded in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, which contains the first instructions of that divine teacher, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and then let him judge, how far removed are the tempers and spirit there inculcated, from those which were exemplified by the greatest among the heathen, and which, are indiscriminately presented for the admiration of our school-boys. The spirit of the world is diametrically opposite to the spirit which is of God; the former is the parent of suicide; the latter alone can correct it. The tragical tales of Brutus, and Cassius, and of Lucretia, make such lodgments in the mind, during the plastic, the pliable, the impressible age of youth, as are altogether unfavourable to sound morality. The high spirit of revenge and retaliation, which they discovered, affixes an indelible blot on their characters, and constitutes a vice which none of their imagined virtues can possibly redeem; and the mischief which will probably arise from the contemplation of so great a mixture of good and evil, to young

persons, may not be inaptly resembled to the pernicious effects of that “forbidden tree, which brought death into the world, and all our woe.” But would you proscribe, altogether, these sources of information and entertainment? I would not have recourse to them without an able guide, who should at once supply an antidote to the poison they convey; and prevent an unmingled draught of those tempting waters, which, though exhilarating in their qualities, have proved, when injudiciously taken, so extremely deleterious in their effects. I wish that piety, sterling piety, were made the indispensable qualification of all who are intrusted with the instruction of youth. If the tutors of our nobility and gentry, and of our public schools, were careful to point out the lines of distinction between the courage, the spirit, the magnanimity, which dignifies and adorns our nature, and that which deforms and disgraces it, what beneficial effects might we not hope for? At least, the crime of suicide would disappear, and a taste for false honour would decrease in proportion as a thirst for true glory should prevail.

While speaking on this subject, I must consider theatrical exhibitions as the means of public corruption. I am aware that I now touch on very tender ground, because I am aiming a blow at the stage, which is, to many, the idol of supreme adoration — the great Diana of the Ephesians. We are told, that the stage *may be made* the most efficacious engine of moral reformation, but we have long looked and waited for this desirable effect in vain. Among other vices, suicide is nourished in the playhouse. It grows there as in its most congenial soil. The frequent exhibition of this tragical deed, as the concluding point in a character of glory, not only familiarizes the mind to the act, thereby subtracting from the sensation of horror without which it ought never to be contemplated; but, by insensible degrees, it even reconciles to the commission of it. But what? does the preacher mean to decry a sober, thoughtful, moral tragedy? Yes, till a specimen is adduced of this species of composition, morally unexceptionable, and holding out no encouragement, even by remote implication, for the crime of self murder. Addison’s Cato, it may be said,

is an admirable, and a moral composition too. I grant it, with *much exception* and *qualification*. It contains poison; and it is so much the more dangerous, because the destructive ingredient is concealed, by the delightful admixture of sound taste and fine sentiment. But, how does Cato die! And what was the effect of the exhibition on the mind of the unhappy Mr. Budget, who, on retiring (as it is supposed) from the theatre, plunged into the Thames, and was found with this defense on his person;

“ What Calo *did*, and Addison approv’d,
Must needs be right.”

Let not the young people in this assembly complain, if their superiors deny to them the gratifications of the theatre. There, characters are represented at once charming and inconsistent, and while you gaze, you are enamoured and undone. The restraint of which you sometimes feel the inconvenience, is salutary, and may become the mean of securing your principles from injury, and preserving you from many presumptuous crimes. Archbishop Tillotson observes, that the exhibitions of the theatre are as much the ordinances of satan for the damnation of souls, as the instituted means of religion are appointments of God for the salvation of them.

I cannot close this part of the discourse without observing, that it is very seriously to be apprehended, that the mistaken complaisance of modern juries, in giving an unfaithful verdict upon the crime of suicide, amounts to a toleration of the deed, and tends greatly to the encouragement of the offence. On what principle every self murderer is to be pronounced in a state of lunacy? I look to those gentlemen to explain, whose responsible duty it is to decide on the immediate cause of the catastrophe. The course of justice is, by this misjudging lenity, defeated; the magistrate ceases to hold out terror to the evil doer; and the dread of temporal dishonour and privation, as the certain consequences of the crime, no longer operates to

restrain the delinquent from this act of rashness. Can it be doubted, if he were positively assured beforehand that the verdict would be “*felo de se*;” that his body would suffer contempt by an ignominious interment; his goods and chattels be confiscated; and his name and family be branded with these sad marks of infamy, that it would powerfully withhold him from the sin? If he were sure that the sentence of the law would be fully executed, “perhaps,” saith Bishop Fleetwood, “he would give way to calmer counsels, and be content to bear a little shame and pain and loss, till God saw fit to put an end to all his sufferings, by natural means; and therefore an instance or two of such severity as is legal, well and wisely chosen, might prove a greater preservative against these violences, than such a constant and expected mercy as we always find on these occasions. For men have now no fear of the laws; and when they have laid aside the fear of God, they go about this business with great readiness — they are sure of favour in this world, and they will venture the other.”

4. The subject leads, by analogy, to the exprobration of some kindred iniquities. If it be highly criminal to throw away our own life, how much worse is it to trifle with the lives of others. The practice of dueling, one of the crying enormities of the times, cannot be too frequently, nor too harshly condemned. He who gives a challenge, at once risks his own life, and aims to take away the life of another — perhaps, of his friend. He is a murderer in intention, and a suicide in fact. O, when will our legislature, renowned for its wisdom, its justice, its humanity, interpose with becoming zeal and energy to discountenance, and to crush this infernal combination, formed against the peace of individuals, the happiness of families, and the security of human life! O, when shall these accursed sentiments of false honour give way to the voice of nature, of reason, of religion! It was a brave reply of that Christian officer, Colonel Gardner, who fell in his country’s cause, and a double portion of whose spirit it were devoutly to be wished, might rest upon all in the same profession, when, on a challenge being sent him, he returned this answer, “I am not afraid to *fight*, but I am afraid to *sin*.” In this place, I will also record my

feeble, but unblushing testimony, against the low-bred feats of pugilistic combat. Who that has one spark of virtuous dignity, one chord of moral feeling remaining in him, can behold, without the most poignant regret, the countenance afforded by our nobles and gentry, to this illegal and savage sport? Is it thus that the higher ranks in this kingdom, stoop from their attitude, to mingle with the plebeian horde, and eagerly to participate in their coarse and cruel diversions? Shall the star and the coronet be debased and tarnished by such vicious condescension? Shall St. James and St. Giles form an alliance, to defy the laws and to support the ring? Is it thus that our men of blood and title sully their own glory, and insult the memory of their more illustrious ancestors? O tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon! What a diversion for thousands of rational beings, to behold two persons beating and bruising one another, till, perhaps, the weaker antagonist expires! Who can be silent, when crimes are turned into sciences, and when outrages on the public peace and on civil decorum, are patronized as some of the highest sources of entertainment? All pastimes which lessen our value for life, even animal life, ought to be avoided; they give to man a ferocity of mind and character of which others are sensible, though he himself is not, and the effects of which they see much occasion to deplore.

“I would not enter on my list of friends,
(Tho’ grac’d with polish’d manners and fine sense,
Yet wanting sensibility,) the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.”

5. I proceed to awaken some devotional feelings. Unaffected sorrow, for the sin of our nature, and the sins of our times, will on this occasion well become us. “Rivers of water,” said the royal Psalmist, “run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law. — I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved.” Should our reasonings, our remonstrances, our expostulations prove in vain, we may yet withdraw into retirement, and weep, our tears shall not fall unnoticed. — “Go through the streets of the

city,” saith the omniscient God, to the messenger of his displeasure, and first “set a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry for the abominations that are done in the land;” and then proceed. Let our thankfulness be excited to God, for the restraining influence of his providence in the government of the world. But for this, our earth would be indeed a perfect Aceldama, a field of blood. He controls the violence of human passions, and limits their boisterous rage. He says, “Hitherto, and no farther — the wrath of man is made to praise him, and the remainder of that wrath he will restrain.” For the measure of social tranquility we enjoy, and for any freedom we may have attained from ruffling and turbulent passions, let us give thanks to the God of providence and grace. But above all, let this subject lead us to entertain an increased value for the “glorious gospel of the blessed God,” as the only effectual remedy for the moral disorders of a ruined world. This is the balm of heaven, poured into the smarting wounds of our dishonoured nature. The gospel of Jesus is, after all that has been prescribed, the only available expedient for the restoration of man, to *himself*, to his neighbour, and to his God. It brings him back to the law of his creation; it emancipates him from the dominion of the prince of darkness; it places him under the gentle and salutary sway of that gracious sovereign, who shall soon extend his scepter over a tributary world, and who must reign till all enemies are put under his feet. Even *death*, who so long, and in such hideous forms, has triumphed, shall at length be subjugated, according to that most animating prediction, “O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction!” Let us seek a personal interest in this gospel, which is the wisdom and the power of God. Let us labour to disperse, in every direction, and by every scriptural mean, the benefits it conveys. Let us cordially co-operate with our Christian brethren, of every party, sect, and denomination, in assisting the progressive triumphs of evangelical truth. We stand, my hearers, I confidently believe we stand, on the very verge of a glorious aera — an aera more glorious, than any that ever has dawned on our benighted world. The cordial, the unexpected, the universal

concurrence of our fellow Christians, in the laudable endeavour to plant the tree of life in every soil, a tree, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and whose fruits are the blessings of immortality, affords the strongest presumption, I had almost said the most delightful certainty, that the promised Millennium is at hand. We have a grand, a thrilling presentiment of the Messiah's approach. We have heard the sounding of his chariot wheels, and we are preparing the way of the Lord. Fly abroad into every land, on the wings of mercy, ye lively oracles, and announce to all people the approaching advent of their king! The reign of darkness is expiring; the time is hastening when the Hindoo widow shall no more incur the guilt of suicide, by giving her body to be burned on the funeral pile. No longer shall helpless infants, the victims of a blind superstition, be exposed to the monsters of the deep. The voice of human blood, crying from the ground, shall no more assail the ear of heaven, and men shall not destroy themselves, nor hurt each other; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. O Spirit of almighty grace, send out thy light and thy truth. Have respect unto the covenant, for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty!

Finally, I address myself to some distinct class of persons in this large assembly. And it is not impossible that there are some present, who are, or have been, the subjects of this temptation. From a nameless variety of circumstances, satan, the great destroyer, has taken occasion to suggest that it is better for you to die than to live. With this gloomy impression, you are continually haunted, so that your existence is become burden. I beseech you, fortify your minds, by the various considerations which have been brought before you today, against the fatal measure. Pray earnestly to him "who is able to keep us from falling," that he would "uphold you with his free Spirit." Make a seasonable disclosure of your secret distresses, to those who may have wisdom to advise, and tenderness to condole with you. Forbear to cloke your purpose under the covert of *reserve*. Fear to trust yourselves too often, or too long, in solitude. Study the holy art of self-government; and above all, flee to that exalted, yet

sympathizing High Priest, who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and who submitted to be assailed with a temptation to this very act, that he might be able to succour those who are tempted.

To you, who have never felt any inclination to commit this great wickedness, the review of the subject may not be unprofitable. You have many reasons for thankfulness, that in this respect you have been made to differ from others. You are called on to admire the favour of God, displayed at once in the arrangement of your external circumstances and in the regulation of your internal feelings. Remember to whom you are indebted for your preservation — “I also withheld thee from sinning against me.” Be humble and dependent, and watch against all tendencies to the crime we have been examining. Never speak with indecorous levity of so heinous a transgression, nor veil its guilt by soft and extenuating epithets. Recollect always, that pride goeth before destruction; and seeing that none of us is out of the reach of danger; “let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” Take to yourselves the whole armour of God, that if, at any future period, this fiery dart should be directed against you, you may stand in the evil day.

In the most respectful and affectionate manner, I would offer a few remarks to those who sustain the office of the Christian ministry, or have in prospect the discharge of its important functions. Permit me, my fathers and brethren, and you amiable youths, who are looking forward to the services of the temple, to remind you of the necessity of making this awful theme, in all its bearings, at least the *occasional* subject of your public discourses. We mistake, if we regard it as either unfit, or unuseful, in the disquisitions of the pulpit. The objects very nearly interested in these inquiries, are far more numerous than we may be apt to suppose. Let us aim to take a comprehensive scope in the particular addresses, which usually close our sermons. Let us meet, so far as we are able, every modification of human depravity, and every species of human distress, with its appropriate corrective and relief. Let us endeavour to acquire and

exercise the tongue of the learned. that we may speak a word in season to those “who are weary and heavy laden.” “Of some, have compassion, making a difference; and others, save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.” Above all, let us determine to press a “full-orbed Gospel,” making an unreserved disclosure of the free, abounding, transcendent grace of God, in forgiving, in converting, and saving the vilest of transgressors. Let us proclaim a possibility of pardon for *all* offences, without limitation or exception, other than of that one which divine wisdom pronounces irremissible. Let murderers hear, that blood-guiltiness itself may be washed away by the cleansing streams of that fountain which poured from the side of the crucified Redeemer. Tell him that the pardon, which was dearly purchased by our all-atoning surety, is freely offered to believing penitents, without money and without price. The two grand engines of satan’s success, are presumption and despair; and, of the two, the latter is more offensive to God, and more ruinous to the souls of men, than the former. It is a sin against the highest glory of the divine character, against *every* attribute of Deity, as centered in the work of redeeming love; and it proves incalculably detrimental to man, as often prompting him to a deed which renders repentance impracticable, Let us therefore combat, with our utmost energy, the demon despondency, knowing that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins. Never let the charge, preferred against some ecclesiastical rulers of ancient times, be brought against us. “The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost.” It has pleased God in many instances to bless the labors of the pulpit, for preventing the sin of self murder. I have lately been introduced to a well-educated, and, as I hope, a sincerely pious female, who, under the influence of religious melancholy, not *unaided* by mental distraction, made several direct attempts at self destruction; but who was diverted, at length, from her purpose, and considerably tranquillized in her spirit, by

being taken (as we generally say) casually to worship at Tooting, where, to her great surprise and consolation, the venerable and. excellent minister, [Rev. J. Bowden, for whom the author gladly avails himself of this opportunity to express his respect and affection.] who stately officiates, was directed to take for his text, “Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red, like crimson, they shall be as wool.” In viewing so remarkable an occurrence, who can forbear saying — herein is the finger of God!

I am much indebted to the esteemed and honoured pastor of the church, with whom we are worshipping this day, for the communication of an authentic and original anecdote, well calculated to illustrate and confirm these remarks. It records a fact which occurred nearly seventy years ago. [Mr. Pitts, who at that time was the assistant of the Rev. Thomas Bradbury, (the venerable grandfather of the present pastor,) was led one afternoon, in his discourse, to mention an anecdote of the celebrated Mr. Dod, which Flavel, in his” *Mysteries of Providence,*” relates in these words: — “I find it recorded of that holy man, Mr. Dod, that being late at night in his study, he was strongly moved, though at an unseasonable hour, to visit a gentleman of his acquaintance. Not knowing what might be the design of providence herein, he obeyed and went. When he came to the house, after a few knocks at the door, the gentleman himself came to him, and asked him whether he had any business with him. Mr. Dod answered, No; but that he could not be quiet till he had seen him. ‘O sir,’ replied the gentleman, ‘you are sent of God at this hour; for just now’ (and with that he takes the halter out of his pocket) ‘I was going to destroy myself.’ And thus the mischief was prevented.” *Flavel's Works*, vol. ii. p. 157.] Let us, then, my beloved brethren, make it our study to snatch some of these brands from the burning; steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

To conclude all that has been said. While, my Christian friends, we endeavour to attribute to human life its due importance, to regard it with becoming reverence, and to preserve it with a well-proportioned care, let us not indulge an over-valuing fondness for it, nor cling to it with an

excessive attachment. Let us not be scrupulously nice, nor studiously anxious, about the external accommodations of the body, saying what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed; but learn to hold these subordinate attentions in habitual subjection to the higher ends of our existence. Let us ever recollect that usefulness, not indulgence, is the great design of our being and preservation; and let these grand objects ever occupy and animate us in the service of God on earth, and in the prospect of enjoying him in heaven. Sensible that the days of our pilgrimage are few and transitory, let us cultivate a holy indifference to the present state, and a cheerful readiness to yield up our spirit, whenever God shall see fit to resume it. May none of us live unto himself, nor die unto himself; but for us to live, may it be Christ, and to die, gain. Then, amidst the disturbances of life, and the infirmities of growing years, we shall exemplify the patient temper of him who said, All the days of my appointed time will I wait; and then, when our change shall come, and the harbingers of death shall advance, however formidable their aspect, we may triumphantly exclaim, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy. I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though, after my skin, worms shall destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Thou wilt shew me the PATH OF LIFE. In thy presence there is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Amen.
