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G. W. Goodman

# COUNSELS

OF THE

AGED TO THE YOUNG.

BY A. ALEXANDER, D. D.

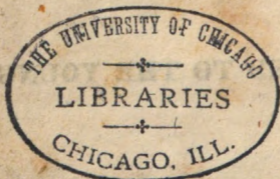
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COUNSELS OF THE AGED TO  
THE YOUNG.

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It is a matter of serious regret, that young persons are commonly so little disposed to listen to the advice of the aged. This prejudice seems to have its origin in an apprehension, that austerity and rigour naturally belong to advanced years; and that the loss of all susceptibility of pleasure from those scenes and objects which afford delight to the young produces something of an ill-natured or envious feeling towards them. Now, it cannot be denied, that some of the aged are chargeable with the fault of being too rigid in exacting from youth the same steady gravity, which is becoming in those who have lived long, and have

had much experience in the world : not remembering, that the constitutional temperament of these two periods of human life is very different. In youth, the spirits are buoyant, the susceptibilities lively, the affections ardent, and the hopes sanguine. To the young, every thing in the world wears the garb of freshness ; and the novelty and variety of the scenes presented keep up a constant excitement. These traits of youthful character, as long as irregularity and excess are avoided, are not only allowable, but amiable ; and would in that age be badly exchanged for the more sedate and grave emotions which are the natural effects of increasing years and of long and painful experience. But it is greatly to be desired, that the lessons of wisdom taught by the experience of one set of men should be made available to



the instruction of those who come after them. We have, therefore, determined to address a few short hints of advice to the rising generation, on subjects of deep and acknowledged importance to all; but previously to commencing, we would assure them, that it is no part of our object to interfere with their innocent enjoyments, or to deprive them of one pleasure which cannot be shown to be injurious to their best interests. We wish to approach you, dear youth, in the character of affectionate friends, rather than in that of dogmatical teachers or stern reprovers. We would, therefore, solicit your patient, candid and impartial attention to the following counsels.

### I.

**RESOLVE** to form your lives upon some certain principles, and to regulate your

actions by fixed rules. Man was made to be governed by reason, and not by mere accident or caprice. It is important, therefore, that you begin early to consider and inquire, what is the proper course of human conduct, and to form some plan for your future lives. The want of such consideration is manifest in the conduct of multitudes. They are governed by the impulse of the moment, reckless of consequences. They have fixed no steady aim, and have adopted no certain principles of action. Living thus at random, it would be a miracle if they went uniformly right. In order to your pursuing a right path, you must know what it is, and to acquire this knowledge, you must divest yourselves of thoughtless giddiness, you must take time for serious reflection. It will not answer, to adopt without consideration the opin-

ions of those who may be about you; for they may have some sinister design in regard to you; or they may themselves be misled by error or prejudice. Persons already involved in dissipation or entangled in error, naturally desire to keep themselves in countenance, by the number of followers whom they can seduce into the paths of vice. As reasonable creatures, therefore, judge for yourselves what course it is right and fitting that you should pursue. Exercise your own reason independently and impartially, and give not yourselves up to be governed by mere caprice and fashion, or by the opinions of others.

## II.

WHILE you are young, avail yourselves of every opportunity of acquiring useful knowledge. Reason should guide

us ; but without correct knowledge reason is useless ; just as the most perfectly formed eye would be useless, without light. There is in every man a natural thirst for knowledge, which needs only to be cultivated and rightly directed. All have not equal opportunities of obtaining important knowledge : but all have more advantages for this object than they improve. The sources of information are innumerable : the principal, however, are books and living men. In regard to the former, no age of the world which has passed, was so favoured with a multiplicity of books as our own. Indeed, the very number, and diversity of character and tendency of authors now creates one of the most obvious difficulties to those who are destitute of wise advisers. It would be an unwise counsel, to tell you to read indiscriminately whatever comes

to hand. The press gives circulation not only to useful knowledge, but to error dressed up plausibly in the garb of truth. Many books are useless, others are on the whole injurious, and some are impregnated with a deadly poison. Waste not your time in works of idle fiction. Touch not the book which exhibits vice in an alluring form. Seek the advice of judicious friends in the choice of books.

But you may also learn much from listening to the conversation of the wise and good. There is scarcely a person so ignorant, who has lived any time in the world, that cannot communicate some profitable hint to the young. Avail yourselves, then, of every opportunity of learning what you do not know; and let not pride prevent you from seeking instruction, lest by this means you should betray your ignorance. Cherish the de-

sire of knowledge, and keep your mind constantly awake, and open to instruction, from every quarter.

But, especially, I would recommend to you the acquisition of self-knowledge. "KNOW THYSELF," was a precept held in such high esteem among the ancients, that the honour of inventing it was claimed for several of their wisest men; and not only so, but, on account of its superlative excellence, it was believed by many to have been uttered by the oracle of Apollo, at Delphos; at which place, as Pliny informs us, it was conspicuously written in letters of gold, over the door of the temple.

And this species of knowledge is also inculcated in the Christian Scriptures, as most useful and necessary. "Examine yourselves," says Paul, "whether you be in the faith; prove your own

selves; what, know ye not your own selves?" And in the Old Testament, the value of this knowledge is also fully recognized, where we are exhorted "to commune with our own hearts,"—and "to keep our hearts with all diligence." And the possession of it is made an object of fervent prayer: "search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts,"—"examine me, O Lord, and prove me, try my reins and my heart."

As this knowledge is necessary to all, so it is placed within the reach of all. But it cannot be acquired without diligent self-examination. To this duty there exists, in human nature, a strong repugnance; partly from natural, and partly from moral causes; so that, by most, it is entirely neglected, to their exceeding great detriment. But, when it

is attempted, we are in great danger of being misled by self-love and prejudice. To acquire any true knowledge of ourselves, some good degree of honesty and impartiality is essentially requisite. But an honest desire to arrive at the truth is not the only prerequisite to self-knowledge. The mind must be enlightened in regard to the standard of rectitude, to which we ought to be conformed. "The entrance of thy word giveth light." The word of God should dwell richly in us, and by the rules and principles of the sacred volume, we should form all our sentiments respecting ourselves. This is the candle of the Lord which searcheth the inward parts of man; and without such a lamp it would be as impossible to obtain any considerable degree of self-knowledge, as to distinguish the objects in a dark room, without a light.



Self-examination, accompanied with a careful perusal of the Holy Scriptures, will lead us daily to a more thorough knowledge of our own character.

Beware of the common illusion of forming your estimate of yourselves, from the favourable opinions of those around you. They cannot know the secret principles from which you act; and flattery may have much influence in leading them to speak in your praise.

Seize favourable opportunities of judging of the latent strength of your passions. The fact is, that until some new conjuncture or occasion elicits our feelings, we are as ignorant of what is within us, as other persons.

Study also your constitutional temperament, and consider attentively the power which particular objects and circumstances have over you. You may often

learn even from your enemies and calumniators what are the weak points in your character. They are sagacious in detecting faults; and, generally, have some shadow of pretext for what they allege against us. We may, therefore, derive more benefit from the sarcasms of our foes than from the flattery of our friends.

Learn, moreover, to form a correct estimate of your own abilities, as this is necessary to guide you in your undertakings.

### III.

BE careful to form good habits. Almost all permanent habits are contracted in youth; and these do in fact form the character of the man through life. It is Paley, I believe, who remarks, that we act from habit nine times, where we do

once from deliberation. Little do young persons apprehend the momentous consequences of many of their most frequently repeated actions. Some habits are merely inconvenient, but have no moral quality: others affect the principles of our conduct; and become sources of good or evil, to an incalculable degree. As to the former, they should be avoided, as detracting from our comfort, and as ultimately interfering with our usefulness; but the latter should be deprecated, as laying the foundation of a wicked character, and as standing in the way of all mental and moral improvement.

## IV.

BE particular and select in the company which you keep, and the friendships which you form. 'Tell me,' says the

proverb, 'what company you keep, and I will tell you what you are.' 'Evil communications corrupt good manners.' Vice is more easily and extensively diffused by improper companions, than by all other means. As one infected sheep communicates disease to a whole flock; so one sinner often destroys much good, by corrupting all the youth who fall under his influence. When vicious men are possessed of wit and fascinating manners, their conversation is most dangerous to the young. We would entreat you, dear young friends, to form an intimacy with no one whose principles are suspicious. The friendship of profligate men is exceedingly dangerous. Listen not to their fair speeches, and warm professions of attachment. Fly from contact with them, as from one infected with the plague. Form no close alliance with

such. No more think of taking them to your bosom, than you would a viper. Gaze not on their beauty, nor suffer yourselves to be charmed with their fascination of manners. Under these specious appearances, a deleterious poison lurks.

‘Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers,’ is the exhortation of scripture. And what can be more unseemly and incongruous, than for an amiable and virtuous woman to be indissolubly united to an unprincipled debauchee? Or, for a good man to be connected with a woman destitute of piety and virtue? Be especially careful, therefore, in forming alliances for life. Seek a connexion with the wise and good, and you will become wiser and better by converse with such.

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## V.

ENDEAVOUR to acquire and maintain a good reputation. 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.' A ruined fortune may be recovered, a lost reputation never. Young men are often laying the foundation of an unenviable reputation, while they are thinking of no such thing. They never dream that the character which they attain at school or college will probably be as lasting as life. The youth who is known to be addicted to falsehood, knavery, treachery, &c., when arrived at the age of man, will be viewed by those who know him with distrust. A stain on the character is not easily washed out; at a distant period the faults and follies of youth may be revived to a man's confusion and injury. But especially is the female character exquisitely delicate. A small degree of

imprudence will often fix a stigma on the gay young lady, which no subsequent sobriety can completely erase.

We do not mean, that the young should cherish a false sense of honor, which would lead them to fight and contend for reputation. No man ever secured or increased a good name, by shedding the vital blood of a human being. The reputation which we recommend must arise from a life of consistent and uniform well-doing. Prize such a character, as of inestimable value to your own peace, and as a most powerful means of usefulness. The most potent human engine of utility is influence; and this depends entirely on reputation.

## VI.

MANAGE your worldly concerns with economy and discretion. Avoid the in-

convenience, embarrassment, and vexation of being in debt. Conduct your business with attention and diligence; and have your accounts in such a condition, that you will be at no loss to ascertain the true state of your affairs. Men often become unjust, and injurious to others, without having intended any such thing, merely by a confused and careless manner of transacting their business. Such a man, after a while, feels an unconquerable aversion to a scrutiny into his affairs. He shuts his eyes against the ruin which he is bringing on himself, and heedlessly rushes forward in the path which habit or fashion has rendered agreeable. When, at length, an exigence arrives, which constrains him to adopt some measure to extricate himself from his difficulties, he is placed under strong temptation to resort to a



course which is not strictly honorable. He persuades himself, that if he can save his credit for the present, by diligence and good fortune, he will be able to rectify every thing, and to preserve his friends from suffering on his account. But these efforts to recover lost ground commonly prove ineffectual, and render the situation of the person more involved than before. He finds, at length, that he is sinking; and this discovery often produces a desperate recklessness. He plunges deeper and deeper into debt; and often drags to ruin, not only his own family, but some of his friends who confided too implicitly in his truth and integrity. It is also too common for men who have failed in trade, to resort to means for the support of a helpless family, which a sound moral faculty never can approve. The temptation arising

from the tender love of wife and children is indeed very strong, but not invincible. In the commercial world, there are many illustrious examples of merit, honor, and the strictest probity, in men who had it in their power to defraud their creditors, or to have deeply involved their confiding friends, but who chose rather to look haggard poverty in the face, and to see their beloved families descending from affluence into the vale of obscurity, than to be guilty of a dishonorable act. And in the long run this turns out more to the benefit of those persons, than any advantage obtained by a resort to shifts and evasions not entirely consistent with the highest integrity. He who sacrifices reputation for present comfort, buys it at too dear a rate. The merchant, who, when he fails, loses his reputation for truth and integ-

riety, will meet with but little favor from the world, and will have very little chance of rising again. But he who has been unfortunate, and yet maintains his integrity, and preserves his character unsullied, is often able to enter again into business under favorable auspices; and is encouraged and aided in his attempts to gain a living, by men of wealth and standing; so, that such a man is often successful to such a degree, that he has it in his power to compensate those from whom benefit was derived in the day of his calamity. Beware of being governed by ambition in your commercial enterprises. The pride of doing a large business, and of being considered as at the head of the profession, reduces many aspiring young merchants: and greediness of gain tempts still more to engage in hazardous speculations; and to trade

to an extent not authorized by the capital which they have at command. In this way bankruptcies become so common that the event ceases to excite much surprise. Families delicately educated and long accustomed to the luxuries as well as the comforts of life, are reduced to poverty. Multitudes of such families are found in our large commercial cities, who are really more properly the objects of benevolence, than the common beggar who clamorously solicits your charity. The real privations and sufferings of such are not fully known; for, from the desire of avoiding the contempt and the pity of vulgar minds, such persons spread a decent veil over their indigence, and prefer to pine secretly in want rather than to seek relief by a public disclosure of their necessities. The Christian philanthropist will, however, seek out such suffer-

ers, and will contrive methods of bestowing relief upon them in a way consistent with the delicacy of their feelings.

The above remarks are particularly adapted to those who engage in commerce; but they are not inapplicable to others. It is true, integrity is the soul of a merchant; but it is a sterling quality which every man ought to possess; and all men are liable to be reduced to a state of indigence by a long series of untoward events. My counsel then is, that you commence and pursue business with prudence; and when unfortunate, that you so act as to preserve your integrity and your reputation, by resorting to no equivocal means of relief; but resolve to act in conformity with the strictest rules of justice and honor.

## VII.

AIM at consistency in your Christian character. There is a beauty in moral consistency which resembles the symmetry of a well proportioned building, when nothing is deficient, nothing redundant. Consistency can only be acquired and maintained by cultivating every part of the Christian character. The circle of virtues must be complete, without chasms or obliquities. A character well proportioned and nicely balanced in all its parts, we are not very frequently permitted to witness; for, while in one branch there is vigor, and even exuberance, in another there may be the appearance of feebleness and sterility. The man who is distinguished for virtues of a particular class is apt to be deficient in those which belong to a different class. This is so commonly the fact,

that many entertain the opinion that the same person cannot excel in every virtue. Thus, it is not expected that the man of remarkable firmness and intrepidity, should at the same time be distinguished for meekness and gentleness. But after making due allowances for a difference of constitutional temperament, we must maintain, that there is not, nor can there be, any incompatibility between the several virtues of the Christian life. They are all branches of the same root, and the principle which affords nourishment to one, communicates its virtue to all. As all truth is harmonious, however it may, on a superficial and partial view, seem to be contradictory so all the exercises of moral goodness are not only consistent, but assist and adorn each other. This is so much the case, that symmetry of Christian char-

acter has, by some distinguished casuistical writers, been laid down as a necessary evidence of genuineness; and it has been insisted on, as probable, that where one virtue seems to exist in great strength, while others are remarkably wanting, it is a mark of spuriousness. There is much reason in this view of the subject; for men are frequently found whose zeal blazes out ardently and conspicuously, so as to leave most others far back in the shade, while they are totally destitute of that humility, meekness, and brotherly kindness, which form an essential part of the Christian character. Some men are conscientious and punctilious in the performance of all the rites and external duties connected with the worship of God, who are inattentive to the obligations of strict justice and veracity in their intercourse with men:



and on the other hand, many boast of their morality, and yet are notoriously inattentive to the duties of religion. Real Christians, too, are often chargeable with inconsistency, which arises from a want of clear discernment of the rule of moral conduct, in its application to particular cases; for while the general principles of duty are plain, and easily understood by all, the ability to discriminate between right and wrong, in many complicated cases, is extremely rare. This delicate and correct perception of moral relations, can only be acquired by the divine blessing on our assiduous exertions. It is too commonly taken for granted, that Christian morals is a subject so easy, that all close study of it is unnecessary: this is an injurious mistake. Many of the deficiencies and inconsistencies of Christians, are owing to

a want of clear and correct knowledge of the exact rule of moral conduct. On no subject will you find a greater diversity of opinion, than in regard to the lawfulness or unlawfulness of particular practices: and even good men are often thrown into difficulty and doubt, respecting the proper course to be pursued. But while many cases of inconsistency arise from ignorance of the exact standard of rectitude, more must be attributed to heedlessness and forgetfulness. Men do not act sufficiently from principle, but too much from custom, from fashion, and from habit. Thus many actions are performed without any inquiry into their moral character. There is an obtuseness in the moral sensibility which permits evils to pass without animadversion. Another cause of the inconsistency, so commonly observed, is the prevalence

which certain passions or appetites may obtain, in the time of temptation. The force of the internal principles of evil is not perceived, when the objects and circumstances favorable to their exercise, are absent. As the venomous adder seems to be harmless while chilled with cold, but soon manifests his malignity when brought near the fire; so sin often lies hid in the bosom, as though it were dead, until some exciting cause draws it forth into exercise; and then the person himself is surprised to find the strength of his own passions, above any thing which he had before conceived. Thus men often act, in certain circumstances, in a way altogether contrary to the general tenor of their conduct. It is by no means a fair inference from a single act of irregularity, that the person who is guilty of it has acted hypocriti-

cally in all the apparent good actions of his former life. The true explanation is, that principles of action which he has commonly been able to govern and restrain, acquire, in some unguarded moment, or under the power of some strong temptation, a force which his good principles are not at that moment strong enough to oppose. The man who is usually correct and orderly may thus be overtaken in a fault; and as all are liable to the same frailties, there should exist a disposition to receive and restore an offending brother, when he gives sufficient evidence of penitence. Man, at his best estate in this world, is an inconsistent creature. The only persons in whom this defect is not observed are the men who by grace live near to God, and exercise a constant jealousy and vigilance over themselves. But when faith is weak and inconstant,

great inconsistencies will mar the beauty of the Christian character. Young persons ought, therefore, to begin early to exercise this vigilance, and to keep their hearts with all diligence, lest they be ensnared by their own passions, and overcome by the power of temptation. I counsel you then, my young friends, to aim at consistency. Cultivate assiduously every part of the Christian character; so that there may appear a beautiful proportion in your virtue.

The reflections to which I have been led, in speaking of consistency of Christian character, suggest the importance of urging upon you the government of your passions. A man who has no control over his passions, is justly compared to a ship at sea, which is driven by fierce winds, while she neither is governed by the rudder nor steered by the compass.

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By indulgence, the passions gain strength very rapidly; and when once the habit of indulgence is fixed, the moral condition of the sinner is most deplorable, and almost desperate. To preserve consistency, it is necessary to be well acquainted with the weak points in our own character, to know something of the strength of our own passions, and to guard beforehand against the occasions and temptations which would be likely to cause us to act inconsistently with our Christian profession. Many men have successfully contended with their own passions, and although naturally of a hasty and irritable temper, have, by constant discipline, brought themselves into a habitual state of equanimity; so that however they may be conscious of the strugglings of the natural passions, they are kept so completely under re-

straint, that to others they do not seem to exist. The anecdote which is related of Socrates and the physiognomist, is instructive on this point. When the latter, upon examining the lines of the philosopher's face, pronounced that he was a man of bad temper, and exceedingly irascible, the disciples of Socrates laughed him to scorn, as having betrayed the weakness of his art, by so totally mistaking the true disposition of their master; but he checked their ridicule, by acknowledging that his natural temper had been truly represented by the physiognomist; but that by the discipline of philosophy, he had been able to acquire such a mastery over his passions, that their existence was not apparent. To achieve a victory of this kind, is more honorable than to conquer in the field of battle; according to that of the wise

man, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." And again, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." Learn then, my young friends, to bridle your passions, and govern your temper, from your earliest days.

### VIII.

**BE** contented with the station and circumstances in which Providence has placed you. Never repine at God's dealings towards you, nor envy those who are above you in worldly advantages. Consider not so much what you want, as what you have; and look less at those above you, than at those in inferior circumstances. Accustom yourselves to look on the bright, rather than the dark



side of the picture. Indulge not in unreasonable fears, nor give way to feelings of despondency. Exercise fortitude, and maintain tranquillity of mind. Be not ruffled and disconcerted by every little cross event which may occur. Place not your happiness at the disposal of every one who may be disposed to speak an unkind word, or do an unhandsome thing. Learn to possess your souls in patience, believing that when appearances are darkest, the dawn of a more comfortable day is near.

## IX.

LET your intercourse with men be marked by a strict and conscientious regard to truth, honor, justice, kindness and courtesy. We should certainly have recommended politeness, as a happy means of polishing social intercourse,

and affording pleasure to those with whom you are conversant: but many are accustomed to connect an unpleasant idea with this word. But, surely, genuine politeness, if not itself a virtue, preads a charm and a beauty over that which is virtuous. And, certainly, there is no merit in awkwardness and clownishness. But our chief object under this particular is to urge upon you a constant and punctilious regard to the social virtues. Be honest, be upright, sincere, men of your word, faithful to every trust, kind to every body, respectful where respect is due, generous according to your ability, grateful for benefits received, and delicate in the mode of conferring favors. Let your integrity be unsuspected. Never resort to any mean or underhand measures: but let your conduct and conversation be character.

ized by frankness and candor, by forbearance, and a spirit of indulgence and forgiveness. In short, 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'

## X.

LIVE not merely for yourselves, but also for the good of others. Selfishness contracts the soul, and hardens the heart. The man absorbed in selfish pursuits is incapable of the sweetest, noblest joys of which our nature is susceptible. The author of our being has ordained laws, according to which the most exquisite pleasure is connected, not with the direct pursuit of our own happiness, but with the exercise of benevolence. On this principle it is, that he who labors wholly for the benefit of others, and as it were forgets himself, is far happier than the man who makes himself the centre of all

his affections, the sole object of all his exertions. On this principle it was, that our Saviour said, 'it is more blessed to give, than to receive.' Resolve, therefore, to lead lives of usefulness. Be in different to nothing which has any relation to the welfare of men. Be not afraid of diminishing your own happiness, by seeking that of others. Devise liberal things, and let not avarice shut up, your hand from giving to him that needeth, and to promote the cause of piety and humanity.

## XI.

BE faithful and conscientious in the discharge of all duties which arise out of the relations which you sustain to others. Relative duties are far more numerous than all others: because the occasions requiring their performance

are constantly occurring. The duties of parents, of children, of brothers and sisters, of neighbors, of masters and servants, of teachers and pupils, of magistrates and citizens, of the learned professions, of trade, of the rich and the poor, occupy a very large portion of the time and attention of every man. And these furnish the proper test of character. 'He who is faithful in little, is faithful also in much.' And he who is not attentive to the daily recurring duties of his station, in vain claims the reputation of virtue or piety, by splendid acts of public beneficence. 'Though I give all my goods to feed the poor and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.'

## XII.

EXERCISE incessant vigilance against the dangers and temptations by which

you are surrounded, and by which you will certainly be assailed. These dangers are too numerous to be specified in detail; but I will mention a few. Guard solicitously against all approaches towards infidelity. Reject unbelieving thoughts and sceptical doubts from the beginning. Even if the system of infidelity were true, it promises no comfort, and cannot possibly be serviceable to you. But the best security will be to study diligently the evidences of religion, and be ready to meet the cavils of infidelity at all points. Make yourselves well acquainted with the best authors on this subject, and let your faith rest on the firm ground of evidence.

Another danger against which you must be watchful, is pleasure—sensual pleasure. Worldly amusements, however innocent they may appear, are re-

plete with hidden dangers. These scenes exhilarate the spirits, and excite the imagination, until reason and conscience are hushed, and the real end of living is forgotten. For the sake of pleasure, every thing important and sacred is neglected, and the most valuable part of human life wasted in unprofitable engagements. Beware then of the vortex of dissipation, and especially of the least approach towards the gulf of intemperance. On that slippery ground, many strong men have fallen, never to rise. The trophies of this insidious and destructive vice are widely spread on every side, and the wise and the good have come to the conclusion, that there is no effectual security against this enemy but in a resolute and persevering abstinence from inebriating drink. Seek your happiness, dear youth, in the pursuit of

useful objects, and in the performance of duty, and then you will be safe, and will have no reason to envy the votaries of sensual pleasure.

### XIII.

A COUNSEL, near akin to that which has been just given, is, "GOVERN YOUR TONGUE." More sin, it is probable, is committed, and more mischief done, by this small member, than in all other ways. The faculty of speech is one of our most useful endowments, but it is exceedingly liable to abuse. He who knows how to bridle his tongue, is, therefore, in Scripture, denominated "a perfect man;" and again, of him "who seemeth to be religious and bridleth not his tongue," it is declared, that "that man's religion is vain." The words which we utter are a fair index of the



moral state of the mind. "By thy words," saith our Lord, "shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned." Not only are sins of the tongue more numerous than others, but some of them are the most heinous of which man can be guilty—even that one sin which has no forgiveness, is a sin of the tongue.

Not only should all profaneness, obscenity, and falsehood, be put far away, but you should continually endeavor to render your conversation useful. Be ever ready to communicate knowledge, to suggest profitable ideas, to recommend virtue and religion, to rebuke sin, and to give glory to God. Beware of evil-speaking. A habit of detraction is one of the worst which you can contract, and is always indicative of an envious and malignant heart. Instead of

prostituting this active and useful member to the purposes of slander, employ it in defending the innocent and the injured.

Permit me to suggest the following brief rules for the government of the tongue. Avoid loquacity. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin." If you have nothing to communicate which can be useful, be silent. Think before you speak. How many painful anxieties would be prevented by obeying this simple, common sense precept. Especially, be cautious about uttering any thing in the form of a promise, without consideration. Be conscientiously regardful of truth, even to a tittle, in all that you say. Never speak what will be likely to excite bad feelings, of any kind, in the minds of others. Be ready, on all suitable occasions, to give utterance to

good sentiments, especially such as may be useful to the young. Listen respectfully to the opinions of others, but never fail to give your testimony modestly, but firmly, against error. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

## XIV.

KEEP a good conscience. If wickedness had no other punishment than the stings of conscience which follow evil actions, it would be reason enough to induce every considerate man to avoid that which is productive of so much pain. No misery of which the human mind is susceptible is so intolerable and

so irremediable as remorse of conscience. And it is liable to be renewed as often as the guilty action is distinctly recollected. It is true, the conscience, by means of error and repeated resistance to its dictates, may become callous—"seared as with a hot iron;" but this apparent death of moral sensibility, is no more than a sleep. At an unexpected time, and in circumstances the most inconvenient, conscience may be aroused, and may exert a more tremendous power than was ever before experienced. The long arrears of sins committed, while no notice seemed to be taken of them, now demand and enforce consideration. Joseph's brethren seem to have almost forgotten their unnatural and cruel conduct in selling him as a slave into a foreign country; but when many years had elapsed, and they found themselves envi-

roned with difficulties and dangers in that very land, the remembrance of their crime painfully rushed upon their minds, and extorted from them mutual confessions of their guilt. "God," said they "hath found out the iniquity of thy servants." "And they said one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear, therefore is this distress come upon us." Men often endeavor to escape from the stings of a guilty conscience by a change of place; but the remedy is ineffectual. The transgressor may traverse the widest ocean, and transcend the loftiest mountains, and may bury himself in the dark recesses of the desert, but he cannot fly so far nor conceal himself so effectually, as to escape from his tormentor. In some

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cases, the agonies of remorse have been so intolerable, that the guilty perpetrator of great wickedness has preferred 'strangling and death' to a miserable life, and has rushed uncalled into the presence of his Judge. And in other cases, men guilty of bloody crimes have found the pangs of remorse so intolerable that they have voluntarily given themselves up to justice; and by a voluntary confession, have convicted themselves, when no human witnesses were competent to prove their guilt. But what man is there who has not committed sins the recollection of which give him sensible pain? And such acts often stand out in strong relief in the retrospect of the past. No effort can obliterate such things from the memory. We may turn away our eyes from the disagreeable object; but the painful idea will return again; and thus

men whose consciences are not seared, are haunted by guilt as by a troublesome ghost; and often their sins find them out, and stare them in the face, when danger threatens, or when calamity has overtaken them. Why moral sensibility should be so much more exquisite at some times than others, cannot be easily explained; but the fact is certain, and is probably familiar to the consciousness of all. There may indeed exist a morbid susceptibility, an unreasonable scrupulousness and terror of conscience, which is a real and distressing disease, and which yields only to physical remedies, judiciously applied. Melancholy is not the effect of religious impressions; but is a state of mind of a most unhappy kind, produced by a derangement of the physical system, and which leads the subject of it to fix his thoughts on those

things which are most awful and gloomy. The same is true in regard to insanity. Many people entertain strong prejudices against experimental religion, because they apprehend that it endangers the reason, and drives the timid and weak-minded into mania.

Now it is no doubt true, that any strong emotion or passion may, when there exists a predisposition to the disease, disturb the regular exercise of reason; but that this danger is greater to persons deeply exercised about religion than to others, is utterly without foundation. Fanaticism, it may be conceded, has a tendency to insanity. Indeed, it has long appeared to me, that fanaticism, especially in its mildest forms, is nothing else than a species of insanity. I have upon no other hypothesis been able to account for the opinions and conduct of



some persons who have been led away into the excesses of enthusiasm. But what is the most effectual preservative from this kind of mental derangement? Is it irreligion, vice, and infidelity? By no means. Persons who take refuge in such things, find them to be "refuges of lies." The only effectual remedy against the misery of a disturbed mind and a guilty conscience, is true religion. For this wound the balm of Gilead is the only medicine which is proved by experience to be efficacious. He who is able to cherish a lively hope of happiness beyond the grave, who can look up to God as a reconciled Father, and who feels good will to all men, has surely within him the ingredients of a settled peace of mind. When I counsel you, my young friends, to keep a good conscience, I mean, that you should, in the first place,

endeavor to obtain this inestimable blessing by an application to "the blood of sprinkling." Until the soul is justified and sin pardoned, there can be no true peace of conscience. While the law remains unsatisfied for us, and denounces vengeance against us for our sins, what in the universe can give us peace? But when by faith the soul apprehends the atonement, and sees that it is commensurate to all the demands of the law, and that in the cross, justice is not only satisfied, but gloriously illustrated, it is at once relieved from the agony of guilt, and the peace of God which passeth understanding pervades the soul. The great secret of genuine peace is, therefore, living faith in the blood of Christ. But if you would preserve your conscience pure and enjoy peace, you must not only obtain forgiveness for the past,

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but must be very careful to sin no more in future. The law of God is exceeding broad, and if we would preserve peace of conscience, we must conform our actions to its precepts with assiduous and holy diligence.

A good conscience is always an enlightened conscience. Through error, a man may believe that he is doing God service, when he is persecuting his people; but such a conscience is not good. Men may act conscientiously, and yet act very wickedly. I suppose that all the devotees of the most absurd and impious superstition, act according to the dictates of conscience, even when they sacrifice human beings, and expose to eath their own offspring, or themselves; but who would say that such a conscience was good? The correct knowledge of truth, therefore, lies at the

foundation of a good conscience. Nothing is more important to man than the truth; therefore "buy the truth and sell it not." But too often conscience is not regarded when it correctly dictates what should be done or avoided. Amidst the cravings of appetite, the storm of the passions, and the incessant bustle of the world, the whispers of conscience are not heeded. In multitudes of instances, where persons do wrong, they have a premonition of the evil; or, at least, a suggestion, that it is proper to inquire and consider what duty is. Some persons are conscientious in great matters, who, in comparatively small concerns, seem to have no moral discernment. The habit of consulting the moral sense in all things is of great importance. Before you act, consider; and beware of the false coloring which passion and self in-

terest throw around the subjects of duty. Lean to the safe side. Where an action is of dubious character, do not venture upon it. Be fully persuaded in your own mind, "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Some persons are conscientious and punctilious about little things, but careless about the weightier matters of the law. This is the conscience of a hypocrite. Others have a mind ill at ease, because the festering wound of guilt has never been thoroughly probed and cleansed, but merely externally healed. Their repentance has not been deep enough, nor universal enough: some secret sin is still too much indulged. Now, while these are the facts, good conscience is an impossible thing. Sincere penitence, humiliation and confession, are God's prescribed remedy,

and where these are wanting the conscience will not be at peace.

Now whatever may be the infirmity or moral defect which cleaves to us, it is odious in the sight of God, and tends to grieve the Holy Spirit. In just judgment, we are left to darkness, barrenness, and misery, because we have not sufficiently desired deliverance from sin; but have made vain excuses for our own faults. I would then counsel you, especially, to cherish the motions of the Holy Comforter. By his divine influences alone, a good conscience can be maintained. And if you are sensible that you have grieved the Spirit, so that you are left comfortless, never rest until you again experience the peace and joy, which is the fruit of his indwelling.

## XV.

CULTIVATE peace. Next to the blessing of peace with God and in our own conscience, is that of peace with our fellow-men. "As much as lieth in you live peaceably with all men." And again, "Follow peace with all men." The true source of all the wars, contentions, and disturbances which are in the world, is the pride, the envy, the covetousness, and other evil passions of our nature. Eradicate these, and in their place introduce pure and kind affections, and you will experience a double peace—peace within, and peace without. Every Christian temper is friendly to peace. I know, indeed, that Christ says, that he came not to bring peace but a sword: but he refers not to the nature of his religion, but to the event which he foresaw would

occur, from the perverse opposition of men, to that which is good. The genuine spirit and tendency of the gospel is beautifully and emphatically expressed in the angelic anthem, sung by the celestial choir at the nativity of our Saviour. —“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth PEACE; good will to men.” All the adopted sons of God are sons of peace; and are peace-makers. “Live in peace,” says Paul, “and the God of peace shall be with you.” Humility, meekness, and benevolence, must, from the nature of the case, have a mighty influence in producing and maintaining peace. For, as the apostle Peter argues, “who will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good.” No system was ever so well adapted to produce universal peace as Christianity; and the only reason why this effect has not followed its



reception everywhere, is, that its true spirit has not been imbibed. Just so far as this blessed system is cordially embraced, it cuts up by the roots all causes of contention; except that which has for its object sin and error. It teaches us not only to love our friends and brethren, but also our bitterest enemies; to return blessing for cursing, and kindness for ill treatment. Endeavor then, to cherish habitually those kind affections which lead to peace; and while you seek peace in your own souls, make it an object to promote peace in the world, and covet the blessedness which is pronounced to belong to peace-makers. Their high honor it is to be denominated "THE SONS OF GOD."

## XVI.

As "man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward;" and as no situation is exempt from the arrows of adversity, I would give it as a necessary counsel, to learn to bear affliction with fortitude and resignation. To dream of escaping what is appointed unto all, would be to fall wilfully into a dangerous delusion. Every man is vulnerable in so many points, that nothing short of a perpetual miracle could shield any one from the strokes of adversity. Indeed, piety of the most exalted kind does not secure its possessor from affliction and persecution. Christ himself suffered while in this world, and has left his followers a perfect example of holy fortitude, and filial submission to the will of God. When sorely pressed with the inconceivable load of our sins, so that his human soul

could not have sustained it unless supported by the divine nature, his language was, "Not my will but thine be done." Those afflictions which are allotted to the people of God, are necessary parts of salutary discipline, intended to purify them from the dross of sin, and to prepare them for the service of God here, and his enjoyment in the world to come. They are, therefore, to them, not penal judgments, but fatherly chastisements; which, though "not joyous but grievous" for the present, "afterwards work for them the peaceable fruits of righteousness." But whatever may be our moral and spiritual condition, whether we are friends or enemies of God, we must be subject to various afflictions. This is a dying world. The nearest and dearest friends must part. Death sunders the tenderest ties, and often pierces

the susceptible heart with a keener anguish, by directing the mortal stroke to a dear companion, or child, than if it had fallen on our own head. When I see youth rejoicing in the sanguine hopes and brilliant prospects which the deceitful world spreads out before them, I am prevented from sympathizing with their happy feelings, by the foresight of a speedy end to all their earthly pleasures. Their laughter will be converted into mourning. Their day of bright sunshine will soon be overcast with dark clouds; and all their brilliant prospects will be obscured, and the overwhelming gloom of sorrow will envelop them.

It is, indeed, no part of wisdom to torment our minds with vain terrors; of evils which are merely possible. Many persons suffer more in the apprehension of calamities, than they would if they

were present. The imagination represents scenes of adversity in a hue darker than the reality. In regard to such evils, our Saviour has taught us not to yield useless anxieties about the future, but to trust to Providence. "Let the morrow take care of itself. Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof." But that to which I would bring my youthful readers is a state of mind prepared for adversity, of whatever kind it may be; that they may not be taken by surprise when calamity falls upon them. And when the dark day of adversity arrives, be not dismayed, but put your trust in the Lord, and look to Him for strength to endure whatever may be laid upon you. Never permit yourselves to entertain hard thoughts of God, on account of any of his dispensations. They may be dark and mysterious, but they are all wise and good.

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What we cannot understand now, we shall be privileged to know hereafter. Exercise an uncomplaining submission to the will of God, as developed in the events of Providence. Believe steadfastly that all things are under the government of wisdom and goodness. Remember that whatever sufferings you may be called to endure, they are always less than your sins deserve: and consider, that these afflictive dispensations are fraught with rich, spiritual blessings. They are not only useful, but necessary. We should perish with a wicked world, if a kind Father did not make use of the rod to reclaim us from our wanderings. Besides, there is no situation in which we can more glorify God, than when in the furnace of affliction. The exercise of faith, and humble resignation, with patience and fortitude, under the

pressure of heavy calamity, is most pleasing to God, and illustrates clearly the excellency of religion which is able to bear up the mind, and even render it cheerful, in the midst of scenes of trouble. Bear then, with cheerful submission, the load which may be laid upon you; and learn from Paul to rejoice even in the midst of tribulation. And not only bear your cross with cheerful resignation; but endeavor to extract from sorrow a rich spiritual benefit. While enjoying such an effectual means of grace, improve it to the utmost, to promote growth in the divine life. Be willing to suffer any pain which will render you more holy. Although we naturally desire uninterrupted prosperity; yet if the desire of our hearts was always given to us, it would prove ruinous.

And when schooled in adversity, you will be better qualified to sympathize with the children of sorrow, and better skilled in affording them comfort, than if you had no experience of trouble.

### XVII.

My next counsel is, that you set a high value upon your time. Time is short; and its flight is rapid. The swiftness of the lapse of time is proverbial in all languages. In Scripture, the life of man is compared to a multitude of things which quickly pass away, after making their appearance; as to a post, a weaver's shuttle, a vapor, a shadow, &c. All the works of man must be performed in time; and whatever acquisition is made of any good, it must be obtained in time. Time, therefore, is not only short, but precious. Every



thing is suspended on its improvement, and it can only be improved when present; and it is no sooner present, than it is gone: so that whatever we do must be done quickly. This precious gift is sparingly parcelled out, by moments, but the succession of these is rapid and uninterrupted. Nothing can impede or retard the current of this stream. Whether we are awake or asleep, whether occupied or idle, whether we attend to the fact or not, we are borne along by a silent, but irresistible force. Our progressive motion in time, may be compared to the motion of the planet on which we dwell, of which we are entirely insensible; or, to that of a swift-sailing ship, which produces the illusion that all other objects are in motion, while we seem to be stationary. So in the journey of life, we pass from stage to stage,—from in-

fancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, from youth to mature age, and finally, ere we are aware of it, we find ourselves declining towards the last stage of earthly existence. The freshness and buoyancy of youth soon pass away: the autumn of life, with its "seared leaf," soon arrives; and next, and last, if disease or accident do not cut short our days, old age with its gray hairs, its wrinkles, its debility and pains, comes on apace. This period is well described by the wise man, as one in which men are commonly disposed to be querulous, and to acknowledge that the days draw nigh in which they have no pleasure. "The keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows are darkened. When men rise up at

the noise of the bird—when all the daughters of music are brought low, and there shall be fears.—And the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper be a burden.”

Time wasted can never be recovered. No man ever possessed the same moment twice. We are, indeed, exhorted “to redeem our time,” but this relates to a right improvement of that which is to come; for this is the only possible way by which we can redeem what is irrevocably past. The counsels which I would offer to the young on this subject are: Think frequently and seriously on the inestimable value of time. Never forget that all that is dear and worthy of pursuit must be accomplished in the short span of time allotted to us here. Meditate also profoundly, and often, on the celerity of the flight of time. Now

you are in the midst of youthful bloom, but soon this season will only exist in the dim shades of recollection, and unless it has been well improved, of bitter regret.

If you will make a wise improvement of your time, you must be prompt. Seize the fugitive moments as they fly; for, otherwise, they will pass away before you have commenced the work which is appropriated to them.

Diligence and constancy are essential to the right improvement of time.—“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” “Work while it is called to-day.” “Walk while you have the light;” for the dark night rapidly approaches, when no work can be done.

Let every thing be done in its season. There is a time for all things; and let

all things be done in order. The true order of things may be determined by their relative importance, and by the urgency of the case, or the loss which would probably be sustained by neglect.

If you would make the most of your time, learn to do one thing at once, and endeavor so to perform every work, as to accomplish it in the best possible manner. As you receive but one moment at once, it is a vain thing to think of doing more than one thing at one time; and if any work deserves your attention at all, it deserves to be well done. Confusion, hurry, and heedlessness, often so mar a business, that it would have been better to omit it altogether.

Beware of devolving the duty of to-day on to-morrow. This is called procrastination, which is said, justly, to be "the thief of time." Remember, that

every day, and every hour, has its own appropriate work; but if that which should be done this day, is deferred until a future time, to say the least, there must be an inconvenient accumulation of duties in future. But as to-morrow is to everybody uncertain, by suspending the acquisition of an important object on such a contingency, may be the occasion of losing for ever the opportunity of receiving it. The rule of sound discretion is, never to put off till to-morrow, what ought to be done to-day.

### XVIII.

CHERISH and diligently cultivate genuine piety. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Early piety is the most beautiful spectacle in the world. Without piety all your morality, however useful to men, is

but a shadow. It is a branch without a root. Religion, above every other acquisition, enriches and adorns the mind of man; and it is especially congenial with the natural susceptibilities of the youthful mind. The vivacity and versatility of youth, the tenderness and ardor of the affections in this age, exhibit piety to the best advantage. How delightful is it, to see the bosoms of the young swelling with the lively emotions of pure devotion! How beautiful is the tear of penitence or of holy joy, which glistens in the eye of tender youth! Think not, dear young people, that true religion will detract from your happiness. It is a reproach cast upon your Maker, to indulge such a thought. It cannot be. A God of goodness never required anything of his creatures, which did not tend to their true felicity. Piety may indeed lead you

to exchange the pleasures of the theatre and ball-room, for the purer joys of the church and oratory. It may turn your attention from books of mere idle fancy and fiction, to the word of God, which to a regenerated soul, is found to be sweeter than honey, and more excellent than the choicest gold; but this will add to your happiness, rather than diminish it. We would then affectionately and earnestly exhort and entreat you, to "remember now your Creator in the days of your youth." This will be your best security against all the dangers and temptations to which you are exposed; this will secure to you "the favor of God which is life, and his loving kindness which is better than life." Delay not your conversion; every day is lost time, which is not spent in the service of God. Besides, procrastination has proved ruin-



ous to many. Eternity is at hand; the judgment day must be met, and how can we appear there, without piety? This is our only preparation and passport for heaven. Dear youth, be wise, and secure an inheritance among the saints in light. God invites you to be reconciled. Christ extends his arms of mercy to secure you. Angels are waiting to rejoice at your conversion, and to become your daily and nightly guardians. The doors of the church will be open to receive you. The ministers of the gospel, and all the company of believers, will hail your entrance, and will welcome you to the precious ordinances of God's house. And, finally, remember that, "now is the accepted time and the day of salvation."

## XIX

SEEK divine direction and aid, by incessant, fervent prayer. You need grace to help you every day. Your own wisdom is folly, your own strength weakness, and your own righteousness altogether insufficient. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." But if you lack wisdom, you are permitted to ask; and you have a gracious promise, that you shall receive. Whatever we need will be granted, if we humbly and believingly ask for it. "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing with prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God."

Faith and prayer are our chief resource under all the various and heavy

afflictions of this life. When all other refuges fail, God will hide his people who seek Him in his secret pavilion, and shelter them under the shadow of his wings. Prayer is essential to the existence and growth of the spiritual life. It is the breath of the new man. By this means he obtains quick relief from innumerable evils; and draws down from heaven blessings of the richest and sweetest kind. Possess your minds fully of the persuasion, that prayer is efficacious, when offered in faith and with importunity, to obtain the blessings which we need. God has made himself known as a hearer of prayer: yea, he has promised that we shall have, as far as may be for his glory and our good, whatever we ask. The most important events may be brought about by prayer. One righteous man, by fervent and effectual prayer, has

been able to shut heaven and open it again. How often did Moses by his prayers avert the divine wrath from the people of Israel! That man who has access to a throne of grace will never want any thing which is really needful. "God will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." "But He will be inquired of by the house of Israel for these things that he may do it for them." Banish, as most unreasonable, the idea that prayer is a dull or melancholy business. Such a sentiment must have been invented by Satan; for it never could have been suggested by reason, or taught by experience. Intercourse with the greatest and best of all Beings must be a source of exalted pleasure; and, surely, man can have no greater honor and privilege conferred upon him, than to

be admitted to converse intimately and confidentially with the God whom angels adore. The experience of every saint attests, that "it is good to draw near to God;" and that "one day in his courts is better than a thousand." I need not be afraid, therefore, to counsel the young to cultivate the spirit of prayer, and to be constant in its exercise. "Pray without ceasing."—"Be instant in prayer." It will not spoil your pleasures, but will open for you new sources of enjoyment, far more refined and satisfactory, than any which prayerless persons can possess. Prayer is the only method by which intercourse between heaven and earth can be kept open. Often, too in the performance of this duty, a taste of heaven is brought down to earth; and the pious worshipper anticipates, in some degree, those joys which are inef-

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fable and eternal. Prayer will, moreover, be your most effectual guard against sin and the power of temptation:

“For Satan trembles, when he sees  
The weakest saint upon his knees.”

## XX.

I CONCLUDE my counsels to the young, by a serious and affectionate recommendation to every one who reads these pages, to make immediate preparation for death. I know that gay youth are unwilling to hear this subject mentioned. There is nothing which casts a greater damp upon their spirits, than the solemn fact that death must be encountered; and that no earthly possessions or circumstances can secure us from becoming his victims, on any day. But if it is acknowledged that this formidable evil is inevitable, and that the tenure by

which we hold our grasp of life is very fragile, why should we act so unreasonably, and I may say, madly, as to shut our eyes against the danger? If, indeed there was no way of preparing to meet this event, there might be some reason for turning away our thoughts from immediate destruction: but if by attention and exertion, it is possible to make preparation for death, then nothing can be conceived more insane, than to refuse to consider our latter end. How often are we called to witness the decease of blooming youth, in the midst of all their pleasures and prospects! Such scenes have been exhibited within the observation of all of you. Dear friends and companions have been snatched away from the side of some of you. The grave has closed upon many whose prospects of long life were as favorable as

those of their survivors. Now, my dear young friends, what has so frequently happened, in relation to so many others, may take place with regard to some of you. This year you may be called to bid farewell to all your earthly prospects, and all your beloved relatives. The bare possibility of such an event ought to have the effect of engaging your most serious attention, and of leading you to immediate preparation. Do you ask what preparation is necessary? I answer, reconciliation with God, and a meetness for the employments and enjoyments of the heavenly state. Preparation for death includes repentance towards God for all our sins, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and reliance on his atoning sacrifice, regeneration of heart and reformation of life; and, finally, a lively exercise of piety accompanied with a comfortable



assurance of the divine favor. In short, genuine and lively piety forms the essence of the needed preparation. With this your death will be safe, and your happiness after death secure; but to render a death-bed not only safe but comfortable, you must have a strong faith, and clear evidence that your sins are forgiven, and that you have passed from death unto life. Be persuaded, then, before you give sleep to your eyes, to commence your return unto God, from whom like lost sheep you have strayed. "Prepare to meet your God." Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

Seek deliverance from the fear of death by a believing application to Him who came on purpose to deliver us from this bondage. With his presence and guidance we need fear no evil even while

passing through the gloomy valley and shadow of death. He is able by his rod and his staff to comfort us, and to make us conquerors over this last enemy.

**THE END.**

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Counsels of the aged to the young



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