

SERMONS  
ON  
IMPORTANT SUBJECTS,

BY THE LATE REVEREND AND PIOUS

SAMUEL DAVIES, A.M.,

Sometime President of the College in New-Jersey.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE FIFTH EDITION.

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TO WHICH ARE NOW ADDED,

THREE OCCASIONAL SERMONS,

NOT INCLUDED IN THE FORMER EDITIONS;

MEMOIRS AND CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR;

AND

TWO SERMONS ON OCCASION OF HIS DEATH,

By the Rev. Drs. Gibbons and Finley.

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## SERMON XXIII.

INDIFFERENCE TO LIFE URGED, FROM ITS SHORTNESS AND VANITY.<sup>1</sup>

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1 COR. vii. 29, 30, 31.—*But this I say, brethren, that the time is short: it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.*

A CREATURE treading every moment upon the slippery brink of the grave, and ready every moment to shoot the gulf of eternity, and launch away to some unknown coast, ought to stand always in the posture of serious expectation; ought every day to be in his own mind taking leave of this world, breaking off the connections of his heart from it, and preparing for his last remove into that world in which he must reside, not for a few months or years as in this, but through a boundless everlasting duration. Such a situation requires habitual, constant thoughtfulness, abstraction from the world, and serious preparation for death and eternity. But when we are called, as we frequently are, to perform the last sad offices to our friends and neighbours who have taken their flight a little before us; when the solemn pomp and horrors of death strike our senses, then certainly it becomes us to be unusually thoughtful and serious. Dying beds, the last struggles and groans of dissolving nature, pale, cold, ghastly corpses,

“The knell, the shroud, the mattock, and the grave:  
The deep damp vault, the darkness and the worm;”

these are very alarming monitors of our own mortality: these out-preach the loudest preacher; and they must be deep and senseless rocks, and not men, who do not hear and feel their voice. Among the numberless instances of the divine skill in bringing good out of evil, this is one, that past generations have sickened and died to warn their successors. One here and there also is singled out of our neighbourhood or families, and made an example, a *memento mori*, to us that survive, to rouse us out of our stupid sleep, to give us the signal of the approach of the last enemy, death, to constrain us to let go our eager grasp of this vain world, and set us upon looking out and preparing for another. And may I hope my hearers are come here today determined to make this improvement of this melancholy occasion, and to

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon is dated, at Mr. Thompson’s funeral, February 16, 1759.

gain this great advantage from our loss? To this I call you as with a voice from the grave; and therefore *he that hath ears to hear, let him hear*.

One great reason of men's excessive attachment to the present state, and their stupid neglect to the concerns of eternity, is their forming too high an estimate of the affairs of time in comparison with those of eternity. While the important realities of the eternal world are out of view, unthought of, and disregarded, as, alas! they generally are by the most of mankind, what mighty things in their esteem are the relations, the joys and sorrows, the possessions and bereavements, the acquisitions and pursuits of this life? What airs of importance do they put on in their view? How do they engross their anxious thoughts and cares, and exhaust their strength and spirits? To be happy, to be rich, to be great and honourable, to enjoy your fill of pleasure in this world, is not this a great matter, the main interest in many of you? is not this the object of your ambition, your eager desire and laborious pursuit? But to consume away your life in sickness and pain, in poverty and disgrace, in abortive schemes and disappointed pursuits, what a serious calamity, what a huge affliction is this in your esteem? What is there in the compass of the universe that you are so much afraid of, and so cautiously shunning? Whether large profits or losses in trade be not a mightier matter, ask the busy anxious merchant. Whether poverty be not a most miserable state, ask the poor that feel it, and the rich that fear it. Whether riches be not a very important happiness, ask the possessors; or rather ask the restless pursuers of them, who expect still greater happiness from them than those that are taught by experience can flatter themselves with. Whether the pleasures of the conjugal state are not great and delicate, consult the few happy pairs here and there who enjoy them. Whether the loss of an affectionate husband and a tender father be not a most afflictive bereavement, a torturing separation of heart from heart, or rather a tearing of one's heart in pieces, ask the mourning, weeping widow, and fatherless children, when hovering round his dying-bed, or conducting his dear remains to the cold grave. In short, it is evident from a thousand instances, that the enjoyments, pursuits, and sorrows of this life are mighty matters! nay, are all in all in the esteem of the generality of mankind. These are the things they most deeply feel, the things about which they are chiefly concerned, and which are the objects of their strongest passions.

But is this a just estimate of things? Are the affairs of this world then indeed so interesting and all important? Yes, if eternity be a dream, and heaven and hell but majestic chimeras, or fairy lands; if we were always to live in this world, and had no concern with anything beyond it; if the joys of earth were the highest we could hope for, or its miseries the most terrible we could fear, then indeed we might take this world for our all, and regard its affairs as the most important that our nature is capable of. *But this I say,*

*brethren*, (and I pronounce it as the echo of an inspired apostle's voice) this I say, *the time is short*; the time of life in which we have anything to do with these affairs is a short contracted span. Therefore *it remaineth*, that is, this is the inference we should draw from the shortness of time, *they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it, or using it to excess; for the fashion of this world*, these tender relations, this weeping and rejoicing, this buying, possessing, and using this world *passeth away*. The phantom will soon vanish, the shadow will soon fly off; and they that have wives or husbands in this transitory life, will in reality be as though they had none; and they that weep now, as though they wept not; and they that now rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that now buy, possess and use this world, as though they never had the least property in it. This is the solemn mortifying doctrine I am now to inculcate upon you in the further illustration of the several parts of my text; a doctrine justly alarming to the lovers of this world, and the neglecters of that life which is to come.

When St. Paul pronounces anything with an unusual air of solemnity and authority; and after the formality of an introduction to gain attention, it must be a matter of uncommon weight, and worthy of the most serious regard. In this manner he introduces the funeral sentiments in my text. *This I say, brethren*; this I solemnly pronounce as the mouth of God: this I declare as a great truth but little regarded; and which therefore there is much need I should repeatedly declare: this I say with all the authority of an apostle, a messenger from heaven; and I demand your serious attention to what I am going to say.

And what is it he is introducing with all this solemn formality? Why, it is an old, plain, familiar truth universally known and confessed, namely, that the time of our continuance in this world is short. But why so much formality in introducing such a common plain truth as this? Because, however generally it be known and confessed, it is very rarely regarded; and it requires more than even the most solemn address of an apostle to turn the attention of a thoughtless world to it. How many of you, my brethren, are convinced against your wills of this melancholy truth, and yet turn every way to avoid the mortifying thought, are always uneasy when it forces itself upon your minds, and do not suffer it to have a proper influence upon your temper and practice, but live as if you believed the time of life were long, and even everlasting? O! when will the happy hour come when you will think and act like those that believe that common uncontroverted truth, that the time of life is short? Then you would no longer think of delays, nor contrive artifices to put off the work of your salvation; then you could not

bear the thought of such negligent, or languid, feeble endeavours in a work that must be done, and that in so short a time.

*This I say, my brethren, the time is short;* the time of life is absolutely short; a span, an inch, a hair's breadth. How near the neighbourhood between the cradle and the grave! How short the journey from infancy to old age, through all the intermediate stages! Let the few among you who bear the marks of old age upon you in grey hairs, wrinkles, weakness, and pains, look back upon your tiresome pilgrimage through life, and does it not appear to you, as though you commenced men but yesterday? And how little a way can you trace it back till you are lost in the forgotten unconscious days of infancy, or in that eternal non-existence in which you lay before your creation! But they are but a very few that drag on their lives through seventy or eighty years. Old men can hardly find contemporaries: a new race has started up, and they are become almost strangers in their own neighbourhoods. By the best calculations that have been made, at least one half of mankind die under seven years old. They are little particles of life, sparks of being just kindled and then quenched, or rather dismissed from their suffocating confinement in clay, that they may aspire, blaze out, and mingle with their kindred flames in the eternal world, the proper region, the native element of spirits.

And how strongly does the shortness of this life prove the certainty of another? Would it be worth while, would it be consistent with the wisdom and goodness of the Deity, to send so many infant millions of reasonable creatures into this world, to live the low life of a vegetable or an animal for a few moments, or days, or years, if there were no other world for these young immortals to remove to, in which their powers might open, enlarge, and ripen? Certainly men are not such insects of a day: certainly this is not the last stage of human nature: certainly there is an eternity; there is a heaven and a hell:—otherwise we might expostulate with our Maker, as David once did upon that supposition, *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?* Ps. lxxxix. 47.

In that awful eternity we must all be in a short time. Yes, my brethren, I may venture to prophesy that, in less than seventy or eighty years, the most, if not all this assembly, must be in some apartment of that strange untried world. The merry, unthinking, irreligious multitude in that doleful mansion which I must mention, grating as the sound is to their ears, and that is hell!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Regions of sorrow! doleful shades! where Peace  
And rest can never dwell! Hope never comes  
That comes to all! but torture without end  
Still urges, and a fiery deluge fed  
With ever-burning sulphur unconsum'd. MILTON.

and the pious, penitent, believing few in the blissful seats of heaven. There we shall reside a long, long time indeed, or rather through a long, endless eternity. Which leads me to add,

That as the time of life is short absolutely in itself, so especially it is short comparatively; that is, in comparison with eternity. In this comparison, even the long life of Methuselah and the antediluvians shrink into a mere point, a nothing. Indeed no duration of time, however long, will bear the comparison. Millions of millions of years; as many years as the sands upon the seashore; as many years as the particles of dust in this huge globe of earth; as many years as the particles of matter in the vaster heavenly bodies that roll above us, and even in the whole material universe, all these years do not bear so much proportion to eternity as a moment, a pulse, or the twinkling of an eye, to ten thousand ages! not so much as a hair's breadth to the distance from the spot where we stand to the farthest star, or the remotest corner of creation. In short, they do not bear the least imaginable proportion at all; for all this length of years, though beyond the power of distinct enumeration to us, will as certainly come to an end as an hour or a moment; and when it comes to an end, it is entirely and irrecoverably past; but eternity (O the solemn tremendous sound!) eternity will never, never, never come to an end! eternity will never, never, never be past!

And is this eternity, this awful all-important eternity, entailed upon us! upon us, the offspring of the dust! the creatures of yesterday! upon us, who a little while ago were less than a gnat, less than a mote, were nothing! upon us who are every moment liable to the arrest of death, sinking into the grave, and mouldering into dust one after another in a thick succession! upon us whose thoughts and cares, and pursuits are so confined to time and earth, as if we had nothing to do with anything beyond! O! is this immense inheritance unalienably ours? Yes, brethren, it is; reason and revelation prove our title beyond all dispute. It is an inheritance entailed upon us, whether we will or not; whether we have made it our interest it should be ours or not. To command ourselves into nothing is as much above our power as to bring ourselves into being. Sin may make our souls miserable, but it cannot make them mortal. Sin may forfeit a happy eternity, and render our immortality a curse; so that it would be better for us if we never had been born; but sin cannot put an end to our being, as it can to our happiness, nor procure for us the shocking relief of rest in the hideous gulf of annihilation.

And is a little time, a few months or years, a great matter to us? to us who are heirs of an eternal duration? How insignificant is a moment in seventy or eighty years! but how much more insignificant is even the longest life upon earth, when compared with eternity! How trifling are all the concerns of time to those of immortality! What is it to us who are to live for ever, whether we live happy or miserable for an hour? whether we have

wives, or whether we have none; whether we rejoice, or whether we weep; whether we buy, possess, and use this world, or whether we consume away our life in hunger, and nakedness, and the want of all things, it will be all one in a little, little time. Eternity will level all; and eternity is at the door.

And how shall we spend this eternal duration that is thus entailed upon us? Shall we sleep it away in a stupid insensibility or in a state of indifference, neither happy nor miserable? No, no, my brethren; we must spend it in the height of happiness or in the depth of misery. The happiness and misery of the world to come will not consist in such childish toys as those that give us pleasure and pain in this infant state of our existence, but in the most substantial realities suitable to an immortal spirit, capable of vast improvements and arrived at its adult age. Now, as the apostle illustrates it, we are children, and we speak like children, we understand like children; but then we shall become men, and put away childish things. 1 Cor. xiii. 11. Then we shall be beyond receiving pleasure or pain from such trifles as excite them in this puerile state. This is not the place of rewards or punishments, and therefore the great Ruler of the world does not exert his perfections in the distribution of either; but eternity is allotted for that very purpose, and therefore he will then distribute rewards and punishments worthy himself, such as will proclaim him God in acts of grace and vengeance, as he has appeared in all his other works. Then he will *show his wrath*, and *make his power known on the vessels of wrath who have made themselves fit for destruction* and nothing else; *and he will show the riches of the glory of his grace upon the vessels of mercy whom he prepared beforehand for glory*. Rom. ix. 22, 23. Thus heaven and hell will proclaim the God, will show him to be the Author of their respective joys and pains, by their agreeable or terrible magnificence and grandeur. O eternity! with what majestic wonders art thou replenished, where Jehovah acts with his own immediate hand, and displays himself God-like and unrivalled, in his exploits both of vengeance and of grace! In this present state, our good and evil are blended; our happiness has some bitter ingredients, and our miseries have some agreeable mitigations; but in the eternal world good and evil shall be entirely and for ever separated; all will be pure, unmingled happiness, or pure unmingled misery. In the present state the best have not uninterrupted peace within; conscience has frequent cause to make them uneasy; some mote or other falls into its tender eye, and sets it a weeping; and the worst also have their arts to keep conscience sometimes easy, and silence its clamours. But then conscience will have its full scope. It will never more pass a censure upon the righteous, and it will never more be a friend, or even an inactive enemy to the wicked for so much as one moment. And O what a perennial fountain of bliss or pain will conscience then be! Society contributes much to our happiness or misery. But what misery can be felt or

feared in the immediate presence and fellowship of the blessed God and Jesus (the friend of man); of angels and saints, and all the glorious natives of heaven! But on the other hand, what happiness can be enjoyed or hoped for, what misery can be escaped in the horrid society of lost abandoned ghost of the angelic and human nature; dreadfully mighty and malignant, and rejoicing only in each other's misery; mutual enemies, and mutual tormentors, bound together inseparably in everlasting chains of darkness! O the horror of the thought ! in short, even a heathen<sup>1</sup> could say,

“Had I a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths  
An iron voice, I could not comprehend  
The various forms and punishments of vice.”

The most terrible images which even the pencil of divine inspiration can draw, such as “a lake of fire and brimstone, utter darkness, the blackness of darkness, a never dying worm, unquenchable everlasting fire,” and all the most dreadful figures that can be drawn from all parts of the universe, are not sufficient to represent the punishments of the eternal world. And, on the other hand, *the eye*, which has ranged through so many objects, *has not seen*; *the ear*, which has had still more extensive intelligence, *has not heard*; *nor has the heart*, which is even unbounded in its conceptions, *conceived the things that God hath laid up for them that love him*. The enjoyments of time fall as much short of those of eternity, as time itself falls short of eternity itself.

But what gives infinite importance to these joys and sorrows is, that they are enjoyed or suffered in the eternal world, they are themselves eternal. Eternal joys! eternal pains! joys and pains that will last as long as the King eternal and immortal will live to distribute them! as long as our immortal spirits will live to feel them! O what joys and pains are these!

And these, my brethren, are awaiting every one of us. These pleasures, or these pains, are felt this moment by such of our friends and acquaintance as have shot the gulf before us; and in a little, little while, you and I must feel them.

And what then have we to do with time and earth? Are the pleasures and pains of this world worthy to be compared with these? *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*; the enjoyments and sufferings, the labours and pursuits, the laughter and tears of the present state, are all nothing in this compari-

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<sup>1</sup> Non mihi si linguæ centum sint, oraque centum,  
Ferreæ vox, omnes foelerum comprehendere formas,  
Omnia pœnarum percurrere nomina possum  
VIRG. Æn. VI. l. 625.



son. What is the loss of an estate or of a dear relative to the loss of a happy immortality? But if our heavenly inheritance be secure, what though we should be reduced into Job's forlorn situation, we have enough left more than to fill up all deficiencies. What though we are poor, sickly, melancholy, racked with pains, and involved in every human misery, heaven will more than make amends for all. But if we have no evidences of our title to that, the sense of these transitory distresses may be swallowed up in the just fear of the miseries of eternity. Alas! what avails it that we play away a few years in mirth and gaiety, in grandeur and pleasure, if, when these few years are tied, we lift up our eyes in hell, tormented in flames! O what are all these things to a candidate for eternity! an heir of everlasting happiness, or everlasting misery!

It is from such convictive premises as these that St. Paul draw's his inference in my text: *It remaineth therefore that they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it.*

The first branch of the inference refers to the dear and tender relations that we sustain in this life. *It remaineth that those that have wives*, and by a parity of reason those that have husbands, parents, children, or friends dear as their own souls, *be as though they had none*. St. Paul is far from recommending a stoical neglect of these dear relations. That he tenderly felt the sensations, and warmly recommended the mutual duties of such relations, appears in the strongest light in other parts of his writings, where he is addressing himself to husbands and wives, parents and children. But his design here is to represent the insignificancy even of these dear relations, considering how short and vanishing they are, and comparing them with the infinite concerns of eternity. These clear creatures we shall be able to call our own for so short a time, that it is hardly worth while to esteem them ours now. The concerns of eternity are of so much greater moment, that it is very little matter whether we enjoy these comforts or not. In a few years at most, it will be all one. The dear ties that now unite the hearts of husband and wife, parent and child, friend and friend, will be broken forever. In that world where we must all be in a little, little time, they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are in this respect like the angels. And of how small consequence is it to creatures that are to exist forever in the most perfect happiness or misery, and that must so soon break off all their tender connections with the dear creatures that were united to their hearts in the present transitory state! of how small consequence is it to such, whether they spend a few years of their existence in all the delights of the conjugal state and the social life, or are forlorn, bereaved, destitute, widowed, childless, fatherless, friendless! The grave and eternity will level all these little ine-

qualities. The dust of Job has no more sense of his past calamities, than that of Solomon who felt so few; and their immortal parts are equally happy in heaven, if they were equally holy upon earth. And of how small consequence is it to Judas now, after he has been above seventeen hundred years in his own place, whether he died single or married, a parent or childless? This makes no distinction in heaven or hell, unless that, as relations increase, the duties belonging to them are multiplied, and the trust becomes the heavier; the discharge of which meets with a more glorious reward in heaven, and the neglect of which suffers a severer punishment in hell.

Farther, the apostle, in saying that *they who have wives should be as though they had none*, intends that we should not excessively set our hearts upon any of our dearest relatives so as to tempt us to neglect the superior concerns of the world to come, or draw off our affections from God. We should always remember who it was that said, *He that loveth father, or mother, or wife, or children, more than me, is not worthy of me. He that is married*, says St. Paul, in the context, *careth for the things of the world, how he may please his wife*, verse 33. But we should beware lest this care should run to excess, and render us careless of the interests of our souls, and the concerns of immortality. To moderate excessive care and anxiety about the things of this world is the design the apostle has immediately in view in my text; for having taught *those that have wives to be as though they had none*, &c., he immediately adds. *I would have you without carefulness*; and this is the reason why I would have you form such an estimate of all the conditions of life, and count them as on a level. Those that have the agreeable weights of these relations ought no more to abandon themselves to the over-eager pursuit of this world, or place their happiness in it; ought no more to neglect the concerns of religion and eternity, than if they did not bear these relations. The busy head of a numerous family is as much concerned to secure his everlasting interest as a single man. Whatever becomes of him and his in this vanishing world, he must by no means neglect to provide for his subsistence in the eternal world; and nothing in this world can at all excuse that neglect.

O that these thoughts may deeply affect the hearts of such of us as are agreeably connected in such relations! and may they inspire us with a proper insensibility and indifference towards them when compared with the affairs of religion and eternity! May this consideration moderate the sorrows of the mourners on this melancholy occasion, and teach them to esteem the gain or loss of a happy eternity as that which should swallow up every other concern!

The next branch of the inference refers to the sorrows of life. "It remaineth that they that weep be as if they wept not." Whatever afflictions may befall us here, they will not last long, but will soon be swallowed up in

the greater joys or sorrows of the eternal world. These tears will not always flow; these sighs will not always heave our breasts. We can sigh no longer than the vital breath inspires our lungs; and we can weep no longer than till death stops all the fountains of our tears; and that will be in a very little time. And when we enter into the eternal world, if we have been the dutiful children of God here, his own gentle hand shall wipe away every tear from our faces, and he will comfort the mourners. Then all the sorrows of life will cease forever, and no more painful remembrance of them will remain than of the pains and sickness of our unconscious infancy. But if all the discipline of our Heavenly Father fails to reduce us to our duty, if we still continue rebellious and incorrigible under his rod, and consequently the miseries of this life convey us to those of the future, the smaller will be swallowed up and lost in the greater as a drop in the ocean. Some desperate sinners have hardened themselves in sin with this cold comfort, "That since they must be miserable hereafter, they will at least take their fill of pleasure here, and take a merry journey to hell." But, alas! what a sorry mitigation will this be! how entirely will all this career of pleasure be forgotten at the first pang of infernal anguish! O! what poor relief to a soul lost forever, to reflect that this eternity of pain followed upon and was procured by a few months or years of sordid guilty pleasure! Was that a relief or an aggravation which Abraham mentions to his lost son, when he puts him in mind, *Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime, receivedst thy good things.* Luke xvi. 25. Thou hadst then all the share of good which thou ever shalt enjoy; thou hadst thy portion in that world where thou didst choose to have it, and therefore stand to the consequences of thine own choice, and look for no other portion. O! who can bear to be thus reminded and upbraided in the midst of remediless misery!

Upon the whole, whatever afflictions or bereavements we suffer in this world, let us moderate our sorrows and keep them within bounds. Let them not work up and ferment into murmurings and insurrections against God, who gives and takes away, and blessed be his name! Let them not sink us into a sullen dislike of the mercies still left in our possession. How unreasonable and ungrateful, that God's retaking one of his mercies should tempt us to despise all the rest! Take a view of the rich inventory of blessings still remaining, and you will find them much more numerous and important than those you have lost. Do not mistake me, as if I recommended or expected an utter insensibility under the calamities of life. I allow nature its moderate tears; but let them not rise to floods of inconsolable sorrows; I allow you to feel your afflictions like men and Christians, but then you must bear them like men and Christians too. May God grant that we may all exemplify this direction when we are put to the trial.

The third branch of the inference refers to the joys and pleasures of life. *The time is short; it remaineth therefore that they that rejoice be as if they rejoiced not;* that is, the joys of this life, from whatever earthly cause they spring, are so short and transitory, that they are as of no account to a creature that is to exist forever; to exist forever in joys or pains of an infinitely higher and more important kind. To such a creature it is an indifferency whether he laughs or weeps, whether he is joyful or sad, for only a few fleeting moments. These vanishing, uncertain joys should not engross our hearts as our chief happiness, nor cause us to neglect and forfeit the divine and everlasting joys above the skies. The pleasure we receive from any created enjoyment should not ensnare us to make it our idol, to forget that we must part with it, or to fret, and murmur, and repine, when the parting hour comes. When we are rejoicing in the abundance of earthly blessings, we should be as careful and laborious in securing the favour of God and everlasting happiness as if we rejoiced not. If our eternal All is secure, it is enough; and it will not at all be heightened or diminished by the reflection that we lived a joyful or a sad life in this pilgrimage. But if we spend our immortality in misery, what sorry comfort will it be that we laughed, and played, and frolicked away a few years upon earth? years that were given us for a serious purpose, as a space for repentance and preparation for eternity. Therefore, let “those that rejoice be as though they rejoiced not;” that is, be nobly indifferent to all the little amusements and pleasures of so short a life.

And let *those that buy be as if they possessed not.*—This is the fourth particular in the inference from the shortness of time, and it refers to the trade and business of life. It refers not only to the busy merchant, whose life is a vicissitude of buying and selling, but also to the planter, the tradesman, and indeed to every man among us; for we are all carrying on a commerce, more or less for the purposes of this life. You all buy, and sell, and exchange, in some form or other; and the things of this world are perpetually passing from hand to hand. Sometimes you have good bargains, and make large acquisitions. But set not your hearts upon them; but in the midst of all your possessions, live as if you possessed them not. Alas! of what small account are all the things you call your own upon earth, to you who are to stay here so short a time; to you who must so soon bid an eternal farewell to them all, and go as naked out of the world as you came into it; to you who must spend an everlasting duration far beyond the reach of all these enjoyments? It is not worth your while to call them your own, since you must so soon resign them to other hands. The melancholy occasion of this day may convince you, that success in trade, and a plentiful estate, procured and kept by industry and good management, is neither a security against death, nor a comfort in it. Alas! what service can these houses and

lands, and numerous domestics, perform to the cold clay that moulders in yonder grave, or to the immortal spirit that is fled we know not where? Therefore buy, sensible that you can buy nothing upon a sure and lasting title; nothing that you can certainly call yours tomorrow. Buy, but do not sell your hearts to the trifles you buy, and let them not tempt you to act as if this were your final home, or to neglect to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven; treasures which you can call your own when this world is laid in ashes, and which you can enjoy and live upon in what I may call an angelic state, when these bodies have nothing but a coffin, a shroud, and a few feet of earth.

Finally, let “those that use this world use it as not abusing it.” This is the fifth branch of the inference from the shortness of time; and it seems to have a particular reference to such as have had such success in their pursuit of the world, that they have now retired from business, and appear to themselves to have nothing to do but enjoy the world, for which they so long toiled. Or it may refer to those who are born heirs of plentiful estates, and therefore are not concerned to acquire the world, but to use and enjoy it. To such I say, “Use this world as not abusing it;” that is, use it, enjoy it, take moderate pleasure in it, but do not abuse it by prostituting it to sinful purposes, making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, indulging yourselves in debauchery and extravagance, placing your confidence in it, and singing a *requiem* to your souls: “Soul, take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry; for thou hast much goods laid up in store for many years.” O! presumptuous “fool, this night thy soul may be required of thee.” Luke xii. 19, 20. Do not use this world to excess,<sup>1</sup> (so the word may be translated,) by placing your hearts excessively upon it as your favourite portion and principal happiness, and by suffering it to draw off your thoughts and affections from the superior blessedness of the world to come. Use the world, but let it not tempt you to excess in eating, drinking, dress, equipage, or in any article of the parade of riches. Religion by no means enjoins a sordid, niggardly, churlish manner of living; it allows you to enjoy the blessings of life, but then it forbids all excess, and requires you to keep within the bounds of moderation in your enjoyments. Thus *use this world as not abusing it*.

The apostle’s inference is not only drawn from strong premises, but also enforced with a very weighty reason; *for the fashion of this world passeth away*. The whole scheme and system of worldly affairs, all this marrying, and rejoicing, and weeping, and buying, and enjoying, *passeth away*, passeth away this moment; it not only will pass away, but it is even now passing away. The stream of time, with all the trifles that float on it,

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<sup>1</sup> *katachromenoi*. So it is rendered by Doddridge, and others.

and all the eager pursuers of these bubbles, is in motion, in swift, incessant motion, to empty itself and all that sail upon it into the shoreless ocean of eternity, where all will be absorbed and lost forever. And shall we excessively dote upon things that are perpetually flying from us, and in a little time will be no more our property than the riches of the world before the flood? *O ye sons of men, how long will ye follow after vanity? why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which profiteth not?*

Some critics apprehend this sentence, *the fashion of this world passeth away*, contains a fine striking allusion to the stage, and that it might be rendered, “the scene of this world passeth away.” “You know,” says a fine writer upon this text, “that upon the stage the actors assume imaginary characters, and appear in borrowed forms. One mimics the courage and triumphs of the hero; another appears with a crown and a sceptre, and struts about with all the solemnity and majesty of a prince; a third puts on the fawning smile of a courtier, or the haughtiness of a successful favourite; and the fourth is represented in the dress of a scholar or a divine. An hour or two they act their several parts on the stage, and amuse the spectators; but the scenes are constantly shifting; and when the play is concluded, the feigned characters are laid aside, and the imaginary kings and emperors are immediately divested of their pretended authority and ensigns of royalty, and appear in their native meanness.

‘Just so this world is a great stage that presents as variable scenes, and as fantastical characters: princes, politicians, and warriors, the rich, the learned, and the wise; and, on the other hand, the poor, weak, and despised part of mankind possess their several places on the theatre; some lurk obscurely in a corner, seldom come from behind the scenes, or creep along unnoticed; others make a splendid show and a loud noise, are adorned with the honours of a crown, or possessed of large estates and great powers; fill the world with the glory of their names and actions, conquer in the field, or are laboriously employed in the cabinet. Well, in a little time the scene is shifted, and all these vain phantoms disappear. The king of terrors clears the stage of the busy actors, strips them of all their fictitious ornaments, and ends the vain farce of life; and being brought all upon a level, they go down to the grave in their original nakedness, are jumbled together undistinguished, and pass away as a tale that is told.’

Farther: ‘Upon the Greek or Roman theatres, to which the apostle alludes, the actors, if I mistake not, frequently, if not always, came upon the stage in a disguise, with a false face, which was adapted to the different person or character they designed to assume; so that no man was to be seen with his real face, but all put on borrowed visages. And in allusion to this, the text might be rendered, ‘The masquerade of the world passeth away,’

pointing out the fraud and disguises which mankind put on, and the flattering forms in which they generally appear, which will all pass away when the grave shall pull off the mask; and they go down to the other world naked and open,' and appear at the supreme tribunal in their due characters, 'and can no more be varnished over with fraudulent colouring.'"<sup>1</sup>

Others apprehend, the apostle here alludes to some grand procession, in which pageants or emblematical figures pass along the crowded streets. The staring crowd wait their appearance with eager eyes, and place themselves in the most convenient posture of observation; they gape at the passing show, they follow it with a wondering gaze;—and now it is past, and now it begins to look dim to the sight, and now it disappears. Just such is this transitory world. Thus it begins to attract the eager gaze of mankind; thus it marches by in swift procession from our eyes to meet the eyes of others; and thus it soon vanishes and disappears.<sup>2</sup>

And shall we always be stupidly staring upon this empty parade, and forget that world of substantial realities to which we are hastening? No; let us live and act as the expectants of that world, and as having nothing to do with this world, but only as a school, a state of discipline, to educate and prepare us for another.

O! that I could successfully impress this exhortation upon all your hearts! O! that I could prevail upon you all this day to break off your overfond attachment to earth, and to make ready for immortality! Could I carry this point, it would be a greater advantage than all the dead could receive from any funeral panegyrics from me. I speak for the advantage of the living upon such occasions, and not to celebrate the virtues of those who have passed the trial, and received their sentence from the supreme Judge. And I am well satisfied the mourning relatives of our deceased friend, who best knew and esteemed his worth, would be rather offended than pleased, if I should prostitute the present hour to so mean a purpose. Indeed, many a character less worthy of praise, often makes a shining figure in funeral sermons. Many that have not been such tender husbands, such affectionate fa-

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<sup>1</sup> Dunlop's Sermons, Vol. I. p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Dr. Doddridge understands the text, *Family Expositor*, in loc. and thus he beautifully describes it in his Hymns:

"The empty pageant rolls along;  
The giddy inexperience'd throng  
Pursue it with enchanted eyes;  
It passeth in swift march away,  
Still more and more its charms decay.  
Till the last gaudy colours dies." See HYMN 268.

Lucian has the best illustration of this passage, in this view, that I have seen. Dialogue XXXII. Murphy's Edit.

thers, such kind masters, such sincere upright friends, so honest and punctual in trade, such zealous lovers of religion and good men, have had their putrefying remains perfumed with public praise from a place so solemn as the pulpit; but you can witness for me, it is not my usual foible to run to this extreme. My business is with you, who are as yet alive to hear me. To you I call, as with the voice of your deceased friend and neighbour,—Prepare! prepare for eternity! O! if the spirits that you once knew, while clothed in flesh, should take my place, would not this be their united voice, “Prepare, prepare for eternity! ye frail short-lived mortals! ye near neighbours of the world of spirits! ye borderers upon heaven or hell, make ready, loosen your hearts from earth, and all that it contains: weigh anchor, and prepare to launch away into the boundless ocean of eternity, which methinks is now within your ken, and roars within hearing.” And remember, “this I say, brethren,” with great confidence, *the time is short: it remaineth therefore*, for the future—that *they that have wives, be as if they had none; and they that weep, as if they wept not; and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as if they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world, all its schemes of affairs, all the vain parade, all the idle farce of life, passeth away.* And away let it pass, if we may at last obtain a better country; that is, a heavenly: which may God grant for Jesus’ sake! Amen.