



BX

9178

C82W3



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. BX9178
Shelf C82W3

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

THE
WATCHFUL SERVANT.

A
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED
IN THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
IN THE
CITY OF SCHENECTADY,

JANUARY 5th, 1817.

BY HOOPER CUMMING, A. M.

Published by request.

SCHENECTADY:
PRINTED BY I. RIGGS.

1817.

THE
WATCHFUL SERVANT.

A
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED
IN THE
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
IN THE
CITY OF SCHENECTADY,

JANUARY 5th, 1817.

BY HOOPER CUMMING, A. M.

Published by request.

SCHENECTADY:
PRINTED BY I. RIGGS.

1817.

4

THE WATCHFUL SERVANT.

LUKE, xii. 35, 36, 37.

Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning ; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding ; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching : verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

SIN stupifies the soul. From that fatal hour, when man became a rebel, he was cursed with indifference respecting his eternal destiny. Rivetted in the affections of his heart to terrestrial objects, and averse from the spiritual joys of the heavenly kingdom, he presses forward in the path of vanity, until, if God arrest him not, he strays to the verge of that giddy precipice, down which he sinks to hell. To warn him of his danger, before he reach that dread abyss, the gospel of the cross addresses him in language so alarming, so tender, so persuasive, that a man not bent on self-destruction, must listen and obey.

It was one of the most frequent and delightful occupations of the Son of God, to present powerful motives for the purpose of awakening the attention, and saving from death eternal, the souls of men. Often,

by images the most familiar, by parables the most alluring, pressed upon the conscience and the heart, by all the importunity of divine benevolence, the tears of compassion streaming from his eyes, did he entreat the straying flock of Israel, to turn from their follies and their sins, from their obduracy and unbelief, from their carelessness and sensuality.

One of these instances we have before us. He had been teaching the multitude, that riches avail not to avert the stroke of death; and then turning to his disciples, he bids them seek first the kingdom of God, intending however, at the same time, to instruct the rest of his auditors; after which, he most persuasively exhorts, "Let your loins be girt, and your lamps burning, and yourselves like those who wait their Master's return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may immediately let him in. Happy those servants, whom their Master, at his return, shall find watching; verily, I say unto you, that he will gird himself, and having placed them at table, will attend and serve them."*

The similitudes which abound in our Lord's discourses, are allusions to real life, and therefore more readily comprehended, and susceptible of a more immediate and powerful application. The inhabitants of Eastern countries wear long garments. When about engaging in any service, which requires the exertion of strength or agility, they must gird them close—a practice this, to which there are frequent references, both in the Old Testament and the New. For instance, "The hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab, to the entrance of Jezreel."†—"Then said he to Gehe-

* Campbell's Translation.—† 1 Kings, xviii. 46.

zi, gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way."*—"Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee; Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them."†—"Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me."‡—"Which of you having a servant plowing, or feeding cattle, will say unto him, by and by, when he is come from the field, go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?"§—"And behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison; and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals; and so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me."||—"Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."¶—"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you, at the revelation of Jesus Christ."§§

Their loins must then be girded about. Religion is the business of a man's life—the work to which all other concerns must be subordinated. A few sighs and feeble efforts; an occasional earnestness suspended often by the cares of the world; a seriousness interrupted by the deceitfulness of riches; a partial

* 2 Kings, iv. 29.—† Jer. i. 17.—‡ Job, xxviii. 3.—§ Luke xvii. 7, 8.
 || Acts, xii. 7, 8.—¶ Eph. vi. 14.—§§ 1 Peter, i. 13.

reformation arrested in its course, by the allurements of the flesh ; a resolution shaken, and an onset foiled by the subtle, the watchful and the vigorous adversary, will prove utterly ineffectual. The pleasures of sin, the prospects most grateful to carnality, the interests and connexions which are opposed to the divine life, must be renounced with promptitude. Pride must be abased, selfishness dethroned, darling lusts abandoned forever. The pilgrim must break loose from those who would detain him from his purpose, and force his way through such as block up the avenue. He must resist temptation, mortify the flesh, endure reproach, tread the fascinations of the world beneath his feet, and soaring in the affections of his heart to heavenly objects, must strain every nerve in combatting and overthrowing the enemies who oppose his passage.

But more than this. He must not only struggle. As a skilful combatant, *he must watch perpetually*. The Master is absent. He has gone to a marriage feast, which is usually prolonged to the latest hour. The servant is bidden to wait, having all things in readiness for his Master's return. But if his lamp be extinguished, 'tis an unanswerable demonstration of that servant's indolence. The direction implies, that we attend to nothing else, but our Master's service. "That when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." To encourage him in this constant watchfulness and industry, he pronounces that servant blessed, whom, when the Lord cometh, he shall find thus engaged. How exalted the honor ! How condescending the Master ! " Verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make

them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

At the feast of the Saturnalia, Roman Masters did thus treat their slaves. Horace, particularly alludes to the custom in the seventh Satire of his second book.* It was perhaps originally introduced for purposes of diversion; yet it did in fact exist. And however difficult it may be to prove that our Saviour's auditors were acquainted with the circumstance, still, the words must have been perfectly intelligible, without resorting to the supposition of such a reference.

Eighteen centuries have rolled away, since the Son of God thus admonished. His hearers have received their doom. But we yet live, to be instructed and persuaded. Entering as we do, upon the comforts and the trials, and the various vicissitudes of another year; oh let us listen to that voice which pleads with us on behalf of our dearest interests, and which, if disregarded, will soon be heard no more for ever. I congratulate you, that your eyes behold this day. I congratulate you, christians, that you are yet spared to be useful in the Church on earth. I congratulate you, unconverted sinners, while I adore my God for his forbearing patience, that you yet continue the monuments of his love, and that the offers of salvation are yet compassionately tendered. Beloved brethren, I trust that no one presents to you, the usual compliments of the season, with more sincerity and affection than your Pastor. To evince this, while he executes his commission, he tells you truths which though solemn, are intended to make you for ever cheerful, and which are dictated by a spirit of fidelity to God, and the warmest friendship for your souls.

* "Age, libertate Decembri,
(Quando ita majores voluerunt,) utere."

In the course of the past year, multitudes have been cut down by death: And we are spared. Multitudes have, without a peradventure, been cut down in their sins, and are now lifting up their eyes in torment: And we yet live in a world of hope. Multitudes this moment are pining under sickness: And we are in health. Multitudes are deprived of the necessaries of life: And we are surrounded with the choicest comforts. Multitudes, thousands, myriads, are perishing for lack of knowledge: And we enjoy the light of "the glorious gospel." Oh, if our hearts are not melted by such goodness, we must lie under the curse of triple hardness. If it have no influence in making us faithful to Christ our Master, every possible excuse will be wrested from us, and in a future day, we shall stand, without one extenuating plea, before the bar of his righteousness.

The loving kindness of the Lord, is one motive then, why we should obey the injunction of the text. But this is not the only reason. We should be urged by *the value of our souls—by a regard to the interests of the Church—the solemnities of the last judgment, and the bliss of heaven.*

By the value of our souls. 'Tis this which distinguishes us from the beasts that perish. However acute and powerful their instincts, they are utterly incapable of knowing, of serving, or of enjoying God. Strangers to the practice of virtue, and the commission of sin, they are destined to moral inaction and oblivion. But man is allied to angels, and assimilated to the Eternal. Heaven-descended, his faculties are capable of endless progression. From the faint glimmerings of infantile reason, he passes on to that intellectual strength and grandeur, when he can take

the dimensions of the sun, trace the comet in its erratic course, analyze the works of God, and comprehend the vast and complicated operations of the human mind. Delivered from the bondage of corruption, he can rapidly approximate to more than angelic purity, or abandoned to the fatality of the curse, all the ties of moral obligation sundered, he can tread with accelerated footstep the downward path of apostate spirits, until no shade of difference exist between his malignity and theirs. Thus his faculties expand, and his affections meanwhile assume a holy, or a hellish type for ever. *For ever*, oh 'tis that consideration which renders the value of his soul unspeakable. *Man is destined to immortality.* Through fields of light, or through floods of fire, he shall make his way, leaving behind the former dimensions of seraphim and cherubim, and still stretching toward God, or, sinking forever in the bottomless abyss, catching the notes of angels who precede him in his career of rapture, or, responding the groans of devils who experience the same damnation. And when he shall have lived as many myriads of ages, as there are stars in heaven, added to all the sands upon the sea-shore, and all the spires upon the mountain-top, still, his progression will have but just commenced. *So long as God lives, we shall not cease to be.* Can another consideration be adduced, to stamp value on the soul? Oh yes, it is the death of Jehovah Jesus! This exhibits to the astonished view of angels, the light in which the Eternal God regards his immortal creature, man. Jesus Christ, the Creator of the world, a pauper in that very world, not having where to lay his head, calumniated, scourged, arraigned, condemned, crucified—for what? To deliver the soul

of man from the wrath of God. This greatest, only treasure in the universe, expended on such an object! Say, is not the value of the soul, immense, incalculable?

“Mortal be wise, nor make
 Heaven’s highest blessing vengeance! Oh beware,
 Nor make a curse of immortality.
 Say, knowest thou what it is, or, what thou art?
 Knowest thou the importance of a soul immortal?
 Behold yon midnight glory, worlds on worlds
 Amazing pomp! redouble that amaze,
 Ten thousand add—add twice ten thousand more,
 Then weigh the whole—one soul outweighs them all.
 For this believe not me; no man believe;
 Trust not in words, but deeds, and deeds no less
 Than those of the Supreme, nor his a few.
 Consult them all—consulted all proclaim
 Thy soul’s importance. Tremble at thyself
 For whom omnipotence has waked so long,
 Has waked and worked for ages—from the birth
 Of nature to this unbelieving hour.
 In this small province of his wide domain,
 (All nature bows while I rehearse his name,)
 What has God done? And not for this sole end,
 To rescue souls from death? The soul’s high price
 Is writ in all the conduct of the skies.”

For this

“Laws from above were published, were repealed,
 On earth kings, kingdoms rose; kings, kingdoms fell,
 Prophets from Zion darted a keen glance
 Through distant age—Saints travelled, martyrs bled,
 The living were translated, dead were raised,
 Angels and more than angels came from heaven,
 And oh for this descended lower still.”

A regard to the interests of the Church on earth,
 should induce us to be ever watchful, circumspect,
 and zealous. The influence of a holy example is im-

mense. A Christian adorning the doctrine of God his Saviour, however circumscribed his talents, however uninformed his intellect, may do more in advancing the kingdom of his Lord, and promoting the salvation of his fellow-men, than the learning and the eloquence of a thousand preachers. That is a living epistle known and read of all who witness his godly conversation. There is a reality, a dignity, an unction in such a pattern, which cannot fail to inspire reverence, and stimulate an effort at conformity. "Ye are the salt of the earth" said the Saviour to his disciples, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill, cannot be hid. Let your light so shine, that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father in heaven." Behold a church living in harmony, actuated by one spirit, praying and striving to further the purposes of divine love. How beautiful the spectacle ! Sinners discover, that religion is of the heart. God pours down his blessing. The unregenerate ask with deep solicitude what they shall do to be saved. The temple gates of Zion are crowded. Her solemn feasts are thronged with rejoicing guests. Multitudes are added to the family of the faithful.

My brethren, you are furnished by the brightness of our prospects as a Religious Society, with a stimulus to exertion. During the last eleven months, *sixty-five* have been added to the Communion of this Church ; the number of stated worshippers has nearly doubled, and instead of the disunion and contention in which I found you on my first acquaintance, your harmony and peace have become proverbial. The youth of the large and growing Bible Class, and the children who receive instruction in the elementary

principles of the Christian faith, are signalized for their respectful, studious and devout attention. Believer, persevere in your fidelity. Maintain a close and humble walk with God ; cease not to present the importunity of prayer ; and your heart will doubtless be refreshed by still more glorious displays of divine power and compassion.

The solemnities of the last judgment should urge every individual in this audience to be in a state of constant readiness for the second advent of the Lord. At that august, tremendous period, when the once despised Nazarene, now arrayed in his Father's glory, and attended by the host of heaven, shall fix that throne, the effulgence of which a seraph's eloquence never can describe, the slothful professor, the proud Pharisee, the licentious Herodian, the corrupter of the truth of God, together with the whole multitude of ancient and of modern gainsayers, down to the last impenitent reprobate that has disgraced his species and cursed the earth, shall wail and gnash their teeth in diabolical agony and madness. Presumptuous confidence will then have fled. Self-righteousness will vanish like the vapour of the morning. The sinner may cry, "Lord, Lord"—may plead the extent and value of his privileges—but they have been abused ; the correctness of his knowledge—but it has been perverted to the ruin of his soul ; the respect in which he held the institutions of the gospel—but he has made no real sacrifice ; he has not denied himself for the Master's sake—his heart has still remained unregenerate, his life unsuitable to his fair professions whatever may have been their nature ; and therefore Christ will refuse to recognize him as his own, and persist notwithstanding

the utmost importunity in rejecting such from the joys of his salvation. The die is cast. The sinner's fate is sealed. Ah, the disappointment, the anguish and the horror which pervade his bosom. "The day for which all other days were made" has dawned. The undivided attention and the strongest sensibilities of the universe are awakened. The sepulchres of a thousand generations yield up their prey. Rising, they fill the air, some with shrieks, and some with hosannahs. Earth, and her sister planets are on fire. Seraphic spirits, as they descend to the place of judgment, singing Halleluiah; the affrighted ghosts of hell, in all the haggardness of deformity, cursing the moment which gave them birth; the redeemed from every nation, shouting, "Worthy is the Lamb who washed us from our sins"—the tribes of the ungodly, while their hearts are wrung with anguish, deploring, that they stupidly listened to the syren song of a bewitching world, the allurements of the flesh, and the frauds of Satan. Ah, ah, this will be a solemn and an awful day. If you are destined to the doom that awaits the wicked then, and did you know it now, tears would be your food, you would never breathe but in a sigh, nor speak but in a groan.

But meriting, as you do, the horrid anticipation, God warns, that the misery may be shunned. Now, you have the most favourable opportunities to secure a joyful meeting with your Judge. He is urging you to awaken from your lethargic slumbers, to gird your loins, and be in a state of constant preparation. But this golden season will soon pass away. The summer of life will be succeeded by the chilling blasts of winter. The shades of night will gather thick around

us ; and death prove our vision of worldly hopes to have been a dream. The joys which now dilate our bosom, will in quick succession soon forsake us—or, having outlived our comforts, and a few days longer watered the vale with our tears, yet, our pilgrimage must close, and we be gathered to our fathers—an event, big with consequences the most transporting or the most distressing. The youth, whose cheeks are now mantled with smiles, and whose eye sparkles in all the brilliancy of health, must soon become an inanimate lump of clay. Those lips which now echo the sentiments of inexperience, will be silent ; and that heart which now palpitates at the sound of pleasure, stilled in the cold, cheerless mansions of the dead. A new generation will arise to occupy our seats in the sanctuary. Our convenient habitations must be exchanged for the dark and narrow house—our dearest friends for the company of worms, and our downy pillows for the clods of the valley. Strangers will tread upon our sepulchres, without knowing that we existed. A few surviving relatives may remember us and mourn ; but these few will soon follow to the land of silence. The sun will rise and set, the earth revolve, no one here concern himself with our joys or sorrows—while we shall be conversant with the amazing realities of the eternal world ; either spreading our pinions in the air of Paradise—or, or, how I shall express it, or, be tossing on the fiery billows of the wrath of God.

But we turn from the affecting scene, and present a motive the most alluring. *The joys of heaven* surpass the description of an angel's tongue. The perfection of holiness, the utter removal of every species of misery, the enlargement of the intellectual

powers, the uninterrupted enjoyment and service of God, the adoration and love of Jesus Christ, the communion of saints and angels, and all this throughout eternity—other and sublimer language than that of mortals is required adequately to describe the bliss and the honours of the celestial Paradise. Paul declares that what he saw in heaven was unspeakable, and which it is not possible for a man to utter. Peter affirms that Christians anticipating the glory that is after to be revealed, rejoiced with joy unspeakable. Our present bodies having been consigned to the sepulchre, and re-formed after the glorious body of Jesus Christ, will be for ever delivered from disease and pain, from decay and death—fit organs for those spirits, which are destined to bask in the sunshine of God's presence—susceptible of happiness beyond the imaginations of this infant world. The bliss of heaven is ineffable. In the upper Zion, love immaculate, joy uninterrupted, rapture inconceivable reign for ever. The Christian, delivered from the toils, the sins, the perplexities, the sorrows of this tearful vale, shall with the redeemed of former ages, for ever adore the riches and the mysteries of grace—with them, for ever increase in the knowledge of God, perpetually discovering new beauties, new glories in his character. With them, he will walk the golden streets. with them ascend the hill of Zion, and from its lofty summit, extend his eyes far through creation, and praise, and wonder, and adore. Sin shall no more disturb his peace: Sorrow shall no more ruffle his brow: Temptations shall no more vex his soul. He will be perfect as the angels. Like them, he shall never be wearied in worshipping and serving God. As the ages of eternity revolve, he will be rapidly advancing

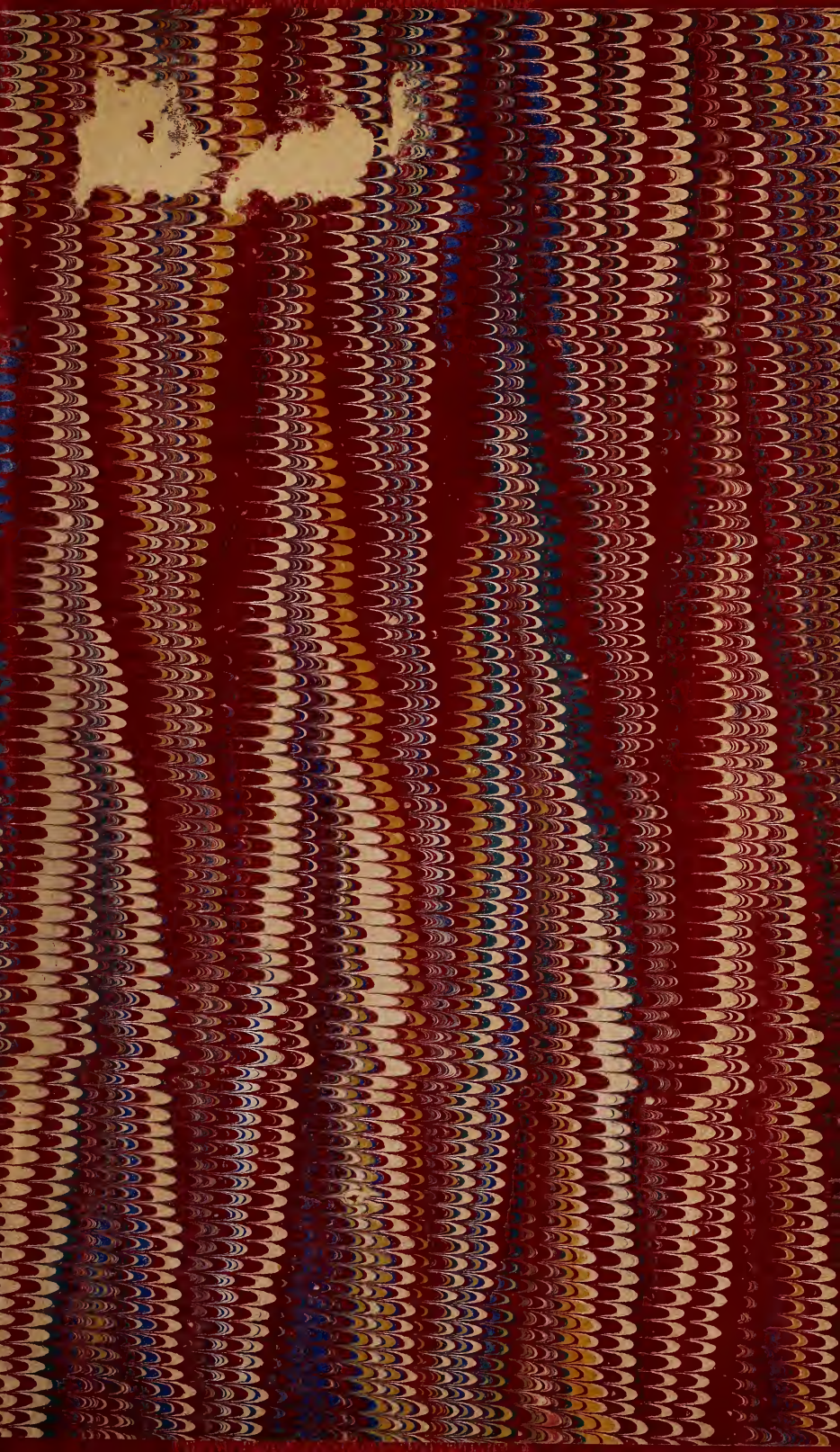
in holiness and happiness. He shall see God face to face, and know even as he is known. "And there shall be no night there ; for the city where they dwell will not need the sun nor the moon to shine in it ; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." Oh ! blessedness beyond conception, why art thou pursued so seldom, so languidly ? Why, why art thou attained by so few ? Collect all the raptures which ever have been experienced on earth—the pleasures of anticipation and possession—the joys which expand the parent's bosom, when his child fulfils his wishes, and rises to usefulness and honor—the extacy of the patriot, when the threatened liberties of his country are restored, and its laurels rest upon his brow—of the warrior, when the battle o'er, the enemy captive, every tongue is anxious to proclaim his praise—of the minister of Jesus, whose heart overflows with gratitude, while God crowns his labours with success, sinners inquiring with deep solicitude how they shall escape from the fires of the curse, new-born souls singing Hosannahs to the Son of David, the people of his charge pressing into the kingdom of grace ; add all that history records, all that the imagination can portray, all that eternity will disclose,—the bliss of heaven is exhaustless, inconceivable. Eternal deliverance from sin and sorrow—eternal expansion of the faculties, and eternal sources of mental gratification—eternal converse with Gabriel and all other holy beings—eternal vision and fruition of God and of his Christ ! Oh brethren, the subject transcends the utmost reach of thought !

Would you make this blessedness your own ? Then listen to the Saviour's voice, which urges a state of constant preparation. "Let your loins be girded

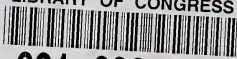
about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord." Begin this year with new purposes and motives. Christians, tread the path of duty with increasing zeal and vigour. Sinners, diligently improve the means of obtaining present peace, and ensuring final salvation, while ye have opportunity. Before the season of acceptance expire, flee to that Lord Jesus, who is "the hiding place from the storm, and the covert from the tempest." Beloved brethren, what is there in the *world*, which should induce you to run the dreadful hazard of losing your precious souls. The world, believe it, the world has nothing solid, nothing durable. Honours are specious titles which time effaces. Pleasures are momentary, evanescent. Riches are unstable. Grandeurs moulder. Glory and renown are soon lost in the mazes of oblivion. Thus rolls the torrent of this world. The passing moments bear all before them; and by continual revolutions, we arrive frequently without reflection, at that point where time ends, and eternity begins.

Happy then the Christian soul, who, obeying the precept of Jesus Christ, loves not the world, nor any thing that the world contains. Reserved from him on high, are durable riches and never-fading honours. A convoy of angels surround his disenthralled spirit, and as he passes the crystal gate, he hears thousands of thousands, and ten times thousands, chanting in accents melodious as the winds of Heaven, "Holy, Holy, Holy"—while, above he listens to another choir who exclaim, "Holy, Holy, Holy,"—and as he mounts, the notes of myriads at a distance die upon his ravished ear, shouting without weariness, "Holy,

Holy, Holy," "Glory, and honour, and thanksgiving, and power be unto him that loved us, and washed us in his blood"—he seizes a harp, and adds fresh notes to the harmony of the redeemed.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 021 623 709 2