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Book

THE

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER:

OR,

SERMONS

ON

PLAIN & PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY SOME OF THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL,
RESIDING IN THE STATE OF NEW-JERSEY.

VOL. I.

*Edited by George S. Woodhall
1813 V.*

*Woodhall
Editor*

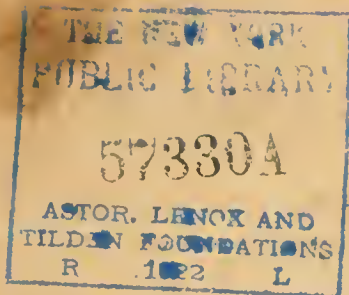
Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech
you by us; we pray *you* in Christ's stead be ye reconciled
to God....2 Cor. v. 20.

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District of New-Jersey, ss.

BE IT REMEMBERED, that on the thirty-first day of March, in the thirty-seventh year of the Independence of the United States of America, George S. Woodhull and Isaac V. Brown, of the said district, have deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof they claim as proprietors, in the words following, to wit:

“The New-Jersey Preacher, or Sermons on plain and practical subjects. By some of the ministers of the gospel residing in the State of New-Jersey. Vol. I. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.— 2 Cor. v. 20.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, “An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;” and also to the act, entitled, “An act supplementary to an act, entitled an act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving and etching historical, and other prints.”

ROBERT BOGGS,

Clerk of the District of New-Jersey.

SERMON X.

THE DANGER AND FOLLY OF INDULGING A COVETOUS TEMPER.

Luke xii. 20.

⁂ But God said, unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee ⁂
then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?

BY THE REV. JAMES RICHARDS, A. M.

Pastor of the first Presbyterian Congregation of Newark.

NEW-JERSEY PREACHER.

SERMON X.

Luke xii. 20.—“ But God said unto him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?

NEVER was the folly of a worldly spirit, pourtrayed in stronger colours than in the parable before us. One had said to our Lord while he was discoursing upon the danger of denying him, “ Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritanee with me.” To which unseasonable request Jesus returns this answer, “ Man, who made me a judge or divider over you ?” I am not come to settle men’s disputes about their worldly estates ; I have an infinitely more important errand ; I came to save their souls, which from a covetous spirit they are in danger of losing forever. “ Take heed therefore, and beware of covetousness, for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”

To give the more effect to this reply, he relates the short and striking parable from which my text is taken. “ The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully : and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do ? because I have no room where to bestow my fruits. And he said, This will I do : I will pull down my barns, and build greater ; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then

whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he, who layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

There is none who can describe the heart of man like him who made that heart. There is none whose instructions so much merit our regard, as his who came into the world to teach us and to shed his blood for our redemption.

He has a perfect knowledge of our ease, and the most disinterested regard to our welfare. Let us a moment attend to his representation of the rich man in the parable, whose character and destiny are both comprehended in these words, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

I ask the more earnest attention to this subject, because no doubt there are many, who are acting the foolish part of this man, while others, are treading so closely in his steps, as greatly to endanger their salvation. It is a day, brethren, of deep and awful declension; when the love of the world has become predominant; and the cry of many hearts is, "give, give, and say not, it is enough."

But let us hear our Lord's representation of the rich man.

1. In the midst of prosperity, he was *unthankful*. God had endued him with wealth, and thus raised him above that state of dependance, to which many are subjected. A blessing descended upon the labour of his hand, and his ground brought forth plentifully, so that he had not room where to bestow all his fruits. Here was a call for the warmest gratitude. He ought to have lifted up his heart to God, in sentiments of humble and pious acknowledgment. But God does not appear to have

been in all his thoughts. His concern was how to augment and secure his abundance, regardless of the hand whence it came and of the obligations it conferred.

Who does not see, that this is a common case, among those on whom God has bestowed the riches of this world? The more they are indebted to their great benefactor, the more do they forget him. The more he causes their cup to run over, the more presumptuous, hardened, and ungrateful do they appear. This is so plainly the fact, that if a man were to ask, where shall I find the best friends of my God? Where shall I find the heart that glows with the warmest sensibility for the common blessings of divine providence? We must for the most part direct him to the humble dwellings of the poor, and often to those who subsist upon the slender charity of their fellow men. Read what the pious Asaph has said of the rich in the seventy-third Psalm. "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart can wish.—They set their mouth against the heavens and their tongue walketh through the earth. They say, how doth God know? And, is there knowledge in the Most High? Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world: they increase in riches." We know that this is not true of all: we know that there are many who, like Abraham, abound in the good things of this life—and at the same time are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. Still it cannot be denied that men who increase in wealth, often increase in pride and self-sufficiency, and forget their dependence on God. But we proceed with our Saviour's account of the rich man in the parable.

2. His grounds brought forth plentifully. God pours abundance into his hands. Does he not begin to consider,

what is the proper use of this bounty? What deeds of charity and beneficence he ought to perform? Perhaps he intends to be the father of the poor, and to make the widow's heart sing for joy? Perhaps he meditates deeds of benevolence which shall immortalize his name on earth and lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come? Far otherwise; his heart is occupied only with selfish and earthly schemes. He cares not for the cries and sufferings of the poor. If others chuse to be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, be it so: he neither covets their work nor their reward. His soul is bent on another object. All his thoughts turn upon the grovelling purpose of increasing his wealth, and providing the means of voluptuous enjoyment. He does not seem to know that he has an eternity to provide for. He talks of his soul indeed, but not of its future and immortal destiny. All his attention is confined to this world, and to those short-lived pleasures, which with the fashion of this world pass away. On these his imagination eagerly dwells. But mark,

3. They are to him pleasures yet future. Much as he loves the world, and much as he possesses of it, all his enjoyment is in prospect. He has not yet reached the period in which he can say, "Soul, take thine ease;" nor does he know any satisfaction in a moderate participation of his abundance; an insatiable desire to hoard up, and to rise to a state of independence, is paramount to every other object. Thus his foolish heart postpones the certain enjoyment of the present, for the precarious and excessive indulgence of the future. He deceives himself by imagining that time and the increase of his wealth will make him more liberal.

How many are there who follow his example ; who cannot enjoy to-day because they are laying up for to-morrow ; and when to-morrow comes, their enjoyment is still postponed for the same reason. All is prospect with them, and were they to live to the age of Methuselah, the scene would not change. To swell their estates, with the deceitful dream of one day enjoying them, constitutes the sum of their desires and exertions.

4. We call your attention to another view of the rich man. He is increasing in wealth, while it fills him with care, puts him upon resolutions to guard against loss, and provide for future enjoyment. But attend to the self-confident and presumptuous language he employs. "I am resolved what to do. I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." You hear not, "If the Lord will, I shall live, and do this or that." He forgets his dependence on God, for the accomplishment of his purposes, and what is commonly connected with it, he forgets the precarious tenure of that life, on which all his schemes and enjoyments are suspended. He looks forward to the future, as if the events of it were under his control ; and calculates as confidently upon success, as if his own exertions were sufficient to command it.

Neither death nor disappointment make any part of his plan. In all the height of self-flattery, he fixes on a period when he shall be able to say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry." Then nothing is to be wanting of all that he desires. Secured from the chances of misfortune, and freed from his present cares and labours, he is to pass the remainder of his days in a course of unrestrained indulgence, and of unmingled delight.

This is the prospect which his own imagination presented. But what was the sequel? In the midst of this dream, God said to him, "thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Awful reverse! In a moment his sky is overcast; the gilded prospect of the morning disappears; all his expectations are cut off, and his hopes are forever turned to despair. He dies,—and that soul, whose immortal destiny he had forgotten, is summoned to the bar of judgment. It comes before God, whose mercy it had abused, and whose power and justice it had defied. Where now is that wealth which he had accumulated in this world, or which he was so anxious to accumulate? Will it fill him with confidence in the presence of his Judge? Will it soothe the anguish of throbbing guilt? Will it purchase for him a moment's reprieve from the wide opening pit of hell? Alas! riches profit not in the day of wrath: the remembrance of them to the lost soul, will sting it with keen and eternal remorse. Who can look at this picture without saying, miserable end of a self-deluded mortal! Fool, indeed, to make this world his portion, while all that is honourable in a virtuous course, all that is valuable in the immortal soul, all that is pure and exalted in heaven is sacrificed. But pause a moment, brethren.—On whom does this censure fall?

We are astonished at the man who is wholly intent on the pursuit of gain, while he neglects the salvation of his soul, "a good all price beyond." But are none of us treading in his steps? The heart is deceitful above all things, and a covetous heart, perhaps, the most deceitful of all. On no subject do men more frequently mistake their own character. We often see those over whom this vice reigns with the most unlimited sway, apparent-

ly as unconscious of the fact, as if their souls were baptised with the purest charity. They may even become a proverb for their covetousness without suspecting that this disposition has ever found its way into their hearts. But how is it with us? Are we so far absorbed in the world as to have neither time nor inclination to attend to the great duties of religion? Do we plead the multiplicity of our worldly cares as an excuse for neglecting the great and solemn concerns of our souls?

Then are we covetous. We indulge an inordinate desire for the good things of this world, and we are not willing to cast our care on divine providence in the humble discharge of our duty. We are not willing to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness first of all, leaving it to the Lord to supply us with whatever is needful, according to his good promise. We tread in the steps of the rich worldling, whose heart was supremely set upon the acquisition and enjoyment of the present life.

But suppose we do not neglect the duties of religion altogether—yet if we attend to them only as our worldly interest and convenience will admit—if we subordinate them to the pursuits and acquisitions of the world, we are among the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth. I will go farther. Suppose we are scrupulously attentive to all the external duties of religion, yet if our souls are not in them, what will it avail? If our hearts are not in heaven but on earth, are we not earthly? The Pharisees abounded in the rites and forms of religion, while they devoured widows' houses and gave other signs of the most deep rooted covetousness. Whoever toils chiefly for the body, not for the soul, is like the man in the parable, who laid up treasure for himself, but was not rich towards God. What shall be said of those,

who, though possessed of abundance, have seldom or never any thing to spare for the poor; whose well known covetousness chills the heart of every applicant? What shall be said of the litigious man, who has always some right in dispute, and who has a thousand times more concern for his earthly inheritance, than to secure a title to the promised rest? What shall be said of the devouring usurer, who in defiance of the laws of God and society, grinds the face of the poor to satisfy his greedy thirst of gain? Are not these men under the reigning power of covetousness? Are they not in danger of being arrested by God himself, in the awful language of our text, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

But admit that we could acquit ourselves of covetousness as a reigning sin, and that, none of the characters now mentioned, belong to us; still, has not this temper too manifest a hold of our hearts? Do we not think more about the world, and care more for the world than we ought to do? Do we not give less frequently, less bountifully, and less cheerfully, than if a spirit of covetousness was wholly eradicated from our hearts? Alas! brethren, covetousness is the sin of our times. It is a sin in the church, and a sin out of the church; a sin which, under the deceitful names of prudence and œconomy, chills the spirit of piety in many a bosom, and which daily loads with reproach that heaven-born religion, whose principle and end is charity.

What shall we do to counteract its baneful and wide spreading influence? Let us deeply fix in our hearts, the immense folly of seeking to become rich in this world, when it is to be done at the expense of any moral duty,

and at the hazard of our immortal souls. Let us remember, that wealth is but a painted bubble, which though it has a thousand charms for its votaries, can never make us happy. It cannot satisfy the covetous soul itself. It cannot bring peace to the troubled conscience ; it cannot draw the sting of death.

Let us bear in mind, that we brought nothing into the world with us, and that it is certain we can carry nothing out ; that death will soon strip us of all our worldly acquisitions, should our days be protracted to the longest period, and that for aught we can tell, it may be nigh, even at the door. Who ever felt more secure than the rich man in the parable, when he was occupied with the thoughts “of pulling down his barns and building greater?” And yet God said to him, “Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.”

We know not what a day may bring forth. Every moment we are liable to be torn from our possessions, and pass into eternity.

What madness is that, which causes our hearts to cleave to this world? Why are we so anxious to lay up treasures on earth, rather than in heaven? I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God : I beseech you by the hopes of an eternal heaven, and by the fears of an endless hell, that you withdraw your affections from this world ; that instead of heaping up silver as the dust, and preparing raiment as the clay, you strive to become rich towards God. Fear not to give alms of such things as ye have ; but remember, that to do good, and to communicate, is a sacrifice with which God is well pleased. By and by you will be put out of your stewardship ; O, how desirable to find one who will receive you into everlasting habitations !

I press you the more upon this subject, because it cannot be doubted, if we held the world with a looser hand, we should enjoy more real happiness while in the world, and should not find the same impediments to our entrance into the kingdom of God, when the business of this world is over. On the wings of faith let us rise to that rich and undefiled inheritance, whither Jesus the Saviour is gone, and to which he will bring all his true disciples at last:—there are treasures incorruptible and immortal; treasures of increasing value, which can never be lost by misfortune, or torn away by violence; treasures which will continue to enrich and to bless their possessors through eternity.

Some, however, may be ready to felicitate themselves, that they are in no way concerned in this subject. Whatever vices or follies they possess, they are not covetous. They have no desire to hoard up wealth with a view to any future enjoyment. They spend liberally and cheerfully as they go. The parable of the rich worldling, they conceive is in no degree applicable to them.

To such let me say, are not your hearts fastened upon the world? It matters not, whether it be honour or pleasure, or gain which attract you. If you love the world, you will perish with the world. The rich man dreamed of one thing: you may dream of another: but your dreams will be alike delusive, alike ruinous. He who said to him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee," may suddenly and unexpectedly pronounce the same awful language in your ears. Delay not then in detaching your affections from the world. Think often, and think solemnly of that dread eternity, which will soon swallow up all your interests and con-

cerns. Prepare to meet thy God, whose favour is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and thou perish from the way, while his wrath is kindled but a little.—AMEN.