No. 37.

On diligence in religious concerns.

Jan 16, 1820
John vii. 27. — "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life."

It is one of the characteristics of our Saviour's instructions, that they are frequently suggested by present scenes, or from arise out of the circumstances of the occasion, on which they were delivered.

The most trivial objects & the most common events, become, under the touch of this heavenly teacher, fruitful in the most important & admirable lessons. This circumstance must have carried home what Jesus taught to the minds of those, who heard him, with a freshness, vivid force of expression, wh we can scarcely estimate from merely reading the detail of a narrative. The words of men that are an illustration of this fact. The historian informs us, that he had fed an immense multitude with five loaves & two fishes. On the day after this
miracle was performed, a crowd of those zealous Jews, who followed with wonder, yet without faith, crossed the sea of Galilee, finding that he had arrived there before them, eagerly engaged. "Rabbi, why camest thou hither?" said one of gratifying their idle curiosity by informing them that he had sailed on the water from the opposite shore of the lake, with a sort of stern, but softened, indignation, says, "neither sent me, nor sent you, I have brought no miracles, but because ye did eat the loaves were filled; yea, then with an admirable prudence of man he seized on this hint for instruction, while their minds were awakened by the consectated reply, he urges upon them this solemn charge, "labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life." And he shall give unto you." The remark was pointed of touching the instruction affecting the sublime. Even now, that base selfish spirit, which prompted these Jews to follow Jesus in the hope of sharing in the fruits of his miracles, he draws an opportunity for inculcating the most weighty doctrine, by which the actions of man can be governed. With what a mournful and humbling power must his deeply have gone to the hearts of those, who eagerly crowded around him for no other reason, but because they helped to be fed by the 'economies of that mighty power, of which he had received from the omnipotent God! It is perhaps unnecessary to remark, that what says, "labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life," is the declaration, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," was not intended to prohibit sacrifices, but to show the great superiority of moral, over external, ritual duties. In the same way, from the expression of our text, we can by no means infer, that we are not to labour with diligence for the sustenance of our life; but we may assert, and infer, that this life, with all its enjoyments and advantages is nothing, compared with that in whose path is beyond the bliss of those, if we are nothing but industrious.
full for the good things of this world, how much more, inestimably more, delightful, important should we be in seeking those golden treasures which will never fade. God has spread around us in earth and heaven, in our days and in our years, the choicest fruits of grace, and his many capacities of enjoyment. And these are not meant to be used with inconstancy or coolness; but as they are given to us in those glorious promises, before our eyes, and in a way that makes it impossible for us to think no text too painful, no labor too arduous. (As much as the stars, the pleasures in the heavens, are more grand and brilliant than the gems, or glitter in the dust beneath your feet; so much, and with infinitely more interest, are the objects of the future life, than all the objects of present life.) This is the great truth, that God meant to inculcate, when he said, "I delight in the meat wherewith to eat the life of the world to come." In the expression, he refers doubtless to the world of immortality, the majesty, the truths, the bright hopes of that world, which he had brought to enlighten, to bless man.

Let us think in the 2d place of the supreme worth and excellence of those spiritual, eternal provisions, which God has afforded to his rational creatures.

In order to settle the conviction of this truth, let us in our minds, remember how admirably these provisions are adapted to the better, indeed, the only noble, enduring part of man. The distinguishing excellency of human nature, that acknowledges it the crowning work of the Almighty's hand, is that it is dignified with the faculties of a reasonable being. Compared with this, every other possession becomes poor and trifling. Indeed, mind is the only thing ultimately valuable and important in the universe. What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (When we think of the faculties of man in connection with the future life, a boundless prospect of immortality bursts upon our sight; we feel an almost overpowering sense of their sublime nature, when we see them in the far remote distance of the future, still rising and expanding, till they stretch into immemorial regions far beyond the vision even of imagination.)
As much as that, and can never die, is better than that, and is to be lost, to die—eighth, as much as the
beams of blessing, who surround the throne of the
eternal, are clad in brighter glory, than the bod-
ies of the heavenly beings of earth. As much as the
spark kindled by the breath of the Almighty is
more enduring, splendid, than the faint, dying
membran of this world. So much better, so much more
glorious, so much more lasting, is the soul of man
than every other possession with God has conferred
him. So it is to the welfare of the soul, so much
more valuable than any thing else, that all the divine
instructions, the death, and powerful endures, the endor
animating hopes of the gospel, are expressly adapted.

What would man be, or that principle within him who is to live forever? The being of a
day, harassed by the contention of violent passions,
alternately depressed with disappointment, vexed by
success, equally trifling and transient, at one time elate,
with feverish anxiety, at another flushed with vain
hopes, converted with the wind, as if they were unimportant, as if he would sink into the grave,
and leave no other record of his life, than the record of
a short and troubled dream. Such would man be without
a soul!—again, what would this soul be with
out the gospel? It would have forever, but how
well be employed? It might have large capacity
activities, wide manhood, mind, but find mostly objects
of gratification? It might have immense capacities, but
where would they obtain the best, highest objects?
Were it not illumined by the day spring from above,
it might grope forever in the darkness of medioc-

ity. When, therefore, we remember that the soul is the
only part of man which is concerned with honor and immor-
tality, and that the soul is expressly designed to count
the errors of man, enlarge the capacity of the soul, refine its disposition, and induce it with strength and beauty,
virtues and happiness, shall we not consider, sweetly, that
before this system of heavenly truth, every other cre
sent dwindles into insignificance?

But again, the spiritual provision, with God has made
for us, is not only adapted to the most excellent part of our nature, but it contributes a higher degree of happiness, than any thing else can give. This is a truth, of which, however, we may deny it in practice, we do not venture openly to profess a disbelief. The common sense of mankind has pronounced him to have sunk below the dignity of human nature, who hesitates not to prefer those pleasures, which the lowest animals of creation can share with him; to these we connect him with angels & the spirits of the blessed in heaven. Yet standing men are in practice so lamentably devoted to the things & pleasures of the world, although the fleeting objects of sense are bound to their hearts by so many flattering fictions as artificial embellishments; yet we know that no person is voluntarily desirous, none are thought so miserable, as those who are entirely abandoned to such pursuits, who have lost all capacity for those enjoyments not belonging to man as a being destined to live forever. It is consoling to think that this tribute to vanity is extorted, however unwillingly, from the innate judgment of mankind. If we would know the superiority of the pleasures enjoyed by the disciple of God, over those experienced by the man of the world, we need but bring the chari-
life:—his main delight is in doing good, in communicating happiness or alleviating misery, in reclaiming the offender from the dark paths of sinfulness, & helping the timid, doubtful, wretched of the young & inexperienced; in short, he is happy in just the same degree as he loves his Maker, or as he is able to cherish in himself for others the spirit & power of religion. For one can never be more than a spectator, or observer, or a student, or a bystander, or a witness of these characters, however near the largest share of their pleasures, & possesses the least resources of happiness. But he becomes this happiness, he raises those who enjoy it so much above the rest of the world? It comes from the yes, from religion. This is another reason why we say, that they are entitled to our highest reverence & regard. Once more:—in order to feel the incalculable importance of that spiritual provision which God has made for us, let us remember that it is that good of the soul which never perish, nor endureth into everlasting life. For we see the whole of its nature: here we trace the bright art of its graces. It is a great truth, one we cannot too often bring home to our minds, that the spiritual part of our nature will never go down to the grave, but will live after the manner of things invisible, shall have immortality & the stories of knowledge & virtue laid up in the mind will never disappear, & spread around their growing treasures, open their new sources of delight, through the ages of eternity. This subject is the health of life of the soul. If it be the constitution of this provision, it will be peace, & happiness, & peace forever. Now it is the religion of men as a class of persons, so that knowledge of truth, these dispositions of my soul will prepare us for higher scenes of action & enjoyments, where liberated from the incumbrances of earth, we may feel that in our eternal home there is room for all the vast desires & all the boundless improvements of an immortal mind. Who then will not labor for the "meat which endureth unto everlasting life"? And while we acknowledge this gratitud, the divine goodness in rewarding human industry and the faithful service from abundance of the means of support, let us not forget our feelings of gratitude & obligation far more deep, far more real, because of our provision from this kind provision. He has made for that noble life, & will be commensurate with eternity. Having thus spoken of the supreme importance of the religion of the soul, must be considered as a spiritual provision, let us in the 25th place
God has given nothing valuable to man without industry. Labor is the price of every acquisition, every enjoyment. Everything good, everything great, which makes us happy, and which makes us virtuous, comes originally from the free, unmerited bounty of God; but our labor dispenses all his blessings in a manner agreeable to that nature, constitution, and state of things we have established in infinite wisdom. He has established an infinite number of means, by the diligent use of which, all these faculties are enabled to work. He has conferred on us a power and a duty, and in the enjoyment of these faculties and duties, we must prepare ourselves to meet all the miserable consequences of our fatal and criminal negligence. We see that in the natural order of things, God makes a constant demand upon our industry. He gives fertility to the soil, the hours of the earth, the refreshing rain, the warmth of the fire, the sun, and the moon, but do the fruits of the earth bove up around man without his care and toil? If he has not sown the seed he has watched over, the infant vegetation, will he not in vain expect to reap the rich harvest? Most certainly, it is only by our own labor and industry, under the blessing of Heaven, that we can acquire the necessities of life. If we refuse the labor and toil from this source, we may rest assured that God will not intervene by any extraordinary act of power to save us from the calamity and destruction that may be the bitter fruits of our indolence. And do you think that less care or less diligence are due to the improvement of these moral and natural resources which are placed within our reach? And the good things of this poor perishable life to be gained only by patient, unremitting industry, the unfolding process of the endless fulness of heaven.
be given to those who have dreamed away their hours of preparation in idleness? Oh, let us not indulge such a fatal delusion. As certain as we are moral & accountable beings, so certain is it, that if we pass by in carelessness the means of our improve-ment & spiritual renovation, not God has given us, we shall need with tears of bitterness for the misery of the sin of our wanton negligence. The history of religion suf-ficiently shows, how much in the administration of the providence of God is left to the application & exertion of man. To the hand of God to maintain & in general, God gave the light of nature; & by a sedulous & anxious attention to the faith & this light, disclosed to them, by additional & wise use of that reason & the faculties of their minds, they might have attained to that knowledge & practice of duty, which flows from what we call natural relig-ion. But alas, they were indolent & careless about this revelation of nature, & made no attempt to study the works & will of God. ‘As the Prophet says, ‘the world by wisdom knew not God’; they were permitted to fall into such miserable delusions & such barbarous practices, that the history of them makes us shudder. In the same manner, when the light of heaven threw its beams, & fell in the Gospel of
one of us. Let us ask ourselves with an unfeigned honesty, whether we are labouring "for the meat and perishable life," or for that "inward wealth unto everlast ing life?" How anxious are we about the things which pass, and then we go on from us forever. We spend days of toil, sleepless nights, to gather riches or to acquire fame: we narrow ourselves out in the pursuit of ambitious interest, for such objects we think, rightfully of the most painful labor. We train up our children to industrious and laborious occupations, from their minds to be some habit of intense earnestness, in which ourselves are about our worldly affairs. And for what is all this trouble and turmoil? The things we are must relinquish almost as soon as we grasp them. Do not pursuits depress the value of 11. of industry, for most surely it is a duty we owe to ourselves to as much as the industrious. But, my friends, should we not be blamed to be so diligent and earnest, as we are about these possessions we must pass away like the morning dew, or vanish like the early dew? I yet to have no industry, no toil, no labour to spare for the only possessions we shall endure forever—our only riches will or will never fail us? But each of us say, as our Saviour once said, "I must needs to the work."
of them that sent me while it is day; - let each
us remember too, that soon, very soon, 'the night
of death' comes, 'the other one man can work.'

Does not the uncertainty of life teach the same lesson of wisdom:
Even now death is among us, telling us that here we have no abid-
ing city. The warnings appertaining to enjoining to the teachings, not
with instruction, but as truth and not as our own, for the times
cannot be for distant ages, we shall find all his instruction true.

He is blessed, then, at the source of all bles-
sness, the fountain of all purity. We, thy dependant
sinful creatures, could raise our hearts to thee, lifting
up thy strength to assist our weakness, thy grace to sancti-
tify our souls. Under the impression of thy constant
mercy to us, may we be induced to present ourselves
living sacrifices holy and acceptable to thee, in thy imme-
surable service. May we learn to labor less for them,
and more for that which death unto evil destroy-
ing life. Let not our hearts be engaged by these objects,
but we shall soon be called to leave forever, but may
we seek to obtain an interest in thy love, in the
ways of faith, holy obedience. Deliver us, we beseech thee,
from inordinate desires, from vain hopes, from
reckless fears, prepare us by purity, sanctity of heart for
all the events of this mortal life, for our departure
out of the world. We pay that by the constant ex-
curse of holy righteousness, do we may become fitted
for the beauty of that just made perfect in thine heavenly
kingdom through J.C.
At home, Jan. 16th, 1870, - afternoon -
At home, Friday lecture, Nov. 5th, 1870.