No. 710

On transient goodness & devotion.

Aug. 6, 1823 + 2
Hosea vii. 2. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for thy goodness is like morning cloud, and as early as it goeth away.

The Hebrew prophet thus beautifully represents the Almighty, as expostulating with his people for their inconstancy and treachery. Ephraim & Judah are two generic names, intended to signify the whole Jewish nation. This text is full of tenderness as well as reproof. Jehovah is represented as a kind father or a benignant prince, deeply concerned at the waywardness of the children as subjects, to whom His providence had been so liberal of means & power.
ages. They had not been wholly disregardful of their
obligations to gratitude & obedience to God, but they
were prone to forget him & go astray after idols.
They had sometimes been faithful for a while to
this duty, but their fidelity was transient. So
they were the children of God; but soon they were
the children of Belial. This is the complex character
of human obedience. This constant variation from
good to bad, from its good to its evil, is so strongly
depicted in the text. This is a character of all others
most difficult to deal with; there is in it at
once so much to claim compassion & excite indigna-
tion, that the task of managing it becomes un-
commonly critical. At one time it needs the encour-
agement of mildness; at another, the terror of
punishment. The prophet represents the duty by
an image drawn from the unperfectness of man, &
thus exhibits it as it were, debating with him-
self, how he should treat this inconsistent nation.

He had respect to their occasional devotion & obedi-
ence, therefore he would cherish & spare them, but
when he looked on their occasional reformation, their
inconstancy, & their faithlessness, he would hit the
arm of his anger. "O Jehovah, what shall I do unto
you? O Lord, what shall I do unto you? your
goodness is as the morning dawn, as the early dew
that goeth away."

One may be mentioned among the many instances
which might be added to this the characteristic in-
constancy & faithfulness of this nation. Refer to that
somewhat instance of their idolatry, which occurred
soon after. They had come from Egypt. They had
just passed the Red sea in safety. A wall of cloud
or his hand court were drunk in the waves. The
way to the land of promise was opened. & they
were permitted to ascend the holy mountain, to
desire instruction & support from him who is the
Source of all wisdom & honor. God had been there
as on eagles wings, & had stretched forth his arm.
of his might to vindicate their cause & save them from destruction. By these successive miracles their minds had been deeply affected. They must have been sensible indeed, had they not been so. It was under a lively impression of gratitude & admiration that, as ifanimated by the same passions & as if their hearts were united in the same state of soul & affection, with one voice they declared, all that the Lord hath spoken we will do. But after all, this promise, or rather made of so large an extent of gratitude & reverence, as seemed to have settled so deep in their hearts, was effaced; in forty days the delirium out of Egypt, the catastrophe of Pharaoh, the passage through the watertop, the articles of the covenant, their sense, their promises, were all o'er, & forgotten. Moses was absent. The lightning did not flash, the thunder did not roar; in all the jades of stupid insensibility, made a calf an idol.
devotional feelings are lost when we leave the house of God, or the place, whatever it may be, not first called them for. There are very few interesting scenes or happenings that they may not be related by one of the moving events of life, by some of the words spoken in the presence of God or the church. We too often see the beauty of life and the grace of salvation to cause the day to shine, to warm the sleepy soul. It cannot be Man and must lose his claim to be considered rational. But being, if he is not sometimes affected deeply touched by the various or the presence or God. We are impressed with what we see and what we experience, but some hand is put forth that lifts away these impressions. We have been feelings from vigorous resolutions, but the motion is that they are fleeting as the air. There is no permanent as they are transient.

The news from the world is like fire in the midst of us, and no matter what else is going on, whether it is a business or a great event, the mind is not interested in the matter. The mind is not interested in the matter.}

The temporary quiet, of whose he speaks, is one of the privileges of innocence, and under the care of wise guardians. The power of event, real and true, is one of the ground on which we must live. It is sincere while it endures, but does not endure long. The resolve to be true, to correct it, is sufficient to produce sincere resolutions, but not to keep them. The heart that does not understand it, where it stops, grief that does not eradicate evil, does not. It is a thing of times, opportunities, and circumstances, diverse and a thousand ways, produced by cause and cause. It is not as soon as those causes are removed. Sometimes it is called forth by the great events of life and the more thinking dispose of Providence. A calamity which comes with me...
that force of heavens as under the conviction of our helplessness, may bring the mind to a very low and serious frame. When the judgments of God are abroad in the earth, men learn to pause and consider. "Prosperity is usually productive of ease. As it grows, it increases, the presence of God becomes uneasy; if he punishes either by taking away prosperity or by threatening to take it away. He can severely, help, being clearly affected when the terrible messages of divine power open their commission. The arms of God, all his enemies begin to utter their voices. Names of fire which are constituted his ministers destroy their frightful light; & justly do they execute all the decrees of heaven, for we are to discharge their dreadful office." Or, it may be, theonders of God's providence are nearer home, even at our own doors. We see the marks of destruction; the walls, going on around, it touches our possessions. & the face of all that are deemed most fair and delightful. Then the heart is awaked, conscience recovers her power; we feel our helplessness, & we hasten to find a refuge in that God, who though he wounds, is ever ready to heal. This is the hour when the flame of destruction is kindled, when good resolutions are formed, & when our hearts are plaited into covenant, as it were with the Almighty. But after all, this prosperity is but like the early dew that soon avails. With the first tide of prosperity comes rolling back the former day of prosperity, the same indifference to truth, the same negligence of religion, the same unkindness, the same profaneness; & thus the fair promise of a new, new generation vanishes like the morning cloud. Again, perhaps the providence of God wrought by a still severe trial. You have called & perhaps the part from those who have long been with you on the journey of life, or are objects of your sincerest affection, & when it is a bitter bitter blow for you to bear. And your trial has produced for the time its proper effect in your mind. Ye
have felt that some of the evils of death upon earth, are ouch as tender; if you were willing to give yourself once to these objects, whose value is unchangeable. But this is too rare a story. The only way to gain it is to be brought there. The impression was serious; but it lasted, but it has force to be built a serious dream.

Again, we may suppose that a transient devotion has been kindled in your heart by the fear. But when it has vanished as soon as that fear subsided. There is no teacher like death. The inextinguishable fear it throws over all terrestrial objects, the midnight darkness in which it involves them, the irremovable cloud it gives us to depart, the insurmountable gulf it emblows to tear us away, represent the vanity of the world, better than can be told. If there be anyone who has been brought down to what he seems the bed of death, he has approached death by the awful hour of connecting this world with the unseen world. Let such an one remember that and

his feelings at that moment of dreadful uncertainty. Let him call to mind with what keen contrition he looked back on his sins, with what bitterness of heart he has been once in time. Yet if he remembers too what strong resolutions of amend ment, obedience, he framed of God should have been his life, how he thought himself too deeply sensible of the goodness of sin, that it could no longer have for him any temptations. Yet in too many cases we may ask what has become of all these intentions of conversion. Did not his reformation, when health was restored? Did not his devotion rise and fall with his pulse? Did not his zeal keep time with his disease? As the one decreased, did not the other die away? Was not the recovery of health the resurrection of sin? I fear also, that thus it often happens, that in proportion as God has been gracious to us, we have forgotten him; for because we are in health, we see no necessity of being devout.

Another illustration of this subject may be found.
in that purity transient, is the early dawn & the morning cloud, with religious exercises sometimes produce. 

Then those opportunities of devotion & instruction, with which are kindly indulged, yet were designed to give strength to nurture, religious feelings, may be effectually used to substitute a shallower, superficial, temporary, 
personal, in place of the purity of the heart, which though 
new-born, will wear better. A man in the moment of 
his devotions is touched, perhaps with the visions of 
comprehension: 

whence it may be from the first, with views of the divine character by laws 
& such representations of the benevolence of love, as have 
produced for the time a lively effect on his heart; 
& he goes home resolved for the future to receive 
to be more truly, heavenly minded. And for a few days, 
a few weeks, or a few months, the effect is sustained.

May it may be, that his heart is filled with the 
wild raptures, his imagination awaked by an indis 
teent view of a great subject, may produce. And 
what of all this is the result? The man, restrainers 
ready to boast that he was a child of grace, soon 
shows that he is no better than others, he returns to 
his passions, his follies, his sins, & the early dawn 
the morning cloud are fit emblems of this transient 
fruit.

Such are some of the instances in which we deceive our 
shapes by the glorious appearance of that holy goodness 
& true self of the contrasted. And believe me, sir, there 
is nothing more dangerous than this transient 
fruit, because it is usually so satisfying, so flattering, 
while it lasts; 

& because it is imagined to atone for 
whole years of negligence & sin. There is, & has been 
a disposition in mankind to make religion consist 
in sudden, 

vivifying feelings, in imitation of the news 

of the victory of eulogia. But this notion is equally 

false, to scripture of to the best intents of mankind. 

True religion is not a thing of passion, it is not 

horrors, 

odious, revolting, & charming; it does not go forth & 

proclaim itself in the basest spots, or in the streets. It is 

seated in the heart & operates for the most part,
gradually & in silence, it displays itself in all the
fruits of a good life, in love to God & love to man,
your permanent habits of virtue & piety. And this too
is the only religion which will endure & withstand
because this alone is built on a foundation, not the
passions & temptations of man cannot shake... The man
who worships yeas &n God with reverence & love, who
stirres his courtship of his heart
Saw, who seeks & in his daily conduct to be generous &
yhe spirit of the age, & who prays as a candidate &
demands his own highest, holiest, & purest offices
when we cannot give them, to another's cause.
But when we see a man, who imagines, that he can
be religious only in this degree, as he is furious,
entiation, who is filled with that sort kind
of pride, spiritual pride, & who spends more time
in talking about his religion than in living religiously,
we have great reason to suspect, that the
man's party devotion are superficial & transient; it
is to such, that God himself addresses the oppo-
ting argument in the text; what shall I do unto you,
for your goodness is as the morning dawn, & the
early dew, it goeth away?... It is dangerous to trust
its occasional feelings & on its impromptus; it is
ture, they are not without their value; they are
sometimes of high importance, but it is only when
they lead to something beyond themselves, when
they carry that influence through the whole of
life & the whole of our conduct. They are very
apt to lead us to place too much dependence
on any transient devotion, a fleeting piety. I do
believe, that God loves us, that He hath so loved
as to give us this Sun, that a man ought to turn
him love for love, life for life, than accost
be faith full to God. Whereas in the faith of
the common Goods, of we shall not do this, not at

to how much we long, we reach, we propose. God will not accept us. If we believe that the soul is immortal, if that a future state awaits us in what our condition will depend on our character here, then we ought to regulate our lives by these truths, we ought to train up our souls for immortality. If we do not, do this—no matter how violent it seems or occasional feelings may be, we shall not obtain the crown. He who hath heard and for all his faithful servants in the kingdom of his glory. Let us strive, strive to receive into our hearts the calm, gentle, abiding influence of the Spirit of the Lord, to live in a manner becoming the disciples of that Master, who when on earth next about doing good, and then one spযুতি যুতि, instead of being like the morning cloud or the early dew, vanished away, will go with us through life. When the objects of earth are fading from our sight in the darkness of death, these friends will still stand by us, though they stand alone, and will find us at the home of the good in heaven. Aug. 1820.

O, then, who art the Father of our bodies and the Father of our spirits—thou wouldst use every check for guidance and direction. May the impressions of faith operate be fixed so deeply in our hearts, that they may withstand the temptations and allurements of our desires, and not our goodness be as the morning cloud or the evening frost pass away; but may all the good influences with us receive abide in our souls by being the peaceful fruits of righteousness, where by lest to the finer and glory of God the Father.

We pray that we may be assisted to form habits of devotion and of sincere duties, that we may continue through life thy faithful servants. Suffer us not to be contended with a partial and temporary prosperity, but may we have the not only with our whole hearts, but during our whole lives. Guide us and bless us here, and finally receive us to thyself in glory.
At home Aug. 6th, 1820, afternoon.
At home Jan. 5th, 1823, afternoon (very stormy).
At home Dec. 20th, 1835, snowing.