No. 65

On Self-Government

June 25, 1830+1
Prov. XXV. 2 B. — "For the man that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

No words could describe better than these, the wretched condition to which that man is reduced, who has lost the government of himself, is given up to the sport of his passions. Not only the happiness of life, but the virtue of a true and expands largely on the powers of self-government. It is at the foundation of great attainments in every pursuit; even the more men of the world, who would find success, must practice it; and surely it cannot be less necessary to the disciple of the Gospel. To restrains of some sort or other
we are almost continually subject, if we mean to be happy, if in every corner of the heart, rebellion,

This world within the breast is always a prison.

The image is a fine one — as the city, whose walls are demolished, yet with ruin and devastation un

The power of self-government is so great, it must be noticed as well as disgraceful, to be vastly important. It is the power of self-government, which frequently marks such wide differences between men of the same talents, and the same advantages. It is the power of self-government, which gives coolness and serenity, where it would be expected that the power of self-government, is liable every moment to be agitated and shaken by small passions.

As the power of self-government, which enables one to stand firm, upright, under the pressure of afflictions which others endure.

Without its virtue, no state, no power, can have any moving place where it may be held fast. If such be the importance of this power, we cannot wonder at the living language, in which the wise king of Israel expresses it. In his words: 'As that hath no rule over his own spirit, so is a city that is broken, and without walls.'
love, for tells us that we have done enough. We refuse to admit, that there is much in our own feelings, our own passions, our own hearts, which must be purified, sublimated, much in the domain within us, that needs to be overworn by the unflinching love of duty. So far as relates to external, relative, obligations, we are usually ready to admit, to be governed, directed by proper restraints, but the exercise of self-control, we will not endure, the spirit of self-government we will not mean.

+ There are two sorts of stipulations, or rules on powers of self-control, each an essentially, but each in some way, two classes of passions, which are striving for the mastery over us, the one more violently, the other less violently, more evenly. The first class is composed of those passions & feelings, which affect us violently, yet which it requires no considerable effort of self-command, to restrain, even for a moment, such as anger, fear, sometimes grief. The second class consists of those desires & temptations which, when we are before we are aware of their approach, & the
assaults forth it is easy to repel forces, or any force times only, but it is by repeated resentment, violence, or
the moral some one such as the love of ease, pleasure, of applause, or of many other selfish gratifications. It is easy to see, that these different passions, forth some advance with an immediate first effect, by other strive deliberately study to raise the foundation of vicious principle, must require a difference in degree, manner of self-command. I shall therefore consider for a moment each of these classes of temptations, with respect to the nature of the means by which it may be resisted.

1. It is one of the many unhappy circumstances attending the influence of violent sudden passions, that their very indulgence seems an excise for yielding to them. We deceive ourselves so far as to be persuaded, that in proportion to the fury of the attack, the obligation to resistance becomes less binding. We charge to the account of human infirmity or insensible temptation what derives its strength solely from the folly of habitual indulgence, or from the giddiness of general licentious principles. There are some feelings, we say, oh it is so natural to indulge, that it would be unaccountable to expect us to control from the indulgence. Thus the man, who thinks he has been injured, especially if the anger be deeply inflected with written animosity, is ready to give himself up to the very first burst of indignant resentment, in the moment of keen excitement, to rush to revenge. So it is with sudden, violent anger. He who is made to resist at the touch of insult is offence, willing for himself to be carried into the whirl of passion, whenever he is displeased, is thus puts it in the power of every one to give him pain. The tendency man will yield himself without resistance to the first impression of fear. Yet too often, the tears and gates of distress are opened upon us, when suddenly cherished hopes are laying in ruins around us. If the hopes and places of the heart are brought low, and
then grief must have many of the stern passions versus we must bend to its fury. It is thus, that it often yields to the sudden attacks of the passions without an effort to break their violence or to quell their tumult. It is true, that first impressions are not always in our power. We cannot readily displace of them, as they come crowding on the mind. These, whose feelings have passed through the process of a long subduing discipline, will doubtless find it difficult to upbraid the momentary rising of indignation when injury or offence has been received, grief when objects are suddenly presented in views of terror, or of grief, when the heart is left in the solitude of disappointment, or under the pressure of affliction. Nor is it necessary, or even desirable, that we should banish all recollection of these from our souls. It is not for nothing that God has given us the power of being moved by such feelings: like every thing else, our have ascended from the frame of our spirits, they are designed to be used, not to be disused. They may operate as motives to self preservation, as the cause of all the operation of self defence, or as stimulants to vigorous exertion, as all our passions of heavy cares or distressing remembrances. They should not be considered as destroyed, but considered as regulated. The same force which when unchecked threatens a waste of ruin and desolation wherever it moves, if duly restrained and subdued, will tend to make it serve as the forces of convenience and comfort, as with their natural passions, as God has intended, to the human breast. give them uncontrollable dominion at the first assault, they will make you worse than kind slaves, but place them under the regulation of reason, you will of course, you will become temperate men, for good. More than one we see the advantage of the necessity of self government, with respect to these feelings, although sometimes of short duration are always violent. The best rule is, when at the beginning, as it may be you cannot resist afterwards, ask your will, ask, are these passions, will not yield, as with such sudden violence, to be controlled a regular? Some, the attempt to express them as unusual.
ing as was the attempt of that king, of whom
history relates, that in the evening of his arrogance
he commanded the waves of the sea to roll back
& cease their flow? No, it is not the same thing, of
that been given us passions, with given us the power of or-
aining them. He who hath formed us so that we
are susceptible of being agitated by the sudden
pressures of powerful feeling, has likewise formed us
so that we can regulate & control these emotions. Is
then shall we calmly these excesses into which we are so
apt to be hurried?

Let him, who would establish in his breast the
powers of self-government, reflect for a moment on
the disgrace & unhappiness, en as he envokes himself
by yielding to the gusts of passion. Take for instance
the man who is cast expelled to anguishes & who does
not see how miserable & miserable he makes him-
self. Amidst the opposing interests & interferting
claims, so diverse, of the face of porjects, amidst the
various scenes & the small scenes of different times,
amidst the thousand wishes & variety of hopes, which
one other in the paths which take in life, it is im-
possible that each one can at all times be grat-
ified; of course he who is ready to take fire whenever
his moods are not complicated & whenever the inters-
ions of others offers his own must pass his life in a fever
of passion & in all that misery & unhappiness
which inevitably leads. There is no one whose hap-
iness is so completely in the power of circumstances, as the
irritable man. He is cast in troubled waters, where ev-
ery sound & every wave makes him the sport of all others.
Can he think, can we know what it is to enjoy that
sunshine of the heart, which should flow from the spirit of
reason & forgiveness? Effects equally pernicious sometimes
result from the excessive indulgence of the first
insts of grief. When the potter of life is suddenly turned
in to destitution, & destitution is spread over the prospects,
that was but recently full of life & joy, the trial
we know is sufficiently painful. & how human na-
ture does not too easily with endure it. Yet nothing
can be more pernicious than thus to yield to despair
& spread through the heart a most chilling, lifeless
indifference; the soul requires to pay her tribute of grief
thick & love to his Maker, the mind is estranged & seeks unto an indifferent disregard of duty. Life is wasted in idle sports, or condemned to hopeless & sorrowful efforts. Let the bitter lessons of indulging the first risings of strong passions teach you to beware of that indulgence; from the effort to avoid or subtly evade the cause, if you would pass life happy or sensibly pass away, govern yourself. And while you are taught to consider it disgraceful or ruinous, to yield to the first onset of violent passions, remember too, that it is a sin, a deep sin, against your Maker. God intends to anger & pleadings in mercy. Shall we be children of the dust, who live & die by His good pleasure, shall we give the reins to our timorous feelings, because we are angry, take vengeance on a fellow creature? Our Saviour taught us to be gracious even to the wicked. His is slow to impute & swift to forgive. The back of His dis-pleasure hangs trembling over the head of the sinner, as long as he endures, as if He were unwilling to let it be known, that justice is stretched out, but it is drawn back again by mercy or strays its long are the dreadful blow is dealt. And shall we, whose knowledge is ignorance, whose strength is weakness, shall we give way to the headlong fury of passion, sink with the ingrate, part of God? Yielding to others that indulgence, if the soul, is daily & hourly man-ifesting to us? Oh, no! let us imitate the example of our Jesus, Patient & strong, shall we be able to bear those violent emotions, so suddenly rush upon the soul, if they break it unguarded, do not too often spread through it a waste of ruin.

2. The second class of passions & devices, which require the watchful care of self-government, are those which make their attacks gradually & stealthily, and it is easy to restrain to a considerable degree in some time, but not by repeated assault to find an entrance to the heart, if then are not early checked. These, though less furious, are perhaps even more dan-gerous in their operation, than the first class of passions on which we have mentioned. The first are like an open fire, whose approach greatest you are admonished; but the second are like a fire, who burn in.
ambush, who never springs and slays upon you, but
watches the opportunity to come suddenly & silently
upon to the attack. Thus the love of pleasure is
gradually broken down many a strong, generally genial
and amiable, but not well-endowed mind. It makes its advance under a thousand sub-
cious means & fair pretences; it puts on disguises, wears a mask, tells falsehoods, makes promises. Yet when by
approaching time after time it has at last gained complete entrance, it weakens & tarnishes the mental & moral powers of the man, indisposes him for the
enjoyment of virtue, drives from his heart the love of God & the hope of man, fills it with a
coarse & absorbing sentiment of selfishness. In the
manner the love of ease steals gradually upon us, till
it grows into selfish indulgence; it steals its cause at
suddenly & stealthily, but gently & perseveringly, & when
it has obtained the triumph, our minds become dis-
bilitated; we lose the relish for the vigorous exercise of active duty, while one by one upon our indiffer-
ence, the stream of life becomes stagnant & corrupt.

So the love of praise may steal away from an honest be-
ginning, till it becomes a consuming passion. At first
it is perhaps the desire of the approbation of the good,
by us all; it perhaps a pious regard to the opinion of
the world, or a pious regard to our own character: but
it soon perhaps breaks away from these gentle forms &
lights up the fires of ambition in the soul, & it is
well, of every remnant of holiness feeling for its
principle he must consume. These instances are men-
tioned to show the necessity of vigorous & absolute self-
regulation; in these cases where we easily persuade
ourselves that it is not necessary, or not necessary at
least to any great degree. But let these
passions, gentle & pure as they appear, encompass
your heart, & find encouragement, & then you will
in truth be like the one that is broken down &
without walls. The best guard against these
insidious enemies to true peace, is to establish
a precise & definite standard of action, & well ground
well measured principles of duty, & to form these
standard & to frame these principles according to
the spirit of the love, precepts, & the example of our Lord & Master. It is a great point to have certain rules of conduct well defined. You well understand, therefore, when we are tempted to transgress these rules by one so small a step, we shall be brought if our dangers be put in the grand; whereas if our small omissions are heavy & unperceived, we have nothing to account for, from slight & occasional deviations, if these in time will swell into habitual & large ones. The great art of self-government consists in beginning to place the check early on a course of iniqutity or vice in indulgence; in examining every step when we are tempted to take by a standard of sincerity & righteousness, while the heart is not unsteadfast; to judge aright. And this though at first it may be a most difficult task, becomes easier by every trial & every effort. In truth, it is the only way of proceeding on the journey of life safely & happily. For when we have once overcome the government of ourselves, when by constant & fixed exercises we have eradicated between contending principles of action, to float without anchor in compass at the mercy of every wind - you will be tossed about by a thousand enterprises, you will be far more from the master passions of indulged passions, than you can expect from the few first harmful effects of self-denial & self-government. If then you would check these desire, come silently & long with them a long time, where you mean to stop; & they will not be so strong as you think, but they will be checked, & with you another step or two, and they will not be so strong. Teach me the same principles, watch your standard of action, maintain your moral purpose, & then you will learn that the lesson to subdue yourself, N. B. if it be worth any thing to conquer these "sinful passions, and open the flood gates of iniquity on individuals, on families, & on society, int he flame of amity & contention, & make man the image of man - if it be worth any thing to with stand these gales, but not less dangerous tempests, & gradually up the foundation of certain principles, & spread their power through the mass of the character, if it be worth every thing to imitate the example of your blessed God,
like him to act, with a devoted regard to the will of God, then is it worth something to you to en-gross ourselves, may, then is it your life, your happiness, your virtue, to govern yourselves, like who has complete rule over his own heart, comme true a bear, than his bold victorious armies through victorious provinces, self to the king of conquest on this evening's city JUne 1870.

Others from whom descends every good and perfect gift; y of whom art the source of all blessing and joy, the thing that we may be enabled to regulate our thoughts and affections by the principles of our holy religion. Give us the grace to govern our passions, to check our hasty emotions, to regulate our rash desires; to subdue all our thoughtless purposes to the dominion of thy most holy will. Let the good spirit of meekness, purity, grace be shed abroad in our hearts, and manifest itself in our daily habitual conduct. May we carry the spirit of our religion into all the walks of life, cherishing candor, mildness, showing our love to thy holy benevolence to man, regarding the purity of our hearts and intentions. May it not be in vain that thou hast placed us amidst the trials of life, surrounded us with the means of religion, but may they contribute to soften our soul's and to them fit us for the kingdom of thy grace.
At home, June 25th, 1820.—afternoon.
At home, June 9th, 1822.—afternoon.