No. 134.

On the uncertainty of the future.

New Year's Sermon.
James IV, 13. 14. 15. — "Go to now ye that say, today or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, do buy, and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be in the morrow. For what is your life? It is even vanity, which shall ascend after you as a whirlwind: and shall return to the earth, and know it no more." For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live: but who can tell what shall be in the morrow?"

Who does not at once see, in this animated language of the Apostle, a true picture of the uncertainty of man's condition, and a wise precept as to the duty of results from that uncertainty. There are two exercises of the mind, which enable man to live out of the present moment — recollection and anticipation. The one connecting him with the past, the other with the future, the one leading him back along the line of past scenes of events, the other carrying him forward to days of years that lie in the distance. There is, however,
this striking difference between the objects of these two exercises of the mind, that the former are certain, the latter uncertain. What is past is known, fixed; what is to be is uncertain, and cannot be ascertained. The former becomes matter of fact history; the latter is the province of fanciful imagination. God has given us the privilege of learning wisdom in the days that are gone, but the future He has reserved to His own heart. He only tells us what it is essential to know, but not what it shall be in the manner. Darkness exists before us, as we proceed in the journey of life, as only that little circle of light, in the present of goods. The day and night which the future is not but into the hands of man; and the certain only, is introduced between us and distant days cannot be raised by human skill or sagacity. Thus, as we know, whether tomorrow's sun shall find us bright with health and joy, or sleeping the sleep of death; whether the lot of next month or next year shall be prosperity or adversity; whether you have in reserve for us days of ease or days of trials, or whether the very life of the shall grow so near together, that we cannot separate the

one from the other, but while we are disturbed with the

profound of the former, we must expect to feel the shadow of the latter. The blessings on you now may have their future continuance increased, or they may be cut off, forever.

And it is with your misfortunes, time may allow

ate or of it may make them heavier. The circle of our

friends may continue as bright and happy for many years to

come as it is now; or you may be called to see one after another

extinguished from it, till the whole is darkness. Unrever-

ed for may remain full of health, prosperity, riches may be set

lore, like the thistle down in the whirlwind. What looks

may remain firm in strength, 40 years frame strength.

The origin of health, as you may be given up to the utmost

sickness and the utmost degree of death. In short, the

description given us of the future, is just, as it would be the

map of an imaginary region, not the sketch of reality.

And this is no less true of great public affairs, that

of the less considerable of private interests of individuals.

Who can pronounce of nations imagined what will be the

state? History will show us. But from the past state of its

annals to the present moment, change, constant change.
has been written in large characters in its pages. Those who have stood highest dependents on the conveniences of life, have suddenly found themselves to move more for others, than to have been moved only by the wish for wealth itself. Will be drawn to the final solution.

Themes have been erected in hosts, these are the matters of the world; of sculpture have been entering into all manner of great palaces, yet these themes are new things, these delicate, fragrant stones, and these sculptures are fallen from the grasp of those who thought to have held them firmly. The ability of decay, alternate strength, weakness, the ascending and the descending of things, the coming on of new, almost before the place of the old one is vacant, wearying and ceaseless change, each is the history of man. The events of the own things when the chances at his fatting, are not more various or changeable than are the event combinations of events, as mark the life of man, the fate of nations. Why then shall say, that he can calculate with any certainty on the future? And who will not say that the history, striking language of the scenes in the text is fully justified by the actual state of mortal things. Is it the view of all, that we shall have to any

that he will go into such a place, continues there a year, yea, a week, yea, get what—when one knows not what shall be on the morrow? Ought we not rather to one, if the will, we will love, do this or that?

This subject, my friend, I have thought might furnish us with some predecessors at the least. The commencement of a new year must surely remind us of the uncertainty of all things future. It is the renunciation of building up extravagant plans, all lying in the air of hope, while our life is even a hour with endurance, join little time, it then vanishes away. Another year has gone from us; at the commencement of that year, only, who are now receiving in their lordship's dust, doubtless said to themselves, we shall execute such a place, continue there, a year, a day, a week, yea, get what—where are they now? Yet did not once enter into their calculations that tomorrow would not meet their, but God's thanks who were their joint North. In the congratulation of the season, are new walking in the dust, with their hearts, with their hearts, with their hearts, with their hearts, with their hearts. These things, my friend, should cast, not to be endured but subject trouble in our expectations. Several time
our reflections on this interesting subject, at this interesting time, let us see on the whole consider what is the nature of that uncertainty which hangs over the future.

We may observe, then, that every thing future is not certain. There are laws in the moral government of the world, as always produce the same results, if those results are not anticipated without the fear of shared punishment. Wherever the causes exist, there we may confidently expect the effects. And indeed a large part of our knowledge depends on this kind of certainty; without it, we should always be children at our improvement. We reason every day from the past to the future, from what has been to what will be, foresee it not for the process of the mind only, we should always be learning, never arrive at any permanent information, because what we have found to be true to day might not be true tomorrow. The order of nature, for instance, is fixed by regularity. The earth new rocks sound in the same order by the same laws, as it has been ever since the birth of the greatest friendships. It is, if this we may confidently premise it always will continue, as long as the same force shall please to send it on its course. The sea eddies from new first as it has done an ages past, and just as will continue to do. The reasons and the their sounds in the same order, will always affect to them, of seed time, of harvest to follow each other as of old; and such their invariable, will always be. In that we see, under a law from established laws, if all these laws are observed, there can be no uncertainty as to the consequences. Their too it is in the moral world. There are principles of nature and, according to the established constitution of moral government, will necessarily produce these further results. Therefore, there likewise there can be no uncertainty. We know that virtue is now, always has been, and always will be, the source of main strength, happiness, and that vice always has been and always will be the source of misery. When the certainty of these principles we labor to build our expectations with regard to the future. If we shall not be disappointed. There are many cases, and under the same circumstances, will always produce the same effects. God in mercy has here allotted us to be the effect of distorting uncertainty. The face of the earth in every future age bring to man the same blessing, the same animating power, of the same rich consolation, so it has done in every past age. Here at least is one refuge from the chains of doubt, of fear, of conjecture. The thin veils...
on no nevicious foundation. He has been taught by his religion, he has the blessed assurance that he will be as near as he can to that religion. This is true of the things we come under the dominion of change. His the foundation of the prophets, apostles, and himself as the chief corner stone. The stream of time is changing and changing other things: but this rock, he refused the subject effect. Sinful man, it forever, must forever pass by reminiscence. This we see there are some things about which we know, and to the future there can be no uncertainty; it is not true of all the Apostle in the text reminds us, that we are knowing what shall be on the morrow. And what respect to this is the future uncertain? Namely, it is uncertain which regard shall these things, shall constitute the outward moral discipline of man under the government of God; such as the situation of condition in which we may be placed, the future that may befall us. Here there is indeed the greatest uncertainty, where it may truly be said: we know not what shall be on the morrow. What trials or scenes we may be called to bear, or things it is not for us even to conjecture. Whether the sun will shine brightly on our path, or a cloud, or darkness must rest on our way, whether we shall travel smoothly or easily, or compelled to struggle through various storms of sorrow, whilst our wishes shall be gratified, or whether if we knew the whole, we should deem it desirable or important to be gratified, whether our plans shall be accomplished. Indeed, the sheet of a thousand mischances, whether our enterprizes the increase of prosperity, of pleasures shall be successful, or not, whether our health, or peace shall be preserved or not, whether our health, or those things, or these, those, or these, are the subjects of uncertainty in the future. And these are the events of objects, whose means as the means of moral discipline are main, on that reason, if this is not other, it cannot be avoidable uncertainty. If we could in every case anticipate what will happen, if we could look into the future only and a prophet's eye, we have a clear vision of the storms before us, the effects would probably be deleterious to our moral improvement. It is the uncertainty itself which creates it is intended to operate, as voluntary discipline of these, since it were no less serviceable than unhealthy to centering of this uncertainty. It affects why these things, whatever we are far from being the most important, it teaches not those whole-time, but varied principles. This, and others, the soul of mankind.
the treasure, such it can carry beyond the grave. There are circumstances, about such uncertainty hangs over the future, are by no means essential to man as a rational animal. We are merely appendages to his existence, not him. man, which he
shape. This may be, are not of vital consequence. You do not know, what the future may bring you riches, or poverty; health, or sickness; of what importance is it, that you think you do know? You are sure that virtue will always be your best friend, no matter what may happen; that the formation of good habits will never or later, on a train of influence for you, that shall destroy eternal, as the times of your life. Such misery will breed in the minds of the habits. This is much more important, knowledge, that the evil can easily be removed. You do not know whether the right of your help will be clear or gone; nor can you know that if you please to the eyes, as the anchor of these times, you will enslave our friends at your greatest need. All that belongs to the outward condition of man is uncertain; as the winds of heaven, all that belongs to the inner spiritual part of man may be calculated, when without the approbation of decent sentiments, we shall enjoy this distinction, remember that what we may have with regard is, the future is greatly more uncertain than what we know has been the nature of that uncertainty, not always to the future, let us now consider what part this should have upon us, as what improvements we should make of the knowledge of this uncertainty, what we know not what shall be in the morning!

One effect of this uncertainty about future events should be to direct our heart to God. When we think on this, reflect that with regard to what is coming we are as ignorant as all infants, how should we bow down with a sense of obligation, when that being who only knows the future doth hide all things in mystery? We do remember, that there are as many things as there are in the present, and you are not ourselves aware, that we are cast in an ocean, where we do not whether the winds may change, or anywhere. Where accidents are thick, it is sometimes to think, how should we save our heeds in unwielded confidence to that All Power, whose arm alone is mighty to save, whose power alone is able to rescue. So in all we call to mind how uncertain is, whether there are bound to us by the ties of nature, affection, the friendship of God? It leaves ourselves in that belief, the friendship of God, to leave ourselves in that belief. God's who can never fail, the tie of their love is more than a time of
chance can rend a webinar. It is certainly a habit of great importance to our own happiness to connect the future with the idea of God, the idea of a Being, to whom all times present are alike, who has guided, who watches over his children of the human family in all ages past, and in all ages to come, when Government and its laws become the happiness of his subjects. The dearest habit of mind is the only thing that can always come as near becoming the victims of change as near.

It is like the stars to the moon, to the ocean, who so long as he lives, that an event can stand without fear; so long as the dearest man keeps his foot in water, be proceeds, in his course resembling, though he knew not where the next step will cause may lead him. When we lay out our plans for the future, upon our purposes with a view to accomplish certain ends, it should always be done with a humble reliance to the will of God. So that we may end to enjoy all the good we may have or do this is that. It is the simplest, most of God's...
ne look forward to the future as if that building upon it is like building on the wadding done, that all schemes of plans, of prospects are sometimes built the speck, and all the wings of time brushes away—are we not astonished at the thoughtless congeusement, the vain pretension, with which we reach into the future, of placing all our happiness in the completion of our designs as if we were sure that nothing can happen to threaten or overturn them? When shall we learn, that our true happiness does not consist in things as they may never bring us, or of what it may rob us? And when shall we learn that therefore we ought not to moderate our desires after all worldly good, or place our heart before objects on those treasures, about our there is no uncertainty? Certainly do not mean, that are ought not to provide for the future as carefully as prudent as circumstances will permit. We should do all means make this provision. But, has not left the future so entirely uncertain as to take away every motive to action; if we were to act down in the future, would, because we know not what shall be in the mean-while, how completely want of negligence, do we diagnose the aim of industry of enterprise of sound a must persistent corruption of stagnation among all classes of society? The same inculcates any such contempt for the things of this world, as to make man independent of them, is an enemy to some of the real true interests of man. There are higher and better things; but this does not have that these are of no importance. Think not, therefore, it is carelessnes, it is prime time to
the joy and all good in the minds and memories of things, the frame romantic schemes, of give up good, do let the journey projects. Will you become addicted and, you, and open up for a moment, calculate, conjecture, that there is one more that the things, who are seen are eternal. There is the only, where is the sense, where is the sound, in that any one whole happiness, or object, the can never know, our lives, and hence certainly to attempt, where the chance is disaster, consequently for misery, in very many cases be comes almost a certainty? If you were about to make a voy- age, would you spend your time in idle or unworthy, or
gustures about the winds of the weather for days or months
to come, or make yourself anxious about what you could
neither know nor control. Would it not rather induce
the provisions you might want to make these preparations
who would be of advantage to you at your landing? And
it should be in the voyage of life. We should not spend
all our adventures dear to us, those entered into with
future and it will never be given man to know. What
should be mainly connected with these heavenly treasures,
our love cannot correct it, or our time alone have our power. We are now, my sons, standing at the begin-
nings of a new year. While therefore you are gaining in
the future, visions of happiness and success are floating be-
fore you within the bounds of this year, you are calculat-
ing in the game of life. If pleasures of the sacrifices
shall have an upper hand, peace. I beseech you, for a moment,
somehow that you are on immovable and accountable being
not to link your happiness to these dying, uncertain
things. That the life of them shall have you an wrested
ness of despair, use the world, as not abasing it, for the
fashion of this world passeth away? Lay your plans
d from your purposes with as much dispatch as shall as
you please. But after all do not depend on these kinds
d of purposes; take a more firm, of these you can live without
them. From day to day, from month to month, lean to
moderate your love of the world, strengthen your love
of higher, better things... Do not say: "Today or tomorrow
I will go into such a city, and continue there a year or two, I
will get gain;" no, but remember that you know
not what shall be in the morrow, say rather, "if still,
will, we will live. So do this or that...

These musts are a few of the lessons we should learn
from the uncertainty of all human things. As to the
years calls us, to remember serious reflections. Can
the last year taught us so as not to look with a serious
and worth for a little time is then announced among
during that short space of deaths have occurred in this
town. This is certainly a very uncommon mortality in propor-
tion to the population; it is 15 more than the average
rate of deaths in this place for 12 years past. And the
and not entire in the number. Why was not it, indeed it
ought here to tell you how many there died, number twenty
While you are still so young that it is God, taken
for some days or even weeks, that we are looking
for in this age to come with many good things, perhaps
with many falsehoods, let us strive the more and the more
to lead the vanities with true love around us, so that
whether this year be as last or are the same little is counted
many more, whatever events it may be are led to less
though, whether as ever should go better at once, or we all
presumably fall asleep in the arms of old age, are many
less the prepared is improved, so that we may so pass through
things temporal as finally to obtain the sphere of things
eternal. —

Jan. 1822.
Write Him who holdeth our souls in life or suffereth not our feet to be moved, we would again present our tribute of praise. Then art God not man; thy days are not as ours, neither are thy years as the years of man. While then art without beginning or end, without limits or change, our lives are as a vapor, not endureth for a little time & then vanisheth away. We are strangers & pilgrims on earth as all our fathers were. Having finished their brief period, they disappeared from among their brethren, we are hast'ly following them to that hidden place where all rest together.  O give us grace to make a right improvement of the uncertainty of all future events, as we know not what shall be in the mean time, may we direct our hearts to thee, trust in thy providence, be resigned to thy will; may we live above the world, unagitated by the things of time & sense.  When we look back on the past years, reflect how many have gone to the bounds of death, while we are yet spared, may we receive solemn instructions from the hand of Providence.  Again O God, we would invoke thy blessing upon us for the years before us.  Command thy bless
At home, January 6th, 1822, afternoon.

Pray for the inhabitants of this town, let each family go through the works of the husband. Be thy guide of the path of the subject of the soul, of the refuge of the distressed. Doth with me, you those who are destitute of the comforts of life and at the end of this season, as for the heart of reverence therefore there. Be thy guide of support then.