No. 165.

On being offended in X.
Matth. xi. 6. "And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me!"

The text from this passage is taken from the message of John the Baptist to Jesus. John had been thrown into prison for his faithful reproofs of Herod in the gloomy depression of his situation seems to have doubted whether Jesus was the Messiah. The circumstances in which he happens to be placed have a powerful, enacting confidence or destroying hope. The same mind believes or disbelieves, as it is happy or miserable. When John went forth as the herald of the Savior, ardent, fearless of glowing with confidence in that great one who was to come after him, despite everything that was fair and promising, he never doubted for a moment of the authority of claims of Jesus. But when the
sages of a merciless, capricious, tyrannical were fixed upon him, & he was chilled down by the
burdens of a prison, & did not, as perhaps he expected, exert his miraculous power for his relief.
His confidence was shaken, his hopes frustrated, & an hour of despondency he sent to ask of Jesus, at
then he said, 'Shall I come or do we look for another.
Such seems to me the best explanation of this ex-
tordinary message. The answer of Jesus was digni-
fied & affectionate. He pointed to the miracles, to
the blind who had from him received sight, to the lepers who were cleansed,
to the dead who were raised up; in the very front
of these mighty deeds was engraven the evidence
of his divine commission, & to mention them was
the state an irresistible proof. At the close of this
reply our Saviour administers to John a touching &
deicate reproof: 'Blessed is he who is not def-
fended in me.' He thus gently rebuked the weak-
ness of his forsook faith, that unbalanced state
of mind which had put it into the power of misfor-
time, to cast him down from high confidence to despair, and thus too he carries him into to let his mind swing from its fidelity to the kingdom of God.

There was abundant reason for my Lord to introduce the caution contained in the text, at that time, for it was a time, when many were ready precisely persuaded to be offended on him. One, who has an intimate and strong sense of the state of feeling then existing in Judea, will be convinced, that it required no common firmness or fairness to resist the causes of disgust against 1 of his kingdom. One present can have very little conception of the thing; one can only make it familiar by a strong effort to imagine ourselves in a like situation. We may suppose ourselves to have been educated under the most intense influences of peculiar national pride, to have cherished from earliest youth the warmest hopes of then to have this pride broken down is these hopes baffled by one, to whom we earnestly looked for the satisfaction of the one & the fulfillment of the other.
We may suppose that, where we had looked for splendid, we found poverty of lustiness; — instead of a king, an instructor in righteousness; instead of the banner of victory floating in the air, the gentle influences of the Spirit of God descending like a dove; in stead of a sceptre, a hand stretched forth in the invitation, "come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And to the shock of these, of other equally violent contractions, was every Jewish heart exposed, when the Holy One of God came with his gospel of peace. The Greek too found itself not like the systems of their teachers, full of theories, explanations, disputations, — but simple, unpretending, practical. No wonder then, that to them it was foolishness, while to the Jews it was a stumbling block; and no wonder that Jesus warned his followers against being offended in him, and pronounced them blessed, who could resist all that fear and hope and ambition might offer to draw men away from him.
But we may remark here, as in many other cases, that much of the spirit of error remains, while the form of it is changed. Men, even as in ancient times, take offence at the 'yes,' though not in the same way. It is not necessary that we should have the same hope to be disappointed, the same pride to be cast down, as the Jews had, nor the sufferings of persecution to dread as fell upon the first disciples; nor to need the caution of my text: 'Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.' Offence against the 'yes,' unconsciously to ourselves, is very apt to steal into the mind gradually, to produce a practical, though not an avowed, aversion to the religion of Jesus. And this notwithstanding our advantages are superior to those of the people, who first heard the glad tidings of great joy. In their case, every prejudice, every association of feeling was against the 'yes,' every circumstance of worldly interest, plead strongly against their joining the little band of the followers of Jesus. But with us, it is not so. We are born, educated amidst the light and privileges of the true religion. With most of us, the
The earliest and perhaps the strongest associations of reverence are connected with the thin faith. We regard this as that which has enlightened, supported, and blessed our fathers, who have been taught to believe that its influences upon society have been most useful and happy, and which is gained for it by the circumstance that it is the first religion, which demands of gaining attention, at a time when the mind and heart are young, fresh, and elastic. But notwithstanding these and many other points, upon which early links itself to our hearts, it is undoubtedly true, that as we advance in life, we are very apt first to lose the feeling of strong interest in its formal services, and then gradually to regard the whole system as of little importance, perhaps of little truth. We come to that state of mind, in which we deem it enough, if we forbear from indecent outrage upon religion, or it is well if we do not pass still further, of feel justified in indulging a laugh now and then with regard to the most serious truths. And this state of mind is produced not from any reasoning on the subject, but is the result of serious conviction.
of offence against thy God, which occur in the world. Forget the caution of the Saviour, that he is blessed who suffers himself to be offended in him; we too often permit our reverence for divine truth to be broken down by fragments, because we are disgusted with the errors, follies, vices of them themselves.

I cannot now speak of all the causes of offence; but I shall try to elucidate the hearts of as many from the truth as it is in Jesus. I will speak only of such as are more appropriate to the occasion, and circumstances of the present day.

One source of the offence, to many take against religion, may be found in the disputes and contests, as having stated as do now agitate the thin world. They have the effect of leading men to think, or at least to pretend to think, that the whole of religion is uncertain. Whether, who seem equally persons, candid, or learned, are totally opposed to each other respecting the doctrines of the church, how can you expect us, say they, to have a firm conviction of an efficacious persuasion on the subject? If men, who have spent their lives in researches into the sources of information concerning the Scriptures and divine truth,
cannot agree. How can you expect common men, with common attainments, to grasp their faith with a strong hold, or to look with respect on what they are taught to believe? Besides, it will be said, who can regard religion with complacency, when we see men as quarrelsome and vindictive on this sacred subject, as in any other? I acknowledge that there is a specious appearance in this distinction, but wonder not that it has disturbed the minds of many. But it needs scarcely a moment's reflection to discover, that it is no objection to religion, that there have been or may be disputes about it. We should at once see the falsity of this principle, if applied to other subjects. Men dispute about civil government, political rights, the physical laws of nature &c. &c. there is scarcely a province of mental exertion, that is not full, in every direction, of doubts & discussion; but does this prove that there is really nothing in all these things? No one, for a moment, can imagine it. And if so, neither do the disputes about religion, prove that there is nothing in religion. Every man must weep tears of grief over the bitter, angry, controversy, that have rent the robe of the church & shaken the ark.
of God. But he will only cling to that as the mere
faintly felt affectionately, knowing that it cannot be
overthrown. And we should not forget, that the things
about which they dispute are generally things of very
little importance, at most not fundamental. The ques-
tion about the dress, or leave the pure gold untouched,
we have contested, are now contesting, and probably always will
contest about the person, nature, or rank of the Son, a-
bout the natural state of man, about the decrees of
the number to be saved, &c.; but about the great
commandments of love to God, man, the duty of obedi-
ence to the laws, submission to his will, the necessity
of purity of heart and life, or the salvation of mankind
in some form through Christ there is not, there cannot
be any dispute. The truth is after all, that contro-
versies seldom reach the great body of items: they are
principally excited and maintained by such as love to
discuss learning, the power of arguments, of their own,
the mass of people are satisfied by good sense, honesty, and
practically think alike on all subjects of any
importance, however differently they may be class.
to apply that principle, we must consider the great body of the waters below, so that there is in fact much less diversity in among them than the objection supposes. Indeed, if we will the true in its fullest extent, it would not afford the shadow of an excuse for slighting or deserting it. For unless God were supernaturally hand in hand with the intellect into one course, or shape the thoughts of all in the same mould, seal every tongue, restrain every hand, there must be discussions, disputes, the natural consequence of free agency. But what then? Because men either their discordant cries around the altar of God, shall we not listen to the voice from heaven proclaiming glad tidings of great joy? Rather be it from men.

Another very common offence taken against it, withasmow called more particularly to remark, arises from the bad lives of those who profess regard for religion. No plain can mention this subject without heartfelt pain; for, as I am, that no one can think how much religion is injured by its pretended friends, without feeling his hopes for the prosperity of his country...
almost destroyed. But mournful as it may be, we must confess this source of offence exists. There are those, who at some time have professed a regard for religion & promised obedience to its requisitions, yet have afterwards shown that they have forgotten the name by which they are called, & have shut out the influences of it from their hearts. Now when the go. is thus scandalized by its professed friends, when men see these, who have told the world that they respect & reverence religion, as thoughtless, vicious, as other, dishonest, intemperate, profane, or venturing upon actions of a doubtful character, always hovering on the verge of immorality, & itself being brought into disgrace; the cause is condemned for the conduct of these, who expose it. A man distinguish not between the vice of hypocrisy of pretended purity, & itself. This circumstance it cannot be doubted has prevented many from coming to the Lord's table, & keeping the memorial of their Lord. Nothing, it is true, can be more unreasonable, than this way of thinking; but with the views & feelings wh
the great body of people have, it is impossible it should be otherwise. While they see such as are called professors of religion openly or secretly immoral, and careless about the moral welfare of the community in which they live, as other, they at once say to themselves that if religion be so entirely without influence upon these, who profess to hold it, we wish to have nothing to do with it; of the consequence is that its ordinances are despised and neglected. Thus many are offended against the Gospel. This however is doing great injustice to our religion, as it is doing worse than injustice to ourselves, to permit our hearts to be thus influenced. I know I could never to know it, there are many who disgrace the religion they profess. But what then? Can any point me to a figure of God that is not abused in the hands of corrupt and hypocritical men. Our God sends down his blessings in profession upon us, but he does not miraculously interpose to compel us to use them aright. Having made us moral agents, he leaves it to ourselves to use or abuse his bles-
sings. And so too God has given us that blessed gospel, but he does not expect his favor to preserve it from abuse; but leaves it to the moral responsibility of each individual. We do not undervalue other blessings, because they have been misused or turned into sources of corruption. No more the civil liberty the less desirable, because it has been sometimes converted into wild licentiousness and misrule. Why should we subject religion to such an unfair test, as we do not apply to other subjects? The value of any institution is not to be estimated by its influence or want of influence in particular cases, but by its true nature, character, and its effects in general at large. It is not to be condemned, because it has left some men as bad as it found them, but by the truths it inculcates, the hopes it discovers, and it reveals. No one, who is not filled with the spirit of bigotry and hostility against it, can deny that it is adapted to nourish and fulfill the highest virtues of a man and is capable, to supply the immortal soul with the grandest objects, to bind the heart to all that happens in a
God has annexed to well doing. Besides, we are but too apt to suffer our disgust at the vices of others, to lead us to the belief, that our religion has in fact no influence. We overlook all the good which it has done and is continually doing, by affording a resource of consolation to the weak, by mitigating, by elevating the tone of public morals, by carrying the light of divine truth to the humblest as well as the highest. There is a perverted state of the mind, occasioned by disgust and indifference, in which all these good influences are left out of the account, while the good is heavily charged for the vices of some of its friends, it is allowed no credit for the virtues of others. If then, there are any, I fear there are not a few, who have been so disgusted with the bad lives of many professing it, as to have become indifferent or unwilling to join themselves to the church of which it meets at this table, I would say, you do yourselves wrong, do the cause of religion wrong. Why might you not as well refuse to attend public worship, because with
in the walls of the house may be found those whose principles and conduct are at variance with the spirit of religion? If you will attend to the proper spirit, the memorial of anxious presented in these emblems will not be the less precious, affecting as purifying to you, because at the same memorial may he found there, was when the Jes. has no influence, so the bring dishonour on the holy name of the Son. We may need to think that each there are! But let their voices discourage us from attending to a puncture of personal duty. Do not entreat you, suffer your minds to become charged with an unreasonable prejudice, so distorted as to avail itself of an ungrounded excuse for disregarding the last command of the Son, who loved us, of gave himself for us. I know it, then conscience will find herself able to answer for such negligence, built on such a foundation.

So professing thanks this subject is full of admonition & instruction. I wish I could make you feel the importance of its contents presented to you.
The general character of foreign affairs is to make men do what they would not otherwise do. The more you want to do, the more you have to do. The more you have to do, the more you can do. The more you can do, the more you have to do. And so the cycle goes on, increasing and decreasing, until at last the cycle stops, and the world is in a state of peace and contentment.

But at the same time, you must remember that foreign affairs are not mere accidents. They are the result of careful planning and preparation. They are the consequence of deliberate action. They are the outcome of deliberate thought and purpose. They are the expression of the will of the people. They are the work of men and women who have the courage to stand firm and the wisdom to act wisely.

So it is with this country. We are not in a state of peace and contentment. We are in a state of war and conflict. We are in a state of constant struggle. We are in a state of action and reaction. But we are also in a state of hope and promise. We are in a state of new beginnings. We are in a state of great potential. We are in a state of growing strength and power.
written in gold, - of what is more, every letter of it ought to be written on your hearts. It is an
undeniable fact, that in the first ages of xty.
tricks did more to recommend their religion, to
stop their enemies, by their virtues of purity of life
than by any thing else. Their bitterest foes, who
went forth to persecute or exterminate them, gave
a reluctant testimony to their piety, their humbl
ety, their integrity, their good order, their peaceful
disposition. There was a light reflected from their
virtues, that malice could not quench or lessen, that
caused abroad the Gospel conquering - to conquer.
World to God, that we might imitate them in
this; - that we might take away the approach of
the profane is the indifferent! that we might
give to our religion the power of influence, as it
cannot but derive from the bright examples of
its friends; - that we might at once serve the cause
cannot but arise our own souls, - that we might
not repel our fellow men from the church of xty.
divisions & by vice. - My fr. Pentreat you, by your
regard for the Saviour, to consider this. Remember that while you cultivate the habit in your lives the virtues of the plan, you are at the same time recommending your religion to mankind. If you name of character to be tarnished with impurity of sin, you are throwing obstacles in the way of those who hunt for your perhaps would come to the fold of Christ. Blessed be God, among us, that we have retarded by our vices the extension of the Saviour's kingdom. Assist us to exhibit in ourselves the power of the holiness of the Gospel.

At home, Nov. 30, 1822 - forenoon.
At home Friday lecture Nov. 27, 1822.