No. 185.

On moral unconcern.
Amos vii, 1. "Woe to them, that are at ease in Zion."

It is not necessary to say anything of the meaning of this exclamation of the prophet, as it stands in its original connexion. I intend to use it, as descriptive of a state of character of feeling, as is very common in the human world. I mean that state of security and indifference with regard to moral and religious condition of improvement, into which we are so apt to fall. If we examine ourselves, stop short, and turn aside from the bustle of our occupations and pursuits for a few moments, we cannot mistake the state of feeling, toward which we are all inclined. We shall find ourselves, in most cases, settled into a sort of carelessness and unconcern about the character of our minds and hearts, so that we should think impenetrable, perhaps criminal, on other subjects. This is that pernicious ease, to which belongs the woe, with which the prophet pronounces upon those, who are at ease in Zion, it sometimes draws upon us a woe not less bitter, harsh, than that
wh loss the steps of open dark acknowledged vice. There is a strange confusion of want of congruity in the ideas of men as to the objects about which they allow themselves to be ease. They are not at ease about their mortality, prosperity is well being: they are anxious, careful, profound about that: nothing is left unattempted, that may serve to promote it, nothing permitted to stand in the way, which would oppose its progress. So it is with any plans to gratify ambition or to acquire honor. Scattered shall be the compassed for these purposes: a vigilant eye will be kept on the ever varying circumstances, which may have an influence on the ultimate object; all that dexterity of skill can invent, or boldness of prompt new execute, shall be summoned into action, no helplessness will confound, no fatigue discourage: there is no being at ease here. By one means or another, the desired object will be obtained. So it is with those who are captivated by the love of learning; they will almost bid defiance to sleep, or health, refuse are objects of the least importance compared to the discoveries and researches with interest all their powers; in the pursuit of truth and devotion to letters, they know no ease...
fixed with what they have already attained, but are
continually pressing on to wider acquisitions of knowledge
and the discovery of new fields of investigation. These I reckon as in several
cases of things, in which men are not at ease. But, when
we come to the moral and religious state of the heart, it
is generally quite a different case. I'm nothing and
men more at ease. You see there very little of that anxiety
engagements in which are excited by other subjects. There
is a feeling of security with regard to this, where our
selves should deem impudent or unwise in other things.
We are here at ease in Zion, are apt to turn away with
disgust from any one, who would disturb our ease. The
same mind, which has expended all its power in energy in
the common pursuits of life, which is continually agitated by
gladdening hopes, alarming fears, is fit to influence
the ingredients for improvement, ever dissatisfied with the
present & looking forward to something better in the
future. Which is alive to all opportunities, quick to seer
all advantages, which throws around an eager look to des-
cry dangers. It hastens to apply the means of avoiding it.
This same mind, I say, thus ardent and interested, who,
bring to the subject of its moral state & character, and
duly loses all its watchfulness & energy, becomes deplor-

gish, incident, careless, easily satisfied, without thinking at all on the subject, or thinking it quite foolish to be anxious, deeming that enough has already been done, or if not, that there will abundant time to do the rest, sleeping while opportunities and reasons are passing by, that cannot be recalled, fearing no danger, consequently deeming no means of escape. Now this change of interest & feeling in the same individual is a topic of curious enquiry to us, merely as observers of the operations of mind. If of something more than curious enquiry to us, as immortal beings, as candidates for eternity. There are causes, undoubtedly, for so extraordinary a fact, & we shall therefore first advert to a few of the sources of that easy indifference to danger in a moral point of view. In forms so striking a trait in the character of the mass of mankind. One source of this incident, careless disposition is to be found in that propensity of the human mind, towards deception, which drives men from one extreme to another. By this I mean, that because some men are foolishly excited, we are careful to shun all excitement. Disgust with one error leads us to the opposite error. We see this...
exemplified in other things... I think, as strikingly in matters of religion, as in any thing. There are in the community, many men of giddy minds, of few settled principles of action, who are easily set on fire with regard to any subject, of course may become the subjects of a

wretched and blind excitement with regard to religion. They evidently get into a passion with respect to this sacred subject, but very little better than other ambitious and directed passions. In many cases, they imagine themselves the subjects of very heavenly supernatural influences, and have all that spiritual pride whereby preening themselves, the chosen ones of God... They make pretensions, no of course no natural man can allow. They make perhaps confession of sin, but very different from that of the humble publican—"God, be merciful to a sinner!"—it is more like the haughtiness of the Pharisee, who says, "If I thank thee, that I am not as other men are."—They tell how bad they have been, not out of humility, but only to show the world how much better they are now. All their feelings, exercises in religion seem noisy, boisterous, more like a storm, than like that heavenly sunshine, which true religion fills the breast... Now these abuses are in themselves bad enough; but their effects...
on others are yet more lamentable, and these are the effects, to which I at present call your notice. - Other sensible men are apt to be sickened of disgust with such excesses, as at once to the opposite extreme. - Because some deluded persons are passionate about religion, they are determined to have nothing to do with religion at all; because some deceitfully stifle the peculiar favors of heaven, they lay in the looks all the loathsome fruits of spiritual pride, they seem to
opine that favor of God is life, a better than life; if they can but avoid the Pharisaical pretense of exterior righteousness, care very little whether they have any right
reasoners at all; - because some men have a sort of maniacal humility, accuse themselves of crimes wh they never com
mitted, and pretend themselves much worse than they are other, despising this silly mockery, will scarcely acknowl
dge the faults wh they have, or seek to correct them, and with difficulty be persuaded, that it is a duty to make any confession of sin; - because some men are always vio
lent and extravagant in their religious feelings, others think it a virtue to have no feeling on the subject; - because some make long and protracted prayers, others imagine they
avoid the errors by never praying; - in short, because some are afflicted with a disease, an unremittable anguish of spir it, others are wholly at ease in Zion, - or keep it maybe
on the very brink of ruin... Now, must, suffice me to remind you that this is a very dangerous state of mind, because it is very difficult to reach it by any motives, because there will always be abuses of follies enough in society to feed it, if not keep it alive. That it is no less unreasonable than dangerous. When we suffer the errors and extravagancies of others to disgust our minds, as to drive us to an act of total unconcern about our moral welfare, we are not only guilty, but foolish. We do not suffer ourselves to be thus affected in other things... Because, for instance, liberty is abused by some people turned into licentiousness, we certainly do not wish to go to the opposite extreme, to give up our liberty to despotic authority. Yet one might with just as much reason, as we neglect our moral welfare, because others act foolishly about it. Some men are afflicted with a heart-consuming distressing anxiety to amass wealth; yet, you are not so disgusted with this folly, as to neglect making a proper rational provision for the support and welfare of yourselves and your families. Would you despise your laws, because men were for his head a crown of thorns and a crown of thorns; by way of mockery, in a robe of scarlet?... You suppose not. Yet you might, with just as much propriety, as you suffer yourselves to be wholly at ease about the state of your hearts, because you are sick of the dastardly excesses of
your fellow men... It is most unhappy thing to give our
selves up to the influences of that disease, with which
we look on the extravagancies of fellow of our fellow
And let me remind you, it is particularly the danger of
enlightened minds, of the present times, when a more lib-
eral and rational way of thinking prevails among some clas-
ses of society. Let us not. We seek you, be so influenced
by the view of these excesses which we condemn, as to imagine
we are under no obligation to give heed to our moral welfare.

Another source of carelessness about our moral interests
is the idea, that there is always time enough to attend
on them, that it will do as well at one time, as another.
Our moral welfare is a general thing in its nature, de-
manding, it is thought, no particular season, therefore
no particular season is appropriate. 
Too many are the
spirit, if they do not use the language of Solon, 
way for this time, when have a more convenient season,
I will call for thee. 

"Procrastination," he has been well
said, "is the thief of time; years after years it steals till
all are gone. The the mercies of a moment; leaves the last
cares of our eternal scene." Who is there, that doesn't
detect himself in putting off from day to day, from month
to month, from year to year the task of eradicating his
vices, restraining his vicious propensities, scratching
vigilantly over the welfare of his heart. This is one cause, why men are at ease in sin. They do not mean, probably, to die unprepared & unforearmed, but they trust there is yet enough of life left for all the purposes of moral discipline & improvement; & therefore they are easy. Now this habit of putting off what we acknowledge to be a duty, is very irrational. I call it by no worse name: say it is very irrational, for two reasons. In the first place, suppose you have all the future time upon which you calculate; yet, still, if you reason justly, you will find it too dangerous to trust to it. Moral reformations, improvement, are not things, on which you can take up just when you like, without any difficulty, with equal advantage, at all times. They depend very much upon previous habits & states of feeling. After a long & sluggish negligence, attention is not so easily aroused, as you may think. You not only have not been doing nothing all this time; it has not been merely neutral; it has been gradually acquiring an aversion to moral action, a deadness of feeling has grown over it, which is not the awakened or brought to life by a mere seduction or wish. If you have not gone forward, you have been going backwards; when you at last think it time to attend to the state of your heart, you will find that depressing your long neglect, strong chains have been bound around
that it is very difficult to break it in pieces. It may be very easy to do that now, oh it will not be easy tide at a future time; because meanwhile the man is continually losing its strength of its inclination for the cessation of becoming the prey of passions of temptations, that are hostile to moral advancement... Samson burned in the lap of Delilah, was shorn of the locks of his strength... So the man who believes that he may sleep awhile, awake at any time to virtue of holiness, will find that he has refused so long as to have become too weak for the struggle of the labours of virtue; thus he will probably relapse into his numburned; death will overtake him still negligent, still careless, still at ease in sin... But in the 2d place, even this is making a very presumptuous assumption. Who has told you that you can calculate with any confidence in the future?... There is a voice from Scripture, who says, "cast not thyself upon tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."... While the messenger of death is abroad every day executing his commission, even knocking at our door, taking one after another from our circles... who shall be daring enough to promise himself a future time for improvement or reformation?... Who shall dare to say, tomorrow, or next month, or next year, I will set about it.
task of moral improvement in earnest:—when perhaps there is no tomorrow, no next month, no next year for him? Such expectations are surely a most insecure foundation to build our hopes upon: it will be well, indeed, if the rose does not find us, before we imagined ourselves in blossom.

I will mention another source of carelessness with regard to our moral interests: I mean that, which arises from comparing ourselves with others. We look around us, and see them with whom we associate, perhaps, no better than ourselves. We know that we have faults of our own; but then they are very common faults, common to all, so therefore we have no particular cause for alarm. We allow ourselves, it is true, in some indulgences that are not quite right; but so do our neighbors too. Why should we especially feel any anxiety? Or, it may be, the comparison is even to our advantage. We are better perhaps than some of those with whom we associate: we have not so many open vices, although at least a decency of character and a fair reputation, if many sound us seem to have abandoned. We can look upon them, see dashes of spots resting on their name, than any other stain on our own. We can see a want of principle and prevalence of bad habits, of which we cannot be accused.
And yet we observe, that these men whose moral characters we think to be even worse than our own, are not deemed remarkably deficient by the world; and it would be foolishly presumptuous to be more anxious about ourselves, than others are about their condition. We are satisfied with our present attainments, I think that though we might be much better than we are, yet that we are good enough to put us at ease in sin. Nothing can be more pernicious than this way of thinking; reasoning; it goes just far enough to comfort some to make us uneasy, while it leaves our principles as rotten, our motives as bad, our hearts as impure as ever. The standard, by which we judge in such cases, is wholly & totally wrong. It is no matter, whether we are better or worse than our neighbours & companions; they have themselves to answer for; we ourselves; the question is, whether we are as good as we can be thought to be. Let us not take this flattering & delusive persuasion to our hearts; it will be like an odour to all vicious principles, to all high & noble efforts. There is but one standard for us, if that is, the revealed will of God; while we look to that, instead of the standard of the world, we shall never feel at ease.
in Zion, we shall always feel them much more there
is to aspire after, than we have already attained.

I have thus briefly hinted at a small number of the
sources of carelessness, inattention to our moral intents.
And I believe you will think with me, that it is with
great justice, that woe is pronounced upon those other are
at ease in Zion. Nothing is more dangerous than that
satisfaction with our moral state and condition, which is so com-
mon in the world. In this case, contentment is mortification.
We ought to be satisfied with the allotments of provid-
ence: we ought to be contented with our outward condi-
tion, even if it be not such as we could wish; but to
be contented with our present state of virtue, to
be satisfied with what we have already done in obeying
the will of God, in imitating our blessed Saviour, in cher-
ing the spirit of the gospel, in strengthening good prin-
bles, rooting deep good habits, to be satisfied with
any definite degree of attainments in these sacred
hurts; is most dangerous to our moral welfare; it in-
imates that there is a pause in the good work, that
the spirit is falted, the heart cold. How much more
dangerous is it, then, to be satisfied with that total
indifference to our moral welfare, which marks the con-
duct of a large part of mankind, of such as are not only at ease in their skin, but asleep in their sin. The testimony of a good conscience is to be sure, a privilege in
as they who can enjoy it may exert it, because it is the
purest and most exalted pleasure, no man can know. But
it is pernicious to indulge much self-complacency with
regard to our moral state: all the pleasure which natur-
ally flows from virtue and purity, the virtues of ours cer-
tainly have a right to enjoy: but as soon as any sin-
began to feelquiet and satisfied with regard to
the state of his heart, as soon he begins to decline. It
is almost impossible to be too anxious of earnest about
this great point. Men may be too anxious; I mean,
about the trappings of religion, about doctrines of
 ceremonies; but about moral purity they cannot be
too solicitous, about the vital principles of morality
of purity, they cannot be too earnest. We may hold it for
a maxim, that the moment any one becomes satisfi-
ed with himself, at ease with his qualifications for
enjoying the goodness of God, that moment he begins
to go back. His good principles have done worse than
come to a stand; they are tottering on the brink of de-
cline; a few impulses will be apt to push them
"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We are encompassed about with infirmities, therefore have need to be anxious for our moral well-being, not that anxiety, which would make us watchful, despairing, desperate, but which would make us vigilant, keen-sighted, energetic; not that anxiety, which weakens virtue, but that which strengthens it; not that solicitude, which leads us to painful acts of outward penance, but that which helps us to sacrifice our passions and vices on the altar of obedience to the will of God. Not that activity, which made us fling down our cross, but that which makes us industrious in doing good; in imitating the Saviour; not that watchful care, which consists in discerning the faults of others, but that which is quick-sighted to discern our own faults; not that diseased feeling, which would make us mourn, which would carry us from agony to exultation of rapture back again to agony, but that peace of blessedness which every one of us has much need of, no matter
How much depend we are on doing wrong, failing of the
law? the best protection we can have in this world
Stimulating the magnet, that will most surely fix
the wandering heart in firm obedience to its Lord and
Sav. March 1823.

At home. March 23d. 1823. forenoon.
At Mrs. Ripley's July 14. 1823. afternoon.
At Dunstable July 20. 1823. forenoon.
At Spring St. Roxbury. Aug. 3d. 1823. afternoon.
At Concord. Aug. 17th. 1823. afternoon.
At Brookline. Feb. 27. 1824. afternoon.
At Mr. Burnett's April 4th. 1824. afternoon.
At Mr. Parkman's (Boston) Nov. 15th. 1824. afternoon.
At Dr. Lowell's. March 27th. 1825. afternoon.
At Medford. June 19th. 1825. forenoon.
At Norridgewock (Maine) Oct. 13th. 1825. evening.