No. 179.

On Jephthah's vow.
Judges xi. 35. — "And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, alas! my daughter!"

Such was the feeling exclamation of an agonized father, whose rashness had brought him into as distressing a situation as the heart can conceive. The story of Jepthah's vow is familiar to every one who reads the Bible. The book of Judges, in which the history of this warrior is recorded, is one of the most remarkable in the Old Testament. It gives us the narrative of a singular period of the Jewish history, a period when anarchy, confusion, or irreligion seem to have prevailed universally. The institutions of Moses, as in the preceding books, had been so minutely detailed as to be apparently so firmly established, seem to have been in this age of modern barbarity, entirely neglected and forgotten. We find scarcely a vestige left of the old forms. The glory of the laws of the great legislator had faded away, and scarce a faint ray of the former splendor reached to that time of darkness. We hear nothing of the sites of ceremonies so exactly adjusted...
...nothing in short of the religion of Moses. But
since this, there seems to have been no regular civil go-
vernment. It was a time of violence and terror, when any one
who could distinguish himself by feats of strength, de-
terity, or bravery, became the object of this brutality to have
a leader; still he was removed by death or capture or disgrace.
And when these chieftains were no authority in the manner
were made use of a new warrior. The books of judges are
fact a history of the famous heroes during the barbarous
and cultivated times of their commonwealth. Many of the acts
improvements of life appear to have been unknown to the
life in the order of nature. Of his early
life Smith ignorance. We know not
that he became an object of persecution to his brother,
us, for he was not of legitimate birth. If that after this he took refuge in the land
of So, as the history says, vain men were gathered to him, i.e., able, lawless men, who probably chose him for
their leader, a leader in a wrong manner, as Mende is accus-
dated to those who in their way the means of support.
In this barbarous state, the men lived, till he was
called forth to the defence of his country. He had prob-
ably become famous for courage and martial skill. This in
the hour of danger all eyes were turned upon him, and
Ammonites made war as in the children of Israel. When
this puncture they seem to have been destitute of a chief;
the elders of the people went to Joseph, and said,
...to head their forces and fight the battles. After reminding
them of the inhumanity and wrong they had shown
them, and driving him from home, he engaged to give
them advice, that if he should be successful he should have
the rank and authority of their chief. They made this
promise, and prepared themselves to lead them against the enem-
y having previously sent an embassy, both on that offer
to demonstrate with the Ammonites. It was at this
time that he made the rash vow, the consequence
of which were so dreadful. He made a solemn promise to his
villagers, saying, "If thou shalt without fail deliver the
children of Ammon into my hands, then shall I
bring whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house
to meet me, when I return in peace from the children
of Ammon. Shall surely be the Lord, and all offer a
sacrifice for a burnt offering." Besides the terrors of this
vow, there is something in this making a stipulated
with the Deity, who discovers the most noble grammar of thinking, much however as has always characterized the infant's barbarous state of many people. Japheth was to have had ideas of his God, very little superior to those of the Pagan nations. He regarded him as a local, territorial Deity, who might be pleased over by the present of sacrifices to attain that assistance of protection which otherwise he would not afford. Having thus, according to the rude notions of the age, secured the favor of the Deity, he gave battle to the Ammonites, and gained a complete victory. They were routed and frustrated on every side, twenty of their cities fell into the hands of the conqueror. And new haste was on the accomplishment of his vow. He had promised to consecrate to God whatsoever should first come forth to meet him from his house on his return. From this promise he religiously believed, he could not recede. Nor let us accompany this warrior to his home, imagine what must have been his feelings when the first object he met was the door of his house, saw his only daughter, the pride of his heart, the child of his hopes. After the hard fought struggle of battle was over, he doubtless anticipated the welcome of affection at home, as well as the need of some through the nation. The stern chieftain returned from the battle, glorified in the acclamations of the gratitude of a people also, he had gallantly rescued from among their own falls for. This heart was bounding with exultation at the prospect before him. By one brilliant achievement, he exalted himself from the condition of a fugitive outcast to that of a hero, chief of his nation. The wreath of honor would be wven to his brows, a bemaage would follow his footsteps. Perhaps never is the heart so fully the happier, as when we have done a great deed, for an understanding are uniting the offering of thanks. Such doubt less was the state of Japheth's feelings. And sure here he had a bright, only daughter, the light of his family, young, lovely, affectionate; they who tremored her, the heart of a father no charge to such a daughter, imagine with what feelings in this hour of success, glory, the hero thought of this child. He saw from Aly in her one, who was the continuance of the hero, one of his family, to soothe him with her love, warm
him happy. Yet that daughter was to be the victim of his superstitions. Says the poet, 'The first step to the door is to come near the house of danger.' What wonder, then, that the aged man, in the agony of the moment, sent his daughter away? 'Ah! my daughter, then hast brought me very low,' he said. 'I am one of those that trouble me, and therefore will not return.' Thus generous and patient must have been the struggle he went through. His parental feelings, his strong conviction of duty, enforced as it was by Jewish superstition, in one hand was the life of this beloved child, in the other the decision to kill a king on these days of tremendous consequence, not to be neglected with impunity. The brunt of the moral distress, such but a few moments before expanded, though spread so far and wide, must have been with conflicting emotions, the agony of the battle field more trifles compared with the agony of a struggle of a parent's heart. But at last the father yielded to the physician, to the hero resolved to sacrifice his daughter. With strong savage adherence to what he falsely imagined to be a stern duty, he said

Upon the altar one who must have been embraced by the ties of nature, but by youth, innocence, and love. That this dreadful sacrifice was just, there can be no doubt, though some have attempted to explain the history in such a manner, as to make it appear that Jephthah did not in fact offer up his daughter as a burnt offering. But the account seems to speak for itself too clearly, to have the reality of the awful deed denied. And much as the deed shocked us in this age of refined feeling, it is altogether true, that at that time not only Jephthah himself, but the contemporaries deemed the sacrifice of this daughter a necessary, unavoidable duty. There was a superstitions dread, which required a rigorous fulfillment of vows, lest the consequences be less than mightnam, no matter how cruel or bloody. A similar instance occurs in the remote ages of Egyptian story. The leader of the forces assembled to revenge Toph was induced by innumerable prayers, by the invocation of the gods, to burst under the ties of a father's heart, to devote his daughter, as a burnt offering, to appease an offended god. In fact, then the similar sacrifices are to be ascribed to the character of the times, not to the character of their
the cruel state of the virgin daughter, how are we not bound to dwell on this, and to raise the mind above the agonizing delusion
of the wretched father?

Some considerations of a general moral nature may be drawn from this story,

1. We cannot feel a degree of respect for the firmness of mind exhibited by Jephthah notwithstanding the bloody

Deed, to which it led him. It was a true expression of the sense of what he believed to be duty, though that duty

was attended with most unhappy errors. He thought him-

self called when by God to sacrifice his daughter, if she

were he did it, though it must have been with a breaking

heart and a spirit full of anguish. We cannot approve

the state of mind, which brought him to commit the fa-

tal deed—but we are compelled to admire the unflinched

firmness, with which he followed not even false corrup-

tions of duty... And this part of his character appears in a

strange light, in proportion to the dreadful destitution

of nature, of the consequences in which it involved him,

from on he did not drink. The more painful was

the sacrifice, the more steadfastness of soul it required.

There is something like a commentary added, owing to the

fatal delusion by reflecting on the strength of pure...
In this view of the character of the deluded spirit, I have in mind a striking lesson of the power and efficacy of that firmness of mind which produces a decided, unswerving adherence to what is believed to be duty. Now, this is a trait of character that is often attended with bad as well as good effects. But in itself it is of great value, growing can produce a course of en masse action without it. It may be employed to carry into operation false or delusive principles; then it may become the watchword, but forceful instrument of misery and folly. What is worse, it may be enlisted on the side of vice, then it may inculcate a mighty strength and for the most part, God save us! tends to the worst, a greater curse than a wicked man within. In these cases, it is the principle, not the energy with which they are acted upon, that should be the object of blame. Look into history or among our own experiences, you will find that the men who have produced great effects, who have given impulses that will be felt for ages, who have written their names indelibly on the record of human events and improvements, are not the men who have made long calculations, fluctuated from this consideration to that. I have dealt with an anxious eye to consequences, but the man, who by some means or other have come to a conviction, right or wrong, that certain things should be done, then have had the firmness to carry out their convictions into action without trembling or turning aside. It is true, this faithful adherence to convictions may sometimes wear a stern, unremovable appearance, but nothing very great can be done without it. The work on the seashore may look deathly fascinating, but the waves beat against it in vain, if it is impeded by the tumult of around. But a man, who stubbornly clings to what he believes to be right, without regard to consequences, is agitated by all these considerations, calculations, apprehensions, which make the multitude of weak minds around him wring from one course to another, seek by temporary compromises to solve the interests of the occasion. This quality is undoubtedly sometimes caused to a vicious extremity, deserves no better name than obstinacy. But this is merely saying, that like all our good qualities, it is liable to abuse. It is certainly a question of caution, perhaps not easily settled, whether we are bound in any case without a single exception to act according to our convictions; or if we take the affirmative of this question, instances may be stated in which conscience may be such a devoted state as to make the consequences start...
Nothing is more terrible in the mind of man than the fear of God. But at any rate, it may be laid down as a most valuable general rule, that we should do what we believe to be our duty to do. A great deal of the vice and weakness of men arises from a fear of acting, as they are convinced they ought to act. There is a furious tenacity, accompanying spirit, which, though to the eye of the indifferent observer, it may give one an appearance of peace, is very apt to destroy this virtue. There is in the character of every man, or if it sometimes becomes a weakness, is yet necessary to those who have permanent peace of conscience, to become the rallying point of the confidence and respect of society. It is at any rate better than to be continually harassed with a wavering,ickle disposition, which the very often leaves a man without the assurance of others. He who is always calculating in consequence, always asking himself what this is the occasional, when he believes to be the duty, will do, how it will appear, what the world will say of it, may be almost sure that he is on a path, which in the end bring him to contempt, as well as to weakness of character. The true disciple of the age is much more likely at last to secure even the good opinion of others, for men know where he may always be found. They know that he lives with a regard to every event, to be sure to triumph. With him there is but one step on any case of this is from conviction to action. This spirit is expressed in the memorable words of John: "Serve me this day whom I shall choose.

2. There is another circumstance in the case of Isaiah which is much more remarkable, this fault is to be atonished to the extent of the age, than that of the man. But it was a most lamentable want of mind, that stand as a monitory lesson to us. He had no more to make such a vow, or to reason to think himself under any indispensable obligation to fulfill it. From this we can see the subject, let us learn, that if it is our duty to follow the promptings of conscience, it is necessary to be true to our own sense of right should be our own rule, and it is of vital importance that the sense of right should be clear and pure. Without this, the story of Isaiah is proof enough, that evil consequences may ensue. Had his conscience been enlightened, the child of this merciful affection might have been spared to both a class his old age. It is a melancholy instance
of that obliquity, it leads one to believe that by not fulfilling their own, they can lay themselves under an obligation to God, from which they should otherwise be exempt. It is improper in any case to make vows to God; for if the thing we promise be in its own nature just, obligatory, we are equally bound to do it without any vow. If it be in its own nature wrong or improper, no vow can make it obligatory or acceptable to God. Our putting ourselves under forced engagements cannot alter the nature of our acts of actions. We may make promises to our fellow-men, and even make them, we are equally bound to fulfill them, because we have excited hopes of expectations on the part, on which it is our duty to satisfy. But no such thing can take place with regard to the Deity. Man can excite no hopes of expectations in his Maker; if it is something more than foolish to promise the All, that one will do certain things, as if he had not a right to every good thing we can do without our promises. It seems to me little else than impious, this to bring ourselves into a sort of contract with the Sovereign Rules of heaven and earth, to make pledges, agreements with him whose eye ever dwells its glance through all the recesses of all our hearts, or who has placed us here, as subjects under his moral government, to do all that we can do the best that we can, in his service. It is true, men in the present day, are not liable to such obliquities as that of fifth. But the same general mistake, under various forms of modifications, is more or less prevalent. One may imagine that, when they have promised themselves, as they once, to do any thing, especially in religious affairs, they are still bound to adhere to their solemn promise, though it is painful or disagreeable. This proceeds in the supposition that their own promise has altered the whole case; I made that obligatory which before was not so. This surely is a great mistake, as there is but one party concerned, there can be no obligation. Not that I wished any, we ought for slight causes to abandon our resolutions; nothing weakens character more effectually than this. Both the cases to which I allude are these, in all things of very little importance are many, relied on account of the force of an imaginary promise to ourselves, or where persons are prevented from doing a deal of good, or from securing much innocent pleasure to an edge of foolish expectations, nor after all very probably is it little better than the binding ourselves by all means, but is not make promises engagements truly. For what we do, the day of repentance, with gradually come, one, as
should once the consequences, in which we are involved, become felt, like prisoners, sheltered from fidelity to false convictions or from real indispensable obligations, to say, "I have paid my mouth; I cannot go back." A dark philosophy in science may be almost as bad as a course of guilty passions.

If we have voluntarily suffered ourselves to fall into the belief, that it is our duty to do things, which in fact are so criminal, then we are answerable for all the bad consequences, which flow from such a state of mind; that we may think we are doing right; but as the dummy man is answerable for all the deeds of folly or violence he may commit, though for the time he has not the thing of this reason. The great crimes consist in getting into such a state, when we might have avoided it; with in the blame belonging to this crime is included the blame of all the actions that flow from it. Let us then, not only cherish the spirit of firmness in doing what we believe to be duty, but let us seek to have the most clear of enlightening views of what our duty is. Some take here is like throwing poison into the fountain, all the streams that issue from it will be tainted. Our convictions should be the source of our actions; if the convictions then are false or unpracticed, the actions will be mischievous; such as every good man must, from an exacting energy of forms of justice, we may bring to execute the dictates of a delusive conscience, with but give us greater success of crimes in doing evil, I think that we can follow our mistakes; convictions with a spirit out of a better cause.

I cannot close this subject without bringing before you the teaching of beautiful parts, of the daughters of this acts in this wondrous scene. It is a fine specimen of unquestioning submission to a cruel fate from a conscientious and unavoidable duty. Not a single man escapes in life, though in the gray's bright morning of life, he was to fall in action to the rush of a father's arm. With the most abiding conformity of obedience, she submits to the devil's subtle motion of the chief in my fate; if that fate be not yet done into this, do not me according to that which has preceded. Out of the mouth of the lion, "You best from me no approaching speaks, "a single word of emanation of fear. All the feelings of a time, been accorded, as they must have been in a heart, newly opening itself to the good goodness of life, were at once down in an overwhelming sense of what she owed to her father to her religious convictions, mistaken though they were. She resists only that she may have a short word to her own, until her fate with her companions in the rest of the mountain. There is much of much greatness in the conduct of this master; under the most a gentle.
resigned demeanour. It comes upon me like a dream of the
filial piety, forming a strong contrast to the unkind
manners of the age in which this lovely daughter was cast
we reflect, that at the moment when life must have
been dearer than ever to her, when her father had
flushed with the glory of victory, when she herself
about to be ambushed, she was to be his friend, or
future was all glowing with bright visions of hens
joy. That at that moment crowded eagle and
gave up her life without a sigh or a tear, because she
don't have her father violate his own... when we reflect in the
must consider her as a heroine, to whom history furnishes few
hills. She dared to die, but she dared not to be disobedient
to her father's will.

The review of this dark picture of antiquity, may, forcibly suggest
how thankful we should be for the pure and holy light of this
technology has relieved us from all superstitions of the day.
few hero. Let's free from all visionary views of the service of
him. In a fair age, in a fair country, if that inhuman sacrifice
could have been performed... It is our happiness to worship a God, who do not
require us to tear ourselves the best affections of the heart to do
age to find his favor by making ourselves wretched; the true
the altar of this holiest service to God, must be his own heart; the
best incense he can offer will be the incense of a good life. Paired,
affections purified, soul opening for glory.

At home, Feb 9th, 1823 - afternoon.