

SERMON CXVIII.

ON A SINGLE EYE.

“ If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. Therefore, if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !” Matthew vi. 22, 23.

1. “SIMPLICITY and purity,” says a devout man, “are the two wings that lift the soul up to heaven: Simplicity, which is in the intention; and purity, which is in the affections.” The former of these, that great and good man, Bishop Taylor, recommends with much earnestness, in the beginning of his excellent book, “Rules of Holy Living and Dying.” He sets out with insisting upon this, as the very first point in true religion, and warns us, that, without this, all our endeavours after it will be vain and ineffectual. The same truth, that strong and elegant writer, Mr. Law, earnestly presses in his “Serious Call to a Devout Life,”—a treatise which will hardly be excelled, if it be equalled, in the English tongue, either for beauty of expression, or for justness and depth of thought. And who can censure any follower of Christ, for laying ever so great stress on this point, that considers the manner wherein our Master recommends it, in the words above recited?

2. Let us attentively consider this whole passage, as it may be literally translated. “The eye is the lamp of the body:” And what the eye is to the body, the intention is to the soul. We may observe, with what exact propriety our Lord places simplicity of intention between worldly desires and worldly cares; either of which directly tend to destroy it. It follows, “If thine eye be single,” singly fixed upon God, “thy whole body,” that is, all thy soul, “shall be full of light,”—shall be filled with holiness and happiness. “But if thine eye be evil,”—not single, aiming at any other object, seeking anything beneath the sun,—“thy whole body shall be full of darkness. And if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that

darkness !” how remote, not only from all real knowledge, but from all real holiness and happiness !

3. Considering these things, we may well cry out, “How great a thing is it to be a Christian ; to be a real, inward, scriptural Christian, conformed in heart and life to the will of God ! Who is sufficient for these things ?” None, unless he be born of God. I do not wonder that one of the most sensible Deists should say, “I think the Bible is the finest book I ever read in my life ; yet I have an insuperable objection to it : It is *too good*. It lays down such a plan of life, such a scheme of doctrine and practice, as is far too excellent for weak, silly men to aim at, or attempt to copy after.” All this is most true, upon any other than the scriptural hypothesis. But this being allowed, all the difficulty vanishes into air. For if “all things are possible with God, then all things are possible to him that believeth.”

4. But let us consider, First, the former part of our Lord’s declaration,—“If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light ;” Secondly, the latter part,—“If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness ;” and, Thirdly, the dreadful state of those whose eye is not single,—“If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness !”

I. 1. And, First, “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” If thine eye be single ; if God be in all thy thoughts ; if thou art constantly aiming at Him that is invisible ; if it be thy intention in all things, small and great, in all thy conversation, to please God, to do, not thy own will, but the will of Him that sent thee into the world ; if thou canst say, not to any creature, but to Him that made thee for himself, “I view thee, Lord and End of my desires ;”—then the promise will certainly take place : “Thy whole body shall be full of light ;” thy whole soul shall be filled with the light of heaven,—with the glory of the Lord resting upon thee. In all thy actions and conversation, thou shalt have not only the testimony of a good conscience toward God, but likewise of his Spirit, bearing witness with thy spirit, that all thy ways are acceptable to him.

2. When thy whole soul is full of this light, thou wilt be able (according to St. Paul’s direction to the Thessalonians) to “rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks.” For who can be constantly sensible of the

loving presence of God without "rejoicing evermore?" Who can have the loving eye of his soul perpetually fixed upon God, but he will "pray without ceasing?" For his "heart is unto God without a voice, and his silence speaketh unto him." Who can be sensible that this loving Father is well-pleased with all he does and suffers, but he will be constrained "in everything to give thanks?" knowing that all things "work together for good."

3. Thus shall "his whole body be full of light." The light of knowledge is, doubtless, one thing here intended; arising from "the unction of the Holy One, which abideth with him, and teacheth him of all things,"—all the things which it is now necessary for him to know in order to please God. Hereby he will have a clear knowledge of the divine will in every circumstance of life. Not without the means, but in the use of all those means which God has furnished him with. And, walking in this light, he cannot but "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." He will continually advance in all holiness, and in the whole image of God.

II. 1. Our Lord observes, Secondly, "If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." If it be evil, that is, not single, (for the eye which is not single is evil,) "thy whole body shall be full of darkness." It is certain there can be no medium between a single eye and an evil eye; for whenever we are not aiming at God, we are seeking happiness in some creature: And this, whatever that creature may be, is no less than idolatry. It is all one, whether we aim at the pleasures of sense, the pleasures of the imagination, the praise of men, or riches; all which St. John comprises under that general expression, "the love of the world." The eye is evil if we aim at any of these, or indeed at anything under the sun. So far as you aim at any of these, indeed, at anything beneath God, your whole soul, and the whole course of your life, will be full of darkness. Ignorance of yourselves, ignorance of your real interest, ignorance of your relation to God, will surround you with impenetrable clouds, with darkness that may be felt. And so long as the eye of your soul rests upon all or any of these, those will continue to surround your soul, and cover it with utter darkness.

2. With how many instances of this melancholy truth,—that those whose eye is not single are totally ignorant of the nature of true religion,—are we surrounded on every side! How many,

even of good sort of people, of them whose lives are innocent, are as ignorant of themselves, of God, and of worshipping him in spirit and in truth, as either Mahometans or Heathens ! And yet they are not any way defective in natural understanding : And some of them have improved their natural abilities by a liberal education, whereby they have laid in a considerable stock of deep and various learning. Yet how totally ignorant are they of God and of the things of God ! How unacquainted both with the invisible and the eternal world ! O why do they continue in this deplorable ignorance ? It is the plain effect of this,—their eye is not single. They do not aim at God ; he is not in all their thoughts. They do not desire or think of heaven ; therefore, they sink deep as hell.

3. For this reason they are as far from holiness as they are from valuable knowledge. It is because their eye is not single, that they are such strangers to vital religion. Let them be ever so accomplished in other respects ; let them be ever so learned, ever so well versed in every branch of polite literature ; yea, ever so courteous, so humane ; yet if their eye is not singly fixed on God, they can know nothing of scriptural religion. They do not even know what Christian holiness means ; what is the entrance of it, *the new birth*, with all the circumstances attending it : They know no more of this, than do the beasts of the field. Do they repent and believe the Gospel ? How much less are they “renewed in the spirit of their minds,” in the image of him that created them ? As they have not the least experience of this, so they have not the least conception of it. Were you to name such a thing, you might expect to hear, “Much religion hath made thee mad :” So destitute are they, whatever accomplishments they have beside, of the only religion which avails with God.

4. And till their eye is single, they are as far remote from happiness as from holiness. They may now and then have agreeable dreams, from

Wealth, honour, pleasure, or what else
This short-enduring world can give :

But none of these can satisfy the appetite of an immortal soul. Nay, all of them together cannot give rest, which is the lowest ingredient of happiness, to a never-dying spirit, which God created for the enjoyment of himself. The hungry soul, like the busy bee, wanders from flower to flower ; but it goes off

from each, with an abortive hope, and a deluded expectation. Every creature cries, (some with a loud and others with a secret voice,) "Happiness is not in *me*." The height and the depth proclaim to an attentive ear, "The Creator hath not implanted in me a capacity of giving happiness: Therefore, with all thy skill and pains, thou canst not extract it from me." And indeed the more pains any of the children of men take to extract it from any earthly object, the greater will their chagrin be,—the more secure their disappointment.

5. "But although the vulgar herd of mankind can find no happiness; although it cannot be found in the empty pleasures of the world; may it not be found in learning, even by him that has not a single eye? Surely

Content of spirit must from science flow;
For 'tis a godlike attribute to know."

By no means. On the contrary, it has been the observation of all ages, that the men who possessed the greatest learning were the most dissatisfied of all men. This occasioned a person of eminent learning to declare, "A fool may find a kind of paradise upon earth," (although this is a grand mistake,) "but a wise man can find none." These are the most discontented, the most impatient, of men. Indeed, learning naturally effects this: "Knowledge," as the Apostle observes, "puffeth up." But where pride is, happiness is not; they are utterly inconsistent with each other. So much ground there is for that melancholy reflection, wherever true religion is not,—

Avails it then, O Reason! to be wise?
To see this mournful sight with quicker eyes?
To know with more distinction to complain,
And have superior sense in feeling pain?

III. 1. It remains to consider, in the Third place, our Lord's important question: "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" The plain meaning is, if that principle which ought to give light to thy whole soul, as the eye does to the body; to direct thy understanding, passions, affections, tempers,—all thy thoughts, words, and actions; if this principle itself be darkened,—be set wrong, and put darkness for light. how great must that darkness be! how terrible its effects!

2. In order to see this in a stronger point of view, let us consider it in a few particular instances. Begin with one of no

small importance. Here is a father choosing an employment for his son. If his eye be not single; if he do not singly aim at the glory of God in the salvation of his soul; if it be not his one consideration, what calling is likely to secure him the highest place in heaven; not the largest share of earthly treasure, or the highest preferment in the Church;—the light which is in him is manifestly darkness. And O how great is that darkness! The mistake which he is in, is not a little one, but inexpressibly great. What! do not you prefer his being a cobbler on earth, and a glorious saint in heaven, before his being a lord on earth, and a damned spirit in hell? If not, how great, unutterably great, is the darkness that covers your soul! What a fool, what a dolt, what a madman is he, how stupid beyond all expression, who judges a palace upon earth to be preferable to a throne in heaven! How unspeakably is his understanding darkened, who, to gain for his child the honour that cometh of men, will entail upon him everlasting shame in the company of the devil and his angels!

3. I cannot dismiss this subject yet, as it is of the utmost importance. How great is the darkness of that execrable wretch (I can give him no better title, be he rich or poor) who will sell his own child to the devil, who will barter her own eternal happiness for any quantity of gold or silver! What a monster would any man be accounted, who devoured the flesh of his own offspring! And is he not as great a monster who, by his own act and deed, gives her to be devoured by that roaring lion? as he certainly does (so far as is in his power) who marries her to an ungodly man. “But he is rich; but he has ten thousand pounds!” What, if it were a hundred thousand? The more the worse; the less probability will she have of escaping the damnation of hell. With what face wilt thou look upon her, when she tells thee in the realms below, “Thou hast plunged me into this place of torment. Hadst thou given me to a good man, however poor, I might have now been in Abraham’s bosom. But, O! what have riches profited me? They have sunk both me and thee into hell!”

4. Are any of you that are called Methodists thus merciful to your children? seeking to *marry them well*? (as the *cant* phrase is;) that is, to sell them to some purchaser that has much money, but little or no religion? Is then the light that is in *you* also darkness? Are ye, too, regarding God less than

mammon? Are ye also without understanding? Have ye profited no more by all ye have heard? Man, woman, think what you are about! Dare *you* also sell your child to the devil? You undoubtedly do this (as far as in you lies) when you marry a son or a daughter to a child of the devil; though it be one that wallows in gold and silver. O take warning in time! Beware of the gilded bait! Death and hell are hid beneath. Prefer grace before gold and precious stones; glory in heaven, to riches on earth! If you do not, you are worse than the very Canaanites. They only made their children pass "through the fire" to Moloch. You make yours *pass into the fire* that never shall be quenched, and to stay in it for ever! O how great is the darkness that causes you, after you have done this, to "wipe your mouth, and say you have done no evil!"

5. Let us consider another case, not far distant from this. Suppose a young man, having finished his studies at the University, is desirous to minister in holy things, and, accordingly, enters into orders. What is his intention in this? What is the end he proposes to himself? If his eye be single, his one design is to save his own soul, and them that hear him; to bring as many sinners as he possibly can out of darkness into marvellous light. If, on the other hand, his eye be not single, if he aim at ease, honour, money, or preferment; the world may account him a wise man, but God says unto him, "Thou fool!" And while the light that is in him is thus darkness, "how great is that darkness!" What folly is comparable to his folly!—one peculiarly dedicated to the God of heaven, to "mind earthly things!" A worldly Clergyman is a fool above all fools, a madman above all madmen! Such vile, infamous wretches as these are the real "ground of the contempt of the Clergy." Indolent Clergymen, pleasure-taking Clergymen, money-loving Clergymen, praise-loving Clergymen, preferment-seeking Clergymen,—these are the wretches that cause the order in general to be contemned. These are the pests of the Christian world; the grand nuisance of mankind; a stink in the nostrils of God! Such as these were they who made St. Chrysostom to say, "Hell is paved with the souls of Christian Priests."

6. Take another case. Suppose a young woman, of an independent fortune, to be addressed at the same time by a man of wealth without religion, and a man of religion without wealth; in other words, by a rich child of the devil, and a poor child of

God. What shall we say, if, other circumstances being equal, she prefer the rich man to the good man? It is plain, her eye is not single; therefore her foolish heart is darkened; and how great is that darkness which makes her judge gold and silver a greater recommendation than holiness! which makes a child of the devil, with money, appear more amiable to her than a child of God, without it! What words can sufficiently express the inexcusable folly of such a choice? What a laughing-stock (unless she severely repent) will she be to all the devils in hell, when her wealthy companion has dragged her down to his own place of torment!

7. Are there any of you that are present before God who are concerned in any of these matters? Give me leave, with "great plainness of speech," to apply to your consciences "in the sight of God." You, whom God hath entrusted with sons or daughters, is your eye single in choosing partners for them? What qualifications do you seek in your sons and daughters in law?—religion or riches? Which is your first consideration? Are you not of the old Heathen's mind,

*Quærenda pecunia primum,
Virtus post nummos?*

Seek money first: Let virtue then be sought.

Bring the matter to a point. Which will you prefer? a rich Heathen, or a pious Christian?—a child of the devil, with an estate; or the child of God, without it?—a lord or gentleman, with the devil in his heart; (he does not hide it, his speech bewrayeth him;) or a tradesman, who, you have reason to believe, has Christ dwelling in his heart? O how great is that darkness which makes you prefer a child of the devil to a child of God! Which causes you to prefer the poor trash of worldly wealth, which flies as a shadow, to the riches of eternal glory!

8. I call upon you more especially who are called Methodists. In the sight of the great God, upwards of fifty years I have ministered unto you, I have been your servant for Christ's sake. During this time I have given you many solemn warnings on this head. I now give you one more, perhaps the last. Dare any of you, in choosing your calling or situation, eye the things on earth, rather than the things above? In choosing a profession, or a companion for life, for your child, do you look at earth or heaven? And can you deliberately prefer, either for

yourself or your offspring, a child of the devil with money, to a child of God without it? Why, the very Heathens cry out,

O curvæ in terras animæ, et cœlestium inanes !

O souls, bow'd down to earth, strangers to heaven!

Repent, repent of your vile earthly-mindedness: Renounce the title of Christians, or prefer, both in your own case and the case of your children, grace to money, and heaven to earth! For the time to come, at least, let "your eye be single," that your "whole body may be full of light!"

BRISTOL, September 25, 1789.

SERMON CXIX.

ON WORLDLY FOLLY.

"*But God said unto him, Thou fool!*" Luke xii. 20

BUT one of these fools is commonly wiser in his own eyes "than seven men that can render a reason." If it were possible for a Christian, for one that has the mind which was in Christ, to despise any one, he would cordially despise those who suppose "they are the men, and wisdom shall die with them." You may see one of these, painted to the life, in the verses preceding the text. "The ground of a certain rich man," says our blessed Lord, "brought forth plenteously." (Verses 16, &c.) "And he reasoned within himself, saying, What shall I do? for I have no room where to bestow my fruits. And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool!" I propose, by the assistance of God,

I. To open and explain these few full words; and,

II. To apply them to your conscience.

I. 1. To open and explain them. A little before, our Lord had been giving a solemn caution to one who spoke to him