

HOW TO USE THIS WORLD:

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN ZION CHURCH, MONTREAL,

JANUARY 16, 1859,

BY THE PASTOR,

HENRY WILKES, D.D.



Montreal:

PRINTED BY JOHN LOVELL, ST. NICHOLAS STREET.

1859.

EXPLANATION.

A respected Member of the Church having desired the MS. of the discourse delivered on the evening of last Lord's day, that he might have it printed for private circulation, I have cheerfully placed it in his hands, with the hope and prayer that it may thus be useful. It hardly needs to be stated that it was prepared in the ordinary course of my ministry, without any other idea of publication than the oral.

IL. W.

MOUNTAIN TERRACE,
January 20, 1859.

S E R M O N .

“ And they that use this world as not abusing it.”—1 Cor. 7, 31.

It is apparent from the context that the Apostle is urging the importance of an eminent spirituality in preparation for the end of our time in this life, which, he declares, is short. “ But this I say, brethren : the time is short. It remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing it : for the fashion of this world passeth away.” And yet in doing so, he does not speak evil of marriage, or of weeping over calamities, or of rejoicing at good tidings, or of buying and possessing goods, or of using this world. In relation to the latter, he merely protests against such kind of use as amounts to abuse. Elsewhere we have the injunction : “ Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” He had been speaking of not making a brother to offend by our eating or drinking ; but these acts themselves he regarded as necessary, and to be *regulated* only, not abolished. The same Apostle notes it as “ a departure from the faith, a giving heed to seducing spirits, and a doctrine of devils,”—the “ forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving ; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

In dealing with this subject, we call attention to—

An old and prevalent mistake.

Namely, that there is an essential and ineradicable antagonism between the spiritual interests of man, and all that is connected

with his temporal condition only. Thus the appetites of the body are regarded as mortal foes of the soul; the excursions of the intellect into any region of truth save the strictly religious, is a grievous wandering from its true course; and matters of taste are to be ignored as adverse to a high spirituality.

This false assumption is based on the old pagan error that evil is inherent in matter. The doctrine is older than Christianity, that the true way to ascend to high spiritual elevation is to bring down the body—aye, to abase and injure it; and “to seclude one’s self, as completely as is consistent with existing upon the earth, from all its concerns and interests; and in the undeviating mortification of even the most innocent desires which have the gratification of the senses for their object. The body as well as the world being composed of matter, in which, according to this scheme, evil inheres, both are in themselves utterly and irreclaimably evil, and must be dealt with as such.” Thus the most tender, natural affections were crucified, by the immolation of children in bloody rites to propitiate an offended deity. This crushing of the body, and this lacerating of the heart, in order to save the soul, have prominent place in existing Asiatic idolatries. The Hindoo endeavors to get near his God by inflicting outrage and suffering upon his body; the Hindoo mother worships by casting her infant into the Ganges, to be instant food for hungry sharks. There seems to be allusion to this most prevalent idea of self-abnegation in relation to the body and to the social affections in the prophet’s language: “Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

After the Apostolic age, when error made rapid and sad inroads upon the simplicity and purity of the Church, fasting and celibacy, and retirement from contact with the world, were placed among cardinal virtues. Some of the early fathers are extravagant in their praises of this asceticism. “Cyprian scarcely mentions fasting; but no theme inspires him like virginity. Celibates are with him a sort of spiritual aristocracy, an angelic quire,—souls in white, shining ones.” “These,” he says, “are the flower of the ecclesiastical plant, the beauty and ornament of spiritual grace, a happy produce, a work of praise and honour,

whole and uncorrupt, an image of God corresponding with the sanctity of the Lord, the more illustrious portion of the flock of Christ." The virtue of fasting was also magnified because it was supposed to war against the natural appetite of the body. These poor bodies, in their natural and proper uses, have been made the object of a species of warfare in the name of religion, which exhibits throughout the influence of the idea that matter is under the dominion of an evil spirit.

Just so in literature, and in active participation in the conduct of public affairs, have truly devout men come into conflict with the prejudices of their brethren in the common faith. Profane literature as distinguished from sacred, however pure in its nature and beautiful in its conception,—however large its historical generalizations and correct its narratives,—has been often doubted of by honest and earnest persons, as prejudicial to the soul's health. "The Bible," say they truly, "is an inexhaustible mine of truth; it furnishes a glorious store of all that is sublime in conception and grand in action; and this is enough." We were once ourselves reproached by one of the best of men for troubling ourselves with the perusal of the newspapers. These things are of this world, and, according to the mistaken view we are describing, they are antagonistic to religion.

The active participation in the conduct of public affairs, engaging in the open discussion of public questions, and voting at the polls, whether at municipal or general elections, are supposed to be incompatible with practical godliness. Good people will sagely advise you to let these things alone, and let the world manage the world's affairs. Misapplying and perhaps misunderstanding the Scripture ejaculation, "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth," they would resign all municipal, and state, and other public affairs, into the hands of irreligious men. They seem to think the world is, in all senses of the term, irremediably bad, forgetful that there is an important sense in which the world, the production of the Almighty Maker, is, like all his works, and like himself, very good. The worldly spirit—the maxims and habits of the world considered as a great system under the dominion of Satan, its prince—is indeed *bad*; but the world, as the scene of our present activities and discipline

and as distinguished from heaven and eternity, is a widely different thing. It is the great purpose of Infinite Wisdom and Love to renovate and save the latter; the former is an usurped dominion under the headship of Satan, which is destined only to destruction.

It is proper to say, however, though regarding the view described as a grand mistake, in whatever connexion it may be found, that we have no sympathy with either the ridicule or the vituperation which this prevalent mistake has called forth from many impatient spirits. Rather should we respect the motives of many of those who take this ascetic view of our position in the world, whether it be in relation to its active pursuits, or to those which occupy the mental powers alone. Doubtless it originates, in their case, in a trembling apprehension of aught that may dim the sacred flame which is kindled with such difficulty upon the altar of man's cold heart; and this apprehension is worthy of honour. They fear the consequences of meddling with anything which is not directly religious; and their anxiety in this relation indicates their love of purity. Indeed, under the influence of the mistake, and yet longing for purification, they have even some hankering after the life of a recluse, which they suppose would effectually protect them from all moral danger; at all events, they greatly commend a keeping out of the way of the perilous influences that surround us.

Still they either forget, or have no definite impression of the important fact, that man in his threefold character of a physical, intellectual and spiritual being was so constituted purposely by his Creator, and that the due use of all his powers according to their original design, which design is indicated by their capacities and tendencies is of divine sanction, and indeed of divine obligation. They forget that these extend to all those human circumstances and relations in which also man has been Divinely placed, in such sort as that the duties arising out of them become to him religious duties. So far, therefore, from a spiritually-minded man subserving religion by abstaining from pursuits that exercise the mental faculties, if he have a capacity for them, or from taking such a share in the conduct of the ordinary business of life, public or private, as in the order of Society may fall to him; it is

plain that in so abstaining he inflicts an injury upon himself by disobeying an intimation of Divine Providence, and also upon Society, by doing what in him lies to consign the administration of its affairs, and the guiding of its intellect, to hands that are, above all others, least fitted for such onerous service: those, namely, of men who have no regard for God in the government of His own world and creatures.

I cannot do better than close this part of the subject with the following extract from the discourses of of a deceased clergyman “The ascetic life of abstinence, of fasting, austerity, singularity, is the lower and earthlier form of religion. The life of godliness is the glory of Christ. It is a thing far more striking to the vulgar imagination to be religious after the type and pattern of John the Baptist—to fast—to mortify every inclination—to be found at no feast—to wrap ourselves in solitariness, and abstain from all social joys; yes, and far *easier* so to live, and far easier so to win a character of religiousness. A silent man is easily reputed wise. A man who suffers none to see him in the common jostle and undress of life, easily gathers around him a mysterious veil of unknown sanctity, and men honour him for a saint. The unknown is always wonderful.”

“But the life of him whom men called a gluttonous man and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, was a far harder and a far heavenlier religion. To shroud ourselves is no fair test of holiness,—to dare to show ourselves as we are, making no solemn affectation of reserve or difference from others: to be found at the marriage feast; to accept the invitation of the rich Pharisee Simon, and the scorned publican Zachæus; to mix with the crowd of men, using no affected singularity, content to be creatures, not too bright or good for human nature’s daily food; and yet for a man amidst it all to remain a consecrated spirit, his trials and his solitariness known only to his Father—a being set apart, not of this world, alone in the heart’s depths with God; to put the cup of this world’s gladness to his lips, and yet be unintoxicated; to gaze steadily on all its grandeur, and yet be undazzled, plain and simple in personal desire; to feel its brightness yet defy its thrall; this is the difficult, and rare, and glorious

life of God in the soul of man. This, this was the peculiar glory of the life of Christ." *F. W. Robertson.*

The other part of the subject may be gathered into the question :

How is this world to be used so as not to be abused ?

By "this world" the text does not mean anything evil ; but all the things connected with this life and surrounding us therein which we may legitimately use, yea, which we were created with adaptations and propensities to use and to enjoy. Eating, drinking, sleeping—the joyous consciousness of being—the arrangements of personal, domestic, and social life—the manifold materials every where surrounding us that may be improved for our physical, intellectual or spiritual good,—and the magnificent dwelling place built up in order and beauty by the Creator for the abode of the human race, and in which these advantages are to be enjoyed. With this understanding the question before us receives as a first response.

1.—*By personal Consecration to its Maker and Ruler.*

We find ourselves in the midst of material good, the creation of God,—and of an incessant course of events, under His direct control. The Ruler of all things, He is *our* Ruler : the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth : He is *our* Father. It must be plain to any one who will think, that if we are to use these things aright, we must receive them from His hand, obey His behests concerning them, and do Him homage for them. Nothing can possibly be more natural or reasonable than His requirement, that whether we eat or drink or whatsoever we do, we should do all to His glory. We have only to realize our actual position in this world, whose Maker, Ruler, Supporter is God, in whom we ourselves live and move and have our being, to see at once that there can be no proper use of His gifts, no worthy treatment of Him in the enjoyment of them, without personal homage, gratitude and service. Unless He is thus recognized, we live in the midst of His works and in the enjoyment of His care and bounty most ungratefully and wickedly—such an one is a life of ungodliness, the very life which is called in the Scriptures ungodly.

This being admitted, the question of the principles and mode

of the consecration demanded comes up for adjustment; and whenever this comes up, a fact appears which materially affects such principles and mode. We are not here as innocent children; we stand not among these scenes of Divine goodness and glory as loyal subjects; we appear not on the arena of accountable activity as faithful stewards; but the existing fact of our actual rebellion and guiltiness stands out in its dark and fearful outline. We are now criminals and rebels. The crime deserving death has been perpetrated. The treason against the throne is an alarming reality. The sentence of the law is pronounced; it is only its execution that is stayed. Hence there can be no possibility of practical consecration without the settlement of this grave matter of existing guilt, and that settlement cannot be effected without a Divine appointment of the mode and a Divine provision of the means. We find that appointment of the mode, and that provision of the means, and all the requisite conditions of the case fulfilled in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ who was the gift of the Father, the appointed channel for the bestowment of mercy, and "the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

Accordingly, consecration to God includes, on the part of all the descendants of Adam, the reception of Christ as an expiation for guilt,—of Christ as our teacher,—of Christ as the monarch of our affections and the ruler of our lives. It is impossible to be in a state of consecration to the Maker and Ruler of the world, without this faith in Jesus Christ, and full reception of him. Thus the Apostle reasons, that "whatsoever we do, in word or deed, must be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father by him." The Most High claims our faith and love. How can these be rendered without practical allegiance to the Redeemer? And how can we use this world without grievously abusing it, unless, as bought by grace and redeemed, we love him with all our hearts? How can persons living in a state of enmity rightly use his gifts? Be assured that the first thing for every one to do who would conform to the reasonable injunction in the text, is to become a disciple of Christ, and through him a consecrated servant and son of God. The response is

2. *By moving in and through the world under the influence of sound principles.*

We are required to *use* the world, not to flee from it; hence as it may be so used as to be abused, it is of moment that we should understand the true use. The question "What is right in itself?" is the first and most important one; and our principle ought to be, *to do this* at all hazards and in all circumstances. Nothing that can possibly arise can justify us in doing wrong. If the question be what is right *in the specific case* up for consideration, sound principles will teach us that the maxims and practices of this world are not the standard, but the word of God. There is one great and far-reaching rule of right in relation to all transactions with and conduct towards our fellow-men, with which you are all familiar, and the excellence of which commends itself to every man's conscience,—“Do unto others as ye would that they in the same circumstances should do unto you.” This is simply another statement of our Lord's summary of the second table of the law,—“Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Besides, the right in every case, whether regarding God or man, is well pleasing to God. He loves such a course wherever he sees it; and therefore we may pray for his blessing upon it. One of the modes of detecting the right course where there are nice questions to be decided, is to see if that decided upon or about to be taken, can be brought to a throne of grace with child-like simplicity of desire, and the divine blessing earnestly craved. It is a symptom of a false principle somewhere, if we cannot honestly bring our course before the Lord and pray for his blessing upon it.

Sound principles, moreover, have to do with avoiding as well as with doing. They sometimes require us simply not to do. We ought to talk well when we speak, but there are times to be silent. We ought to act with energy and perseverance in the discharge of our duties, but there are occasions when we are called upon to stop short, and do nothing in that direction. Withal, the Owner and Ruler of the world requires us to “avoid the appearance of evil.” There are actions and practices, not wrong in themselves, that may have an evil aspect, may seem to sanction evil practices, and may thus act unfavourably upon

others. Thus in our social gatherings there may be amusements for recreation most innocent in themselves, and *in those circumstances* a happy use of the world without abusing it, which, in certain states of general society, may be naturally, and would be certainly, construed into a Christian endorsement of what is undoubtedly evil. This may be evil, if you will, because of abuse; yet nevertheless the mischief is so common and so great, that every Christian should shrink from the responsibility of doing anything that may seem plausibly to endorse the practice. So in regard to the sanctity of the Lord's day. There are pleasant walks amid the beauty and glory of the Creator's works, and there may be domestic gatherings for joyous song to the Lord, not innocent merely, but a happy use of sacred time; and yet these things may be done in circumstances and in states of society where they would have the appearance of evil, where they would be popularly considered as a Christian sanction of practices which are undoubtedly a desecration of the day. Thus sound principles teach us to consider the effect of even lawful enjoyments upon others, and to avoid even the innocent where circumstances would warp them into a sanction of the evil. The Apostle lays down the principle in the declaration: "All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." And again: "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." At the same time there is a fair field for the bringing of the popular mind to more enlightened views. One may teach them to distinguish between the innocent recreation and amusement of the small social circle, and the same thing carried to excess in the large promiscuous assemblage, where, though the same in form, it becomes an essentially different thing in substance,—between the devout walk to meditate and pray in the garden or by the river bank on the Lord's day, and the idle sauntering in the roads or fields, or the namby-pamby sentimentalism which may be in the same manner indulged; and indeed between many other things which may have a similarity outside, like two books bound alike, but which within

have all the diversity that exists between good and evil. Until, however, you have so educated the popular mind, benevolence demands that you should make a sacrifice of such enjoyments as may do injury, in this manner, to others.

If then we are to use this world without abusing it, principle must guide us in our minor and greater dealings with our fellows—in the giving of service to employers, and in demanding it of the employed, and rewarding it—in all the intercourse and pleasures of society—in the endeavours to support self and provide for a family—in efforts to do good to our generation by means of educational institutions, or of the press, or of the pulpit—in all things throughout our course, not *out* of the world in a cloister, but *in* the world, in its busy streets, its workshops, its counting houses, its domestic circles—in all things guided and animated by sound principles. We urge this upon our young men and young women. You will be a perpetual failure without principle, and a moral ruin : in all things and everywhere, see to it that you are under the control and impulse of principle. The response is :

3. *By making it subservient to a higher life here, and a blessed life hereafter.*

By the higher life here we mean that which immediately links us with the ever-blessed Lord, in secret communion, in holy living, and in high and godly purpose. It is that which is declared in the record, "that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son, hath life ; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life." It is the life which has its source in God, and which holds of another life, even Christ, "who is our life": it is what we usually call true religion. Now, the present world may be used as an incessant antagonism to this higher life, or it may be used so as to promote its growth and symmetry ; and this latter is the true use. Our faithful discharge of domestic duties, of secular claims, or of the claims of society upon us, may be made highly effectual means of improvement of the mind and heart. Undoubtedly the Lord designs this scene of things for our training school, and even our recreations ought to be made a part of a healthy training. Who has not now and again felt himself better for intercourse in the social circle with happy Christian intelli-

gence. There is noticeable, in all the use of the the world by our blessed Lord—and, as already mentioned, he used it freely, being in the midst of its activities and engagements—an obvious subserviency to a higher life. He is genial and loving, and ready to converse ; he is found at feasts and amid crowds : but everywhere and at all times you will see the cultivation, if we may so speak, of the higher and spiritual. This course may involve a conflict with corrupting usages ; it may lead us into opposition to the world's people, and to some who profess not to be such ; and, above all, it may require, again and again, the more difficult struggle which conquers one's own spirit, but it is the true use of it notwithstanding. And let it be our's to pray earnestly for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that our use of the world may be in all things sanctified to this highest end.

It is a noble use of this world which makes it subservient to the attainment of a more blessed rest and glorious heaven. That there will be differences of degree in the bliss of the happy-land above, is clearly revealed, just as "one star differeth from another star in glory," and as the ruler over ten cities hath more dignity than the ruler over five or two. Now it is a glorious use of this world which makes it subservient to highest attainment and to exalted seats in the new Jerusalem above. You may walk in it and take active part in all its movements, and yet may be so above it in spirit as to suffer no taint from its evil, and as to derive from its discipline spiritual blessings. The Mountains by their elevation attract around them the clouds in which they are often draped, and from which they extract their fertilizing moisture. So may the Christian dwell on high, amid the world's activities, very near the clouds of spiritual blessings from which he will be the first to derive supply, and that most copiously. It is not to be lost sight of, that all real gain on earth is forever. Your true knowledge never perishes. Mere wealth passes away, but not the works of kindness you have done by its means—not the use you have made of it in self-improvement—not the influence of the genial love which it has enabled you to cast around you,—these pass not away. If by its use you have cheered and purified society, gained for yourself stores of knowledge, helped on in the world the deserving, wiped away the widow's tears, and comforted the fatherless, and done your part in sustaining the institutions of Chris-

tianity at home and in spreading them throughout the earth,—you have emphatically “made to yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness”; and though others will have your wealth among them when you die, you carry with you that which, in its unspeakable blessedness, endureth forever. It is one of the great principles that should guide and impel you in the use of the world, that you are not therein running a course which comes to a dead stop in death; at which time you begin another entirely different, and with dissimilar objects and issues; but, on the contrary, that this is the race of which that is the goal—this is the training of which that is the enjoyment of the results—this is the warfare of which that is the resulting victory and peace—yea, that this is the vestibule to the Lord’s people of His heavenly temple.

The sum of our message at this time is, that we are required by religion not to go out of this world, but to dwell in it and to use it—that all parts of our nature are to be exercised in it—that there is a place for the exercise of all physical functions, of all intellectual energies, of all spiritual and moral qualities; and, therefore, that religion is emphatically a necessity of this present life, that we may do all well. Further, that this world can be used without being abused, only by active consecration to its Lord—by moving in it under the guidance and impulse of sound principles—and by making it subservient to a higher life here, and to the obtaining of heaven hereafter. Therefore, there is something obtainable by us all, which endureth forever. “The world passeth away, but he that doeth the will of God, abideth forever.” Let us do His will in the order already described, beginning, continuing, and ending in Christ, and the result will be the gracious indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us as his temples on earth, and this consummated in the full enjoyment of our Father’s house of home and of worship above. If the world be used as the place and sphere of our education for that ultimate home, we shall be in little danger of abusing it. As a pilgrimage—a voyage—a journey—a scene to be used while it lasts, but which is passing away,—the world may be made a blessing; but to treat it as a home, to live in it as such, and to confine our culture and our enjoyments to it as an end,—this is most grossly to abuse it as God’s gift. “Godliness hath the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.”