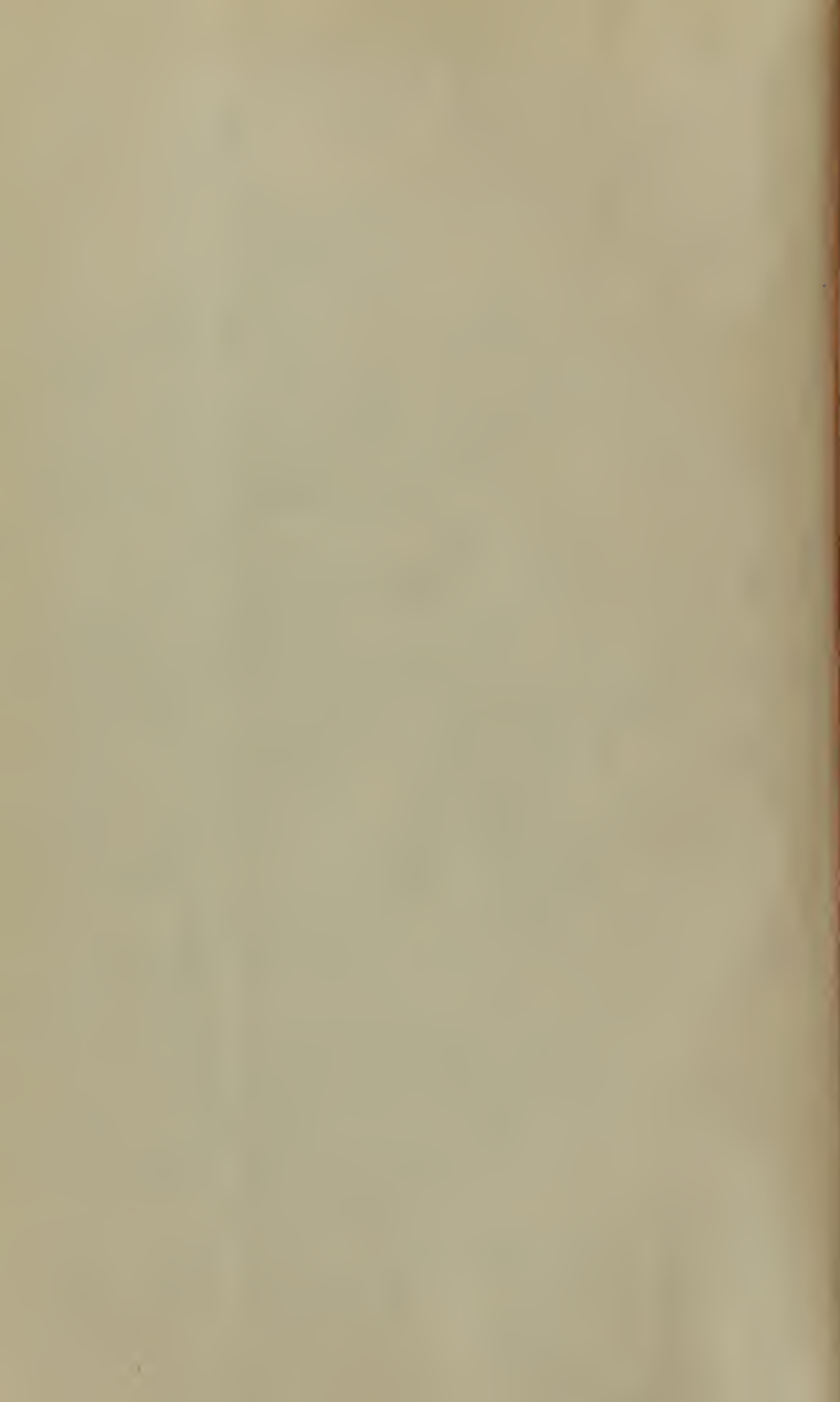


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1821



AN
INTRODUCTORY
DISCOURSE,
DELIVERED TO THE LUNATICS
IN THE
ASYLUM,
CITY OF NEW-YORK,

AUGUST 31, 1819,

BY JOHN STANFORD, M. A.

—◆—
“ Go——minister to a mind diseas'd,
“ Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow ;
“ Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
“ And with some sweet oblivious antidote
“ Cleanse the foul bosom of that perilous stuff
“ Which weighs upon the heart.”

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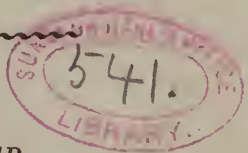
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DISCOURSE.

1 THESS. 5, 14.

“ COMFORT THE FEEBLE MINDED.”

HUMAN NATURE, in its present fallen state, exhibits little else than one vast hospital. Sin has produced such a variety of diseases, both in the body and mind, which none but the God of mercy and compassion can possibly cure. The diseases of the mind, are certainly the most calamitous ; for, the connexion between the body and the mind is so strong, that the disability of the mind may truly be said to unman the man. From the direction contained in my text, it becomes the friendly duty of every christian, and especially of every minister of the Gospel, to employ every possible method to *comfort the feeble-minded*. This duty, with much tenderness and affection, I shall now

attempt to discharge to you, who are residents in this Asylum; sincerely wishing that it may be the means which the God of compassion may bless for your consolation; and that, eventually, he may restore you to your health, your family and friends.

I will endeavour first to describe the CAUSES by which a feeble mind is produced.—Some persons are naturally feeble minded; they have little understanding to judge and determine their duty, or things around them, with the propriety of acting; and therefore, are obliged to depend upon the opinion and advice of others, for direction.—There are not a few, who once possessed a strong mind, which they have made feeble by pursuing the baneful practice of relaxing the nervous system, by the excessive use of ardent spirits.—Other persons, having enjoyed a good degree of affluence, or a competency of life, and, afterwards, by a reverse of circumstances, being reduced to poverty: the severity of such a change, has enfeebled their minds to such a degree, as to cast them into a state of despondency.—Nor is it uncommon, when a person has fixed his superlative affections upon an object, whom, by

marriage, he intended to make his own; and the blast of disappointment intervening, this has produced such severity on the mind, as to cast it into the shades of distraction! *—The loss of valuable and dear relations, by the sudden stroke of death, has sometimes made impressions on the mind, so powerful, as not only to render it feeble, but incapable of enjoying the remaining comforts of life, with the least degree of pleasure.—And, it is still more certain, that a consciousness of sins against God; a doubt of the ability and willingness of Jesus Christ to save; these, aided by the violence of temptations from Satan, have so absorbed the powers of the mind, as to conduct it near the borders of despair.

These causes, which I have now stated, as well as many others, have frequently reduced the powers of the human mind to extreme debility and distress. It is for you, therefore, my afflicted friends, to determine, which, or if any of them, have created your present despondency. Certain it is, that your God of compassion, knows the

* It was observed by several present, that when this sentence was pronounced, one of the patients shed a profusion of tears, as though the case was his own.

cause. I shall, therefore, as a dictate of humanity, sanctioned by the Gospel, endeavour to offer you some advices which I hope the Lord may bless, to the relief and comfort of your feeble minds.

I. Indulge the least reflection, and you will be convinced, that the God who made you, and formed your minds, is certainly able to restore them from their present debilitated state, to composure and activity. It is impossible to doubt of his power, if for a moment you listen to the voice of his word: *Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?* Jer. 32. 27. Impossible! And, as the Maker of your minds, however they may at the present moment be covered with a cloud, the Almighty can convey to you that light and peace which shall effectually produce a happy restoration!—Besides, I can assure you that it is a part of the glory of God, which he hath displayed in all ages, to *comfort them that are cast down*; 2 Cor. 7. 6. And, while thousands, more debilitated than yourselves, have received the aid of his restoring hand, we fervently pray, that you also, may share in the plenitude of his goodness!

II. To produce your recovery, be persuaded, that God can bless the medical attention which you constantly receive from the physicians in this Institution. In the Book of Ecclesiasticus, chapter the 38th, you are informed, that *the Lord createth the physician*. He giveth him talents to discover the nature, causes and progress of diseases, whether of body or mind. And the Lord, who is equally said *to create medicines out of the earth*, giveth knowledge to the physician to explore their qualities and virtues which are adapted to relieve our complaints; for with such, *doth God heal men, and take away their pain*. In the same chapter, it is required, that the patient should *honour the physician with the honour due unto him, for the uses you may have of him*. This therefore forms a necessary direction, that you should submit to the prescriptions and the orders of your physicians. And, at the same time, the chapter to which I have referred, will dictate the more important duty of prayer to your God, for a blessing upon their efforts for your happy recovery; knowing that it is the Lord alone, *who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; and who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies*. Psalm 103.

III. For your consolation, I will inform you from the New Testament, that the blessed Saviour, while on earth, healed a poor distracted man, whose case was far more deplorable than any of yours. A man, whose mind had been a long time distracted; he would not dwell in a house, but made his dwelling among the tombs of the dead; no chains could hold him; he wore no clothes; night and day he was crying, and cutting himself with stones. In this wretched situation, the compassionate Saviour met him, and granted him that healing mercy, which produced so great a change, that, when the people came to see him, they were astonished to find him *clothed, setting* at the feet of Jesus, and, *in his right mind*. Mark 5. Luke 8. Be you persuaded, that this same Jesus, though now in glory, is still possessed of compassion and power to restore you, and make your future days prosperous and happy.

IV. As the spirits of many have been extremely reduced to despondency, on an apprehension of the impossibility of their salvation from the guilt and consequences of sin, accompanied with doubts on the ability and willingness of Jesus Christ to

save them; and, as possibly, this may be the painful impression of some of you, it is a pleasing part of my duty to inform you, from the testimony of Scripture, that *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners*. Of course, if you feel yourselves as such, you may lay claim to his mercy, and rest assured, that such a gracious errand into the world, never can be frustrated. Besides, it is declared, that *he is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him*. Therefore, if it be the great concern of your mind, to come to your offended God, for mercy and acceptance, you may rest assured, that Christ is both able and willing to save you, notwithstanding all your transgressions, the strength of your temptations, or those dreadful fears which now fill you with distress.

V. It is not uncommon to find persons, whose minds are made feeble and distracted, from the apprehension that they have committed the unpardonable sin against the HOLY GHOST. Should any of you indulge such an apprehension, and are distressed for its consequences, I will attempt to relieve your anxiety by assuring you, that I do most firmly and solemnly believe, that a person

who is penitent, labouring under such a fear, may safely rest assured, he has NOT committed that sin. For, certainly, those who have done so, are regardless of its consequences; and are left to the blindness, hardness, and desperate wickedness of their own hearts. I therefore repeat it again, for your relief, that if you are in sorrow, under an apprehension that you have committed this great sin, it is a plain proof that you have not done it. Let these reflections aid in promoting your relief; and may the Lord grant you *the Spirit of truth; the Comforter*, that he may abide with you for ever!

VI. I will offer you one more reflection for your consolation. The journey of life, however painful, is but very short. Let us, therefore, cast our eyes towards an everlasting home. Christ, by his grace, can bear you through all your sorrows, and grant you a hope, full of immortality and glory. The days of your mourning will soon be ended; and every tear shall be wiped away. By arguments of this description, the compassionate Saviour consoled his disconsolate disciples; *let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are*

many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you. John 14. 1. In that heavenly habitation, no cloud shall exist. The mind, which had been feeble, shall bend no more; but grasp in full vision, the realities of eternity, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.

With these charming prospects, I will conclude this discourse, by recommending to you the consoling words of David, which he wrote when he was under a very severe depression of mind; sincerely wishing that the Lord may enable you to adopt them as your own. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.——AMEN.*

APPENDIX.



RELIGIOUS service was commenced in the Lunatic Asylum, by request of the Governors of the City Hospital, the superintending Committee, and the attending Physicians, in hope, through the smiles of the Lord, it might prove beneficial to the patients. There were about forty unfortunates assembled, and behaved with great propriety; several of them, of their own accord, kneeling in time of prayer. One female said to Mrs. Wetmore, "if I live to get home, I will crawl on my hands and knees, but what I will go to church." Another said to me, "how good it is to hear of a Saviour we once loved." On my going out of the yard door, one of the men hastily came and took me by the hand, saying, "Mr. Stanford, I thank you for coming here to comfort us." I asked him if he had attended service in the hall? He replied, "O yes, but then, Mr. Stanford, none can comfort us but Jesus Christ."

In future services in this Asylum, I shall think it most prudent to avoid particular reference to the mental derangement of the patients; as, like unfortunates of other classes, they shrink at being told of their unhappy situation. Still, I considered myself justified in describing their case, and offering them consolation, in this very plain introductory discourse.

THE END.

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