

THE IMPROVIDENT TRAVELLER.

BY REV. WM. J. HOGE, D. D., OF VA.

I saw a man beginning a long journey. It was a most perilous journey, through a wild, inhospitable country. It did not seem so at first; a green and flowery lane led from his dwelling. The road was smooth, the day bright, friends near, the prospect fair. He set gaily off in an easy carriage, attended by assiduous servants, and followed by wagons loaded with all curious provision for present amusement or need. Song and fragrance filled the morning air, and though as the early hours flew by, these fled with them, still his spirits were high, and the wheels rattled merrily over the graded way. The smiles and congratulations of friends saluted him as he passed, and some envied him. He counted himself happy, and rejoicing in his admirable appointments, gave up his heart to pleasure. The evening of the first day has come, and lo! the carriage is going down a hill. How steep it is getting! Faster and faster it goes. The air darkens, the gloom thickens, it grows cold; and faster, faster rolls the carriage downward. Nothing can check it. He tries, the servants try. He shrieks

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for help, but in vain. Downward dash the horses. And see! at the bottom of the hill, a river, dark and without a bridge. The road leads into it. In rush the horses, and with struggles and groans and plunges of agony, all disappears.

But our traveller did not die in the stream. At the other shore he came forth from the water, cold, desolate, alone. His servants were gone. His treasure was gone. His amusements were gone. And on that bleak shore, in that bitter clime, bound still for that awful journey, I saw him standing, pale, weak, in helpless despair. On, on he must go. He was hungry, but he had no food; thirsty, but there was no water; foot-sore, but he must walk. See, he totters, but he has no staff; dangers assail him, but he has no defence; remorse gnaws him, but he has now no resource. An irresistible destiny urges him, and while the hunger ever bites, and the way grows rougher, and horrors thicken about him, on, on he must go.

Yet he knew all this from the first, but counted it nothing. All his preparations were for the pleasant road, through green and sunny fields. He seemed rich then. Men called him so, all but one honest soul, who frankly told him that his arrangements were short-sighted, wretched, and that if he went thus, his folly was as egregious as soon his poverty would be dreadful. But

he was called a rude man for his pains, and bidden begone. Why should he be ever disturbing the present joy with his doleful prophecies? The very sight of him made one melancholy, and his voice seemed to *toll* out his warning, like a dismal bell at a funeral. "Let us use the joys we have, while we have them, and let the future take care of itself!" So he spoke, and so he went; and now there he is.

Nay, you need not tell me that my picture is preposterous—that there is no such fool on earth. I know how wise the children of this world are in their generation,¹ and how unnatural all this would be, if I meant the petty concerns of this life alone. But suppose I strip off the veil, and tell you that eternity is that awful journey, and life that pleasant lane, and the body that easy carriage in which the soul sets out so gaily, and death that bridgeless river, where friends can go no further, and servants must forsake us, and all the treasure of earth go down forever? Where *now* is the unnaturalness? Has it not become natural enough,—tame even, from its very commonness? Thus from your own mouth I condemn you, and from the shock you feel, when the whole scene is bounded by an inch of time, convict you of unutterable madness in preparing for the little

¹Luke xvi. 8.

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course of this life only, and going all unfurnished for everlasting ages.

O souls, let me deal truly by God's Word, and by you. Let me tell you that you *are* poor, miserably poor, and in danger of eternal poverty. Poor? You have no Almighty Comforter for your sorrows,¹ no Infinite Redeemer for your sins,² no Eternal God for your portion.³ You have no solid peace in this world,⁴ no well-grounded hope for another,⁵ no security for one moment more out of hell.⁶ You are an alien from God's people, a stranger from his covenants of promise.⁷ You are without the only blood which can pardon,⁸ the only Spirit who can purify,⁹ the only righteousness which can justify,¹⁰ without title to heaven,¹¹ without meetness for it,¹² without any hope of it, except a hope which is false and shall fail you in the day of need.¹³ Ah, you are without Christ and have no God,¹⁴ and that is poverty indeed, unspeakable, intolerable!

¹ John, xiv. 17. ² Acts, iv. 12. ³ Mat., xxiv. 51,

⁴ Isa., xlviii. 22. ⁵ Job, xi. 20; Prov., xi. 7.

⁶ Mat., xii. 19, 20. ⁷ Eph., ii, 12. ⁸ John, iii. 18.

⁹ John, iii. 5, 6. ¹⁰ Job, xxv. 4; Rom., iii. 19-26

¹¹ Rev. xxii. 14, 15 ¹² Heb. xii. 14. ¹³ Matt., vii. 21, 26, 27

¹⁴ Eph., ii. 12.

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