A SERMON,
DELIVERED AT DANBURY,
Nov. 13th, 1817;
BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR THE EXECUTION OF
AMOS ADAMS,
FOR THE CRIME OF RAPE.

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A SERMON.

ECCLESIASTES, ix. 19.

"But one sinner destroyeth much good."

THIS passage of scripture cannot be misinterpreted or misunderstood. It affirms a single truth in a manner perfectly explicit; a truth, the illustration of which, it is presumed, will not be thought unsuited to the occasion on which we are assembled. The royal preacher after having shewn, by way of example, how much evil, in a particular instance, had been prevented by a man of piety, turns to one of an opposite character, and makes the affirmation in the text: "But one sinner destroyeth much good."

In addressing you from these words, I propose first, to enquire who is designated by the term sinner, as it is here used; and, secondly, to show that the person intended, does, in fact, destroy much good.

I. Who then is designated by the term sinner? I answer, every one, who has no conformity of heart to God; every one, who has not, in the scripture sense, been born again. The term most surely does not include every one who commits sin; for in this sense, it would comprehend all men. All are sinners. "There is not a just man upon
the earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. 37 Every child of Adam is born into the world with the same moral character, which belonged to him immediately after the first transgression. In other words, every man comes into the world a sinner, destitute of any conformity of heart to God. All who are not still sinners, have been renewed in the temper of their minds. Their hearts have been changed by the spirit of God, and they have become partakers of the divine nature. Such, in the scriptures, are denominated holy; not because they are completely and perfectly so, but because they possess some degree of moral conformity to God, whereas, sinners have none.

The character of a sinner is not confined merely to those who are openly immoral. It belongs, I repeat it, to every man and woman and child, who has not been born again. It is true, there are degrees in wickedness. Some sinners are more awful transgressors than others. While some are externally decent, and even moral in their conduct; others give the reins to all the base passions of the heart, and sin with a high hand. This difference in conduct however, is not to be ascribed to any innate difference of moral character, but to the restraining grace of God. For, "as in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man." There is no evidence that Pharaoh, or Ahab, or Judas, were more depraved, at the time of their birth than other children. They became, it is true, giants in iniquity; but it was because they were suffered to act according to their depraved inclinations. God gave them over to a hard heart and to a reprobate mind. Every other sinner would have been just as bad, in the same circumstances, if divine restraints had not been interposed. The bible representation is, that all sinners, in a natural state, possess the same moral character. It declares, that the "carnal mind," which is the mind of every one born into the world, "is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be." It tells us plainly, that we are all not only dead in trespasses and sins, but by nature the children of wrath. "God is angry with the wicked every day." They lie continually exposed to the curses of his violated law; and unless they repent, these will soon come upon them to the uttermost. Such I apprehend is the sinner spoken of in the text. Let me show

II. That he destroys much good. The language of the text is very emphatical. One sinner, that is, every individual sinner, destroys much good. This is asserted as matter of fact. Is it true? Alas! all human experience declares that it is. Reasoning, from cause to effect, we might safely infer the truth of the text, from the entire depravity of man; but, surrounded as we are by the destruction and misery, which sin and sinners have caused, we need not speculate. We have only to open our eyes and unstop our ears.

It would be impossible, in any instance, to estimate the amount of good which a sinner destroys. We cannot follow him through life, and number the crimes, which he commits, or the mis-
eries, which he inflicts; still less can we comprehend all the dreadful consequences of one wicked example through time and eternity. But an attention to a few particulars, will, I think, make the truth of the text sufficiently manifest. Let us enquire then, what good a sinner naturally destroys?

1. He destroys his own peace. It is obvious that nothing but sin prevents men from enjoying peace of conscience. So far as they are sanctified by the spirit of God, they experience the

"Soul’s calm sunshine and the heartfelt joy."

He is in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on God. But the sinner is a stranger to this peace. "The wicked man," says Eliphaz, "travaileth with pain all his days.—A dreadful sound is in his ears.—Trouble and anguish shall make him afraid: they shall prevail against him as a king ready to the battle." "The wicked," says the prophet, "are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Could we behold, my hearers, what often passes in the breast of the sinner; could we see the tumult of his thoughts, and that fearful looking for of judgment, which threatens to devour him; we could have no hesitation in pronouncing him a destroyer of his own peace.

2. The sinner destroys the peace of families. Were it not for sin, every family residence would be a paradise. Persons, in all the domestic relations, would then live together in harmony and love. "All wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking would be done away from among them, with all malice." But how often is the tranquility of families disturbed by sin! Take off restraint from a single member; let him give indulgence to his lusts; and who can tell the misery which that whole family will suffer? Go to the house of the drunkard, for an example. Look at that disconsolate woman, whose heart is broken with grief at the conduct of her husband! Cast an eye on those children, worse than fatherless, half clad, half starved, half educated, or educated only in habits of sin! Survey here what you may, and it bears the marks of wretchedness and misery. Turn also to the man of lewdness, while he employs the night season in digging through houses, which he had marked for himself in the day time; those eyes are running down with tears, which his presence might have caused to sparkle with joy, and that bosom is heaving its bitter and unavailing sighs, which his fidelity should have filled with transport and peace. His children too, the pledges of his lawful love, are sufferers. They are exposed to reproach and disgrace. The property, which should have contributed to their necessities and to their comfort, is wasted in riotous living. Hence the caution of the wise man is, "Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids."

Ungodly children, as well as parents, disturb the peace of families. Witness the family of king David. What affliction was occasioned by means of the rape of Amnon? This family trial was soon succeeded by another—the murder of Amnon by
his brother. Who does not pity the parents? One child is made wretched, another is ushered into eternity; a third has fled for his life. Next comes the horrid rebellion of Absalom. See this ungodly son drive his own father from the throne! See that father and his family flying into the wilderness. Judge of their affliction as you behold them going up by the ascent of Mount Olivet; their heads covered, their feet bare, and the tears streaming from their eyes. But the trials of this family do not stop here. The wickedness of Absalom did not extinguish natural affection in the breast of his father. Unworthy and criminal as was the cause, in which his son was engaged, David was unwilling, that he should fall by the sword. Accordingly, he begs the officers, who were going out against him to battle, to deal gently with him, for the father’s sake. The bowels of his compassion yearned over this wicked child. And when tidings came that he was no more, “the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept;” and as he went, thus he said, “O my son Absalom! my son, my son, Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son!”

3. The sinner destroys the peace of society. “Enter not,” says Solomon, “into the path of the wicked, go not in the way of evil men.” The reason of this advice is given. “For they sleep not except they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.” How many barriers in human society, have been erected against the encroachments of sinners! Look at the laws enacted for the prevention of crimes. Look at the ministers of justice, appointed for their execution. Look at the places of confinement and punishment; to the scaffolds and the dungeons all over the world. But all these are insufficient to restrain sinners. Very often, they burst through all restraints, and, like the “madman, cast firebrands, arrows and death.” “Destruction and misery are in their ways.”

Into what confusion and alarm is a whole neighborhood often thrown, by a single worker of iniquity? The property, the persons, and even the lives of people are in jeopardy, every hour. Hence it sometimes becomes necessary to the peace of society, to remove the sinner from the earth; to terminate his existence by an ignominious death. This has a two-fold effect. It renders it impossible for him further to disturb the peace of community. At the same time, it is a warning to others not to do so wickedly. The man, who is put to death for his crimes, is set forth for an awful example to all, who shall afterwards live ungodly.

4. The sinner destroys the peace of the church. The people of God have ever been in tribulation by means of the wicked. These have been as so many pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides. When God has withheld restraint, and allowed sinners to act out what was in their hearts, they have attacked his church without mercy. In different ages, they have slain her prophets, digged down her altars, and driven into exile, her sons and her
daughters. What havoc has a single persecutor, armed with power, made of the church of God! Who can calculate the mischief he has done; the good he has destroyed?

5. The sinner destroys his own immortal soul. It has already been stated, that the sinner deprives himself of perfect peace; it is now asserted, that he is fitting himself for future punishment. He is in possession of a soul of infinite value; a soul which will eternally be rising higher and higher in the fruition of God, or sinking deeper and deeper in the abyss of woe. Now it is this immortal soul which the sinner is laboring to destroy. Every day, he multiplies the number of his sins. Every day, he increases his guilt. He finds, indeed, that the "way of transgressors is hard." But he is resolute and persevering. From week to week, from month to month, from year to year, he is employed in treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Nothing will dissuade him from his purpose. Friends may advise, ministers may preach, providences may admonish, conscience may reprove, and the spirit may strive, but all in vain. He blinds his eyes, he stops his ears, he hardens his heart, and as if in love with misery, and bent on destruction, he rushes on through every opposing obstacle to hell. Now the amount of good, which a sinner, in this way, destroys, is equal to the sum total of all the happiness or misery, which an immortal mind is capable of enjoying or suffering. I must add

6thly., That the sinner destroys the souls of others.

It would be well for him, if the consequences of his guilt were confined to himself; but like a contagion, they spread wide as his influence. By example or precept, or both, he draws others after him in the road to perdition.

Is he a parent? He rears a seed of evil doers, who will probably be seen treading in his footsteps, after he is gone to the grave and to judgment.

Is he a minister? His people, led astray by his errors, or lulled to sleep by his indifference, will rise up hereafter as swift witnesses against him, and condemn him as the instrument of their ruin.

Is he a magistrate? Instead of becoming a terror to evil-doers, by executing the wrath of heaven upon them, he suffers them to go on transgressing with impunity, till they are ripened for destruction.

It is difficult, my hearers, even to conceive of the mischief which a single sinner of influence may effect. Look at some of the wicked kings of Israel! When they forsook the God of heaven, and went off to idolatry, the whole nation followed them. Look at Adam! By one single sin he

"Brought death into the world and all our woe."

Look at Satan! When he first revolted in heaven he was alone; but by his influence he drew off with him, I know not, but a third part of heaven, who are now reserved "in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day."

How true then is the declaration of the text! *One sinner destroyeth much good.*

In view of what has been said, it is easy to be seen, in the *first place*, why so much good is destroyed in our world.
It is full of sinners. Whoever is acquainted with the world, knows that its history, is but a history of sufferings and crimes. Not a generation has appeared since the fall, which has not answered the following description given of the wicked by Saint Paul:—“Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, malignity; whisperers, back-biters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful.”

The moral desolations of the world, can easily be accounted for, from its apostacy. It is a fallen world; a world of transgressors; a world of rebels.

The people of God, it is well known, have hitherto been only a little flock. But their number is increasing. And when the time shall come, (blessed be God, it is fast approaching) that the earth shall be peopled with saints, how changed will be its aspect! Wars will cease, commotions will be allayed, crimes will be unknown, and all iniquity shall stop her mouth. “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.”

2. This subject calls the friends of religion to exertion.

If sinners are engaged in doing mischief, ought not saints to be engaged in doing good? If the former pull down and destroy, should not the latter build up? It is reported to have been the observance of an eminent servant of Christ, on beholding a notorious sinner, that he was ashamed to think that this man was more diligently employed in the service of Satan than he in the service of God. When our Lord would give us an example of industry and zeal, he pointed to the children of this world, who are “wiser in their generation than the children of light.” Behold, my brethren, a worker of iniquity! See him devising mischief! All his faculties are awake; all his inventive powers are employed. See him executing his mischievous devices! You discover no want of activity. He labors in earnest, and with both hands. Bent on the accomplishment of his purposes, he turns neither to the right hand nor to the left, but presses forward. It is as true of a saint that he can do good, as of a sinner that he can do mischief. We are informed in the context, of a poor wise man, who by his wisdom or piety, delivered the city in which he dwelt, from becoming a prey to a powerful monarch. How much good was effected by some of the pious kings of Judah? With what success did Ezra and Nehemiah attempt a reformation of the people in their days? Who has not read, how the apostles of Christ went forth in different directions and pulled down the strong holds of Satan’s kingdom? What wonders too were accomplished by Luther and his pious fellow laborers in the destruction of the man of sin? And how many of God’s people, may I add, have spe-
cessively engaged at this day, in the benevolent work of doing good? Moral and religious societies have been formed, which exert a powerful influence on community. Can we be reluctant in this blessed work? Shame on us, if we allow ourselves to be outdone by the wicked. Is not the Master whom we serve better than theirs? Let us rise up then and with one heart and one voice endeavor to stop the progress of vice. By our influence, by our example, by our entreaties, and by our prayers, let us strive to reclaim sinners from the error of their ways, and bring them back to God.

In our exertions to reclaim our fellow sinners, let us not forget the people of color in our neighborhood. A few of this class, it is true, are already virtuous members of society; but the rest are engaged in every evil work. On them may be justly charged no small portion of the crimes and misdemeanors in our land. It is a shocking fact that one third or more of the criminals sentenced to Newgate prison, in this county, within the last twenty-six years, have been colored people. Within this period, there have been but three convictions for capital offences, and two of these were committed by negroes. Is no part of their sin chargeable upon us? What but the most cruel avarice brought them here? And what but this has kept so many of them to this day in ignorance and degradation? In this land of boasted light, how many thousands are there, as ignorant as the brutes that perish! They have been taught nothing but
to labor and to sin. To them, our countrymen have generally appeared in the character of tyrants and executioners. No wonder then if God, in judgment, let them loose upon us, as scourges for our iniquity. It is high time that something be done to avert this calamity, and save this degraded people and ourselves, too, from ruin. Our interest and our duty point to the same course. They must be enlightened. They must be instructed in the principles of the Christian religion. They must be raised to the rank of rational beings, and be made to feel as much as possible, the force of moral obligation. The shameful fact must be confessed that our countrymen are largely their debtors. The mention of their claims, so long neglected, ought to affect every heart and crimson every face. Be it ours to recognize, and discharge our obligations. There is not any benevolent society to which I could more heartily lend my feeble support, than to an association for the purpose of reforming the morals and improving the condition of our blacks.

I cannot conclude these remarks without calling upon magistrates to use the authority with which they are invested, for the suppression of vice. And I would take the liberty to suggest, whether lewdness be not a crime, which demands their special attention. This, certainly, however we may affect to conceal it, is one of the crying sins in our land. Though, from the nature of it, its full extent will never be known till the judgment day; yet enough is brought to light to convince us that it ranks high on our list of offences. Great exertions have, of
late, been made to enforce the laws against intemperance, sabbath-breaking, and some other vices; but none, that I know of, have been made to enforce the laws against the vice now under consideration. And they are, I believe, seldom executed. How often is fornication winked at! How many are living in adultery in the open face of day; no man forbidding them! The prevalence of lewdness is the more to be regretted, as it sometimes leads to a crime punishable with death. If I mistake not, more than half of those who have been executed in this State for some years past, have been executed for the crime of rape. The way to destruction is a down-hill road. How easy is the transition from fornication to adultery, and from adultery to the crime for which life must be taken! Let magistrates, then, as they regard the welfare of society, and as they dread the recurrence of scenes like the one which we are, this day, to witness, see to it, that the laws against incontinence are immediately and steadily enforced.

3. Our gratitude should be excited that there is provision in the gospel for the salvation of sinners. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life." For our ruined race an atonement has been made. This earth has been wet with a Saviour's blood. Eternal glory to God, that he can now be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Christ is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour. He is mighty and able to save to the uttermost. The vilest of sinners have had their iniquities washed away in his blood. Could the vail be removed, which conceals heaven from our view, we should see there a Manassah, who once filled the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood; a Paul, who once breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the church of God. Yes, we should see there a multitude who were once liars and thieves and adulterers and drunkards and murderers. But we should behold them "washed, and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God." It is then indeed a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—even the chief of sinners.

It will be perceived that our subject applies, with all its force, to the unhappy youth before us, who is this day to suffer an ignominious death. Amos, I am now to address you for the last time. I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that you are a sinner; a transgressor of God's holy law, and an enemy of the cross of Christ. You have given loose to your depraved inclinations, and sinned without control. Think, how much mischief you have done! You have brought distress and anguish upon yourself; you have deeply afflicted the hearts of your relatives; you have carried wretchedness into families; you have disturbed the peace of society; you have grieved the people of God; you have labored to destroy your own soul, and as far as your influence has extended, the souls of others also. "Destruction and
misery have, emphatically, been in your ways.

Unmindful of admonitions and warnings, you rushed on in your sinful courses, proceeding from one degree of wickedness to another, till you committed the aggravated crime for which you are, this day, to die. Your sins have, indeed, reached to heaven, and your trespasses have grown to the clouds. Must you therefore despair of salvation? No. The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. With God there is pardon and plenteous redemption. Believe in Christ; and “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” Believe in Christ; and your heart, which has so long been the residence of iniquity, shall become a fit temple for the Holy Ghost; and your soul, which has so long been defiled with sin, shall be purified, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Believe in Christ, Amos; and you shall this day experience the full benefit of his atoning blood. You shall pass from nature to grace, from earth to heaven, from the gallows to glory. But if you refuse his offers of mercy, destruction, without remedy, must be your portion. You will be consigned over to the place of punishment, and the wrath of God will forever burn against your naked soul, like fire. His eye will not pity; nor will his hand spare. Can your heart endure, or your hands be strong, when God shall thus deal with you? I need not tell you that what is done in your case must be done quickly. For the time of your departure is at hand. The instruments of death are all prepared, and very soon you will be launched into eternity. Are you yet unconcerned? Since you have been under the sentence of death, you have put off repentance, first by weeks, and then by days; but your space is now reduced to a hand’s-breadth. You must repent now or never. Fall down, then, I beseech you, at the feet of your offended Saviour and Judge, and beg mercy for your perishing soul. O let your remaining moments be spent in prayer! O let your expiring cry be, “God be merciful to me a sinner!”

To conclude: Let every sinner in this assembly be admonished of his danger. Think not that the unhappy youth before us alone needs repentance. I tell you, nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. It is told of the celebrated Boer-have, that when following criminals to the place of execution, he used to ask himself, how much better am I, as a moral being, than those miserable victims of public justice? Though you may not have been guilty of as many outward acts of iniquity as the criminal before you, still your souls are defiled with sin, your hearts are at enmity with God. It is the divine testimony, not only that the openly vicious and abominable, but all unbelievers shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. You too must soon die. And whether your death be disgraceful or honorable, in the estimation of the world, if you die in your sins, you will be accursed. You will go down to hell, from whence there is no redemption. Then,
as you value the salvation of your souls; as you hope for happiness in the world to come; and as you dread the pains of the second death; break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by turning to the Lord.