

Illustrations and Reflections

OR

THE STORY OF

Saul's consulting the Witch of Endor.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

AT WEST-SPRINGFIELD.

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I. SAMUEL xxviii. 6, 7

And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman, that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.

THE great and fundamental principles of religion, the existence and unity of the godhead, were taught, as soon as man was placed on the earth. Nor does it appear, that, in any part of the antediluvian age, corrupt as mankind then were, these principles were rejected, or polytheism and idolatry admitted.

The first idolatry of which we have an account, was in the days of Abraham. He was commanded by God to depart from his country and from his kindred and from his father's house, and to go into the land of Canaan, where, God promised, that he would bless him, give him an inheritance and make of him a great nation. The reason of this command is assigned by Joshua. He says to the tribes of Israel, "Thus saith the Lord, your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood," the Euphrates, "in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor, and they served other gods; and I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him through all the land of Canaan."

Abraham was called from his native land into Canaan, that he might escape the superstitions of his countrymen, might know and worship the one true God, might train up his children in pure and pious sentiments and manners, and might thus lay a foundation in his own family for the continuance and spread of true religion in the world.

Those nations, which, renouncing the one su-

preme God, served gods many and lords many, generally admitted the delusive arts of divination, magic and forcery, which were pretensions to immediate intercourse with invilible beings, or to a profound and occult knowledge of nature, by which they boasted to have learned important secrets, undiscoverable by the ordinary wisdom and sagacity of man.

These arts were conducted with subtile artifice and crafty contrivance, with pompous rites and ostentatious ceremonies, with the collusion of two or more confederates, and with a certain legerdemain or flight of hand, to amuse and deceive the ignorant and credulous. The responses made by the pretended oracles were uttered in such ambiguous terms, as to admit the application of contrary events.

These delusive arts, we find, were much practised and highly esteemed in Egypt, during the time that the Jews sojourned in that country.

The Jews, tho' instructed in the character and government of one supreme God, yet by long residence in Egypt, had fallen into a belief of the reality, and a fondness for the exercise of such arts. There were some so impious as to profess the knowledge of them, and many so credulous as to consult these wicked pretenders. Against this dangerous propensity, God, in the constitution of their religion and government, took early care to guard them. He gave them a written law prescribing the great rules of their duty to himself and to one another. The law was communicated in such a manner as tended to impress them with a belief of the existence, and a reverence for the majesty of one all-perfect Deity. It was introduced with great solemnity. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." And the first precept is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

This law expressly forbids all kinds of divination and forcery, and all application to those who practise such arts. "There shall not be found among

you any one that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination to the Lord ; and because of these abominations the Lord driveth out the nations which were before you. They hearkened unto diviners and observers of times ; but as for thee the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee to do so."

God also gave them prophets, who, being endued with his own spirit, could occasionally instruct them in all things necessary to be known, which were not communicated in the written revelation. And these prophets were enabled to give clear and undeniable proofs of their divine commission.

Besides these, there was the oracle of Urim and Thummim, from which the high priest gave divine answers to those, who religiously consulted him on great and national concerns. And these answers were given in a public manner, in open day, and with an audible voice, so that there could be no suspicion of fraud and imposture.

Notwithstanding all these precautions, those arts still existed. And in the reign of Saul, they had become more common, than in former times. And Saul, probably by the advice of Samuel, who had considerable influence upon the king, " had put away those who had familiar spirits and the wizards out of the land."

After the death of Samuel, the Philistines, encouraged probably by the removal of that great and good man, made war upon Israel, and collected a numerous army to invade the country. Saul gathered an army to oppose them. The two armies encamped in sight of each other. Saul, viewing the host of the Philistines, " was greatly afraid, and his heart trembled." In his terror and perplexity, " he enquired of the Lord." In the book of Chronicles it is said " He enquired *not* of the Lord." He made a pretence of enquiring of the Lord ; but did

not enquire in that humble, penitent and persevering manner, which God required, and which would have entitled him to an answer.

In this embarrassment, Saul said to his servants, "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her and enquire of her," concerning the event of the impending battle. Strange inconsistency ! He had put away those who had familiar spirits ; and now he would consult a creature of this description himself. Since God would not answer him, he determined that, contrary to the command of God, he would try if he could not get an answer from a witch. But God had departed from him : And what absurdity can be too great for a man, that is forsaken of God ?

The servants inform him of a woman to his mind, who lived in Endor, a place not far distant from Gilboa, where he now was. That he might not be discovered by the Philistines, nor suspected by the woman, "he disguised himself, and put on other raiment ;" and in this disguise he went in the night with two servants to Endor to consult the enchantress.

Having arrived at her residence, he soon opened his business. "I pray thee," says he, "divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me up him, whom I shall name unto thee." See here another instance of inconsistency in the man. He had no idea, that the woman, by her familiar spirit, could foretel what he wanted to know, the event of the battle, or could instruct him how to insure success ; yet he imagined, that by her incantations she could raise the dead, which, if there is a difference, is a greater instance of power.

The woman did not yet suspect her querist to be the king ; for he was in disguise ; it was night ; if she had ever seen him, yet she would not now be apt to think of him ; she would not imagine, that a king could be so weak and credulous as to consult an ignorant sorceress, or so inconsistent as to apply to a

person of her character after his severe orders to exterminate such creatures. She therefore, by way of excuse from undertaking the business refers him to what Saul had done, and expressed to him a suspicion, that he was a designing man, who came to lay a snare for her life.

When Saul had given her the assurance of an oath, that no punishment should happen to her, she expressed a readiness to comply with his request. In that day an oath was deemed ample security for the fidelity of him that made it.

Saul had proposed, that she should bring up to him such a person, as he would name to her. She now asks, "Whom shall I bring up to thee?" He answered, "Bring me up Samuel." The hag certainly had no expectation, that she could bring up Samuel, or any body else. She could not be so vain as to imagine, that she possessed a power to raise the dead, and to raise whom she pleased, and when she pleased. But probably she intended to amuse and satisfy her confuser, by the assistance of a familiar, or accomplice who from some secret cell, should give responses, as coming from the mouth of Samuel.

When she began her spells, a figure appeared which resembled Samuel. And she was horribly affrighted. "She cried with a loud voice." The appearance was wholly unexpected to her. She had no idea, that her incantations would produce an effect like this. The sight of Samuel, who had long been a counsellor to Saul, brought the king to her mind. She said, "Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul." The king endeavors to calm her spirits. He says, "Be not afraid. What sawest thou?" She had a sight of the object before Saul had. He, perceiving that she was terrified at something, enquired, what she saw. She answered, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth." The word rendered *gods*, though plural in form, is often singular in sense. It is in scripture applied not only to the supreme Deity, but to a magistrate, a judge, or a man of eminence,

such as Samuel was. Saul understands the woman as speaking of a single person, and asks, "What form is he of?" She says, "An old man cometh up, and he is covered with a mantle." By this time, Saul had a sight of the apparition. "And when he perceived, that it was Samuel, he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself."

It hence appears, that Saul *saw* the object; for he would not have bowed himself to a mere idea, or imagination in his own mind.

A question will naturally arise here, whether this apparition was really *Samuel*, or a mere phantom, and illusion on the senses? The sacred historian says, it was *Samuel*, and gives no intimation of its being a spectre.

The souls of men exist in a separate state. They may be sent into this world in bodies and habits resembling those, in which they appeared before their death. Angels, in ancient times, came to men in human forms and conversed with them in human language. Human spirits may have been sent in the same manner on particular occasions. There is no more difficulty in supposing, that Samuel was raised and exhibited in his former habit, than that Moses and Elijah appeared on the mount of transfiguration. The apparition's discourse to Saul is such as we might expect from the prophet; but in no respect such as the forcerers would have put into the mouth of a spectre, which she had conjured up. The apparition predicts certain events, which were to be fulfilled in a day or two. The events actually came to pass. And they were events which neither the woman, nor an evil spirit could foreknow; such as the death of Saul and of his three sons, and the defeat of his army. Isaiah thus challenges all false gods; "Let them bring forth and shew us what shall happen. Let them declare the things, which shall be hereafter, that we may know that they are gods." Here is a plain declaration, that none but the true God can foretell those events, which depend on the volitions

and actions of men. If we should suppose, that, to amuse Saul, the woman ventured on some bold conjectures, we must suppose, that like other impostors, she would predict good, and not evil. Had she promised success, she had nothing to fear. If success followed, she might hope Saul would reward her. If he should be defeated and slain in battle, he could not hurt her. But a prediction of disaster and death might be considered as an evidence of disaffection and malice; and, had it failed, it would certainly have exposed her to the king's resentment.

But if Samuel really appeared, was he raised by this witch's incantations?

This cannot be supposed; for, as we have already observed, she had no such power, nor had her charms any such tendency, nor had she any such expectation. But Samuel was sent by the power of God, that Saul, in his own way, and by the very person whom he wished to see, might be reproved for his past wickedness, and warned of the destruction which awaited him. His impious application to this vile creature to bring him up Samuel, was the crime which principally provoked against him the awful sentence, which Samuel denounced. The request of Saul, God answered in his anger, as he did the request of Israel, when he gave Saul to be their king. "Saul died for his transgression, which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit to enquire of it, and enquired not of the Lord: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom to David." And the story is recorded to teach men, how criminal, and how dangerous it is to depart from God, and to seek the knowledge of future events, or of any secret things, by consulting diviners, or by any means which reason and scripture do not warrant.

The conversation, which ensued between Samuel

and the king is solemn and interesting, and confirms the observations which we have made.

Samuel said to Saul, "Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?" The saint feels no real disquietude in executing any behest, on which God sends him. But Samuel speaks after the manner of mortals, who are disquieted, when their repose is interrupted. Death is compared to sleep, and the resurrection to awaking out of sleep. As to be prematurely awaked from profound sleep is a painful disquietude, so Samuel speaks as if he had been disquieted by an unseasonable revocation into this world.

Saul answered, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war upon me, and God is departed from me." A distressing case indeed. Affliction is in itself distressing; and in it the only relief and consolation is the presence of God, the support of his grace, the light of his countenance, access to his throne and a consciousness of his approbation. If when trouble is near, God is afar off, trouble will press with all its weight, and the soul will sink under it. "God is departed from me, and answereth me not; therefore have I called thee, that thou mayst make known to me, what I shall do." Samuel said, "Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing God is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" What are creatures without God? "If he withdraw not his anger, the proud helpers stoop under him." Neither men nor angels can do more for us, than God allows and enables them to do. To forsake God, and provoke his departure from us, and then in our distress to seek relief from man, or from any other creature, and especially from a witch, is adding madness to impiety. Samuel proceeds; "The Lord hath done to him," i. e. to David, who is mentioned at the end of the verse, "the Lord hath done to him, as he spake by me; for he hath rent the kingdom from thine hand, and given it to David. Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the

Lord; therefore he hath done this thing to thee this day. Moreover the Lord will deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow," i.e. in a short time, "thou and thy sons shall be with me;" shall be in the state of the dead. Such pious and solemn reproofs and warnings, and such minute and particular predictions to be immediately verified, cannot be supposed to come from wicked spirits, or from a vile woman under their influence. They must have proceeded from God, who alone knew what should be on the morrow. And if they proceeded from God, it is more pious, and more rational to suppose, that he communicated them by the mouth of Samuel sent from heaven, than by the voice or agency of an evil spirit issuing from the infernal regions.

The story, which we have been illustrating, will suggest to us some useful instructions.

1. It teaches us the separate existence of the soul after death, and affords a proof of the resurrection of the body.

If Samuel, after his death, was really sent to the king of Israel, clothed in a body similar to that in which he lived on earth, then the soul survives the death of the body, and may again be united to it. This appearance of Samuel, the translation of Enoch and Elijah, and the visit of Elijah and Moses to Christ and his disciples on the mount, were sensible verifications of the doctrine of a future state, which doctrine was taught by Moses and the prophets, and is more clearly brought to light by the gospel. Hence also we may,

2dly. Infer, that the spirits of pious men were formerly, and may be still, on some occasions, employed as ministers of God's providence in this world.

The angels, we are told, are ministring spirits. Many instances of their ministry are related in scripture. And tho' their ministry has chiefly been em-

ployed for the heirs of salvation, yet it has sometimes been vouchsafed to men of an opposite character, when they acted in a public capacity. An angel was sent to withstand Balaam in his way, reprove his perverseness and instruct him in the will of God. And if the spirits of just men are, as our savior teaches us, made equal to the angels, it is reasonable to conclude, that they are honored with the same employments. The appearance of Samuel to Saul, and of Moses and Elijah to Christ and his disciples, confirm this conclusion.

3. The story warns us of the guilt and danger, which we incur, when we take indirect measures to learn the secrets of providence, and the events of futurity.

Saul, by applying to a forceress, that he might know the issue of an approaching battle, brought on himself a sentence of death from the mouth of a divine messenger.

If we believe, that there is a being of perfect wisdom, power and goodness, who made and governs the world, and directs and overrules all events, we need be solicitous only to know and do his will ; and in well doing we may commit our souls and all our interests to him, as to a faithful creator and kind preserver. Our duty we may know from the revelation, which he has given us. The few events, which it concerns us to foreknow, we may learn from experience, and from the steady course of providence. But events, which depend on the voluntary actions of other men, or on the unknown operations of providence, we have no means, and should have no curiosity to learn ; but should humbly leave them to him, who works all things according to the counsel of his will, and without whose inspection a sparrow falls not to the ground.

There were, in former ages, and there have been in modern times, some who pretended, by a power of divination, or by skill in occult sciences, to fore-

tel men's fortune in life, and the good or ill success of their enterprizes, to discover lost or stolen goods wherever deposited, and to point out by description the authors of theft, arson, murder and other mischiefs, however secretly committed.

It may possibly be a question with some, whether it can be lawful or reasonable to consult such persons for information in matters of this kind.

(1.) In the first place, it is certain that men cannot acquire this knowledge by any regular art, or by any natural sagacity. Such secrets are not subject to human calculation. There are no given principles in nature, on which a calculation can be grounded. The greatest philosophers, astronomers and mathematicians have pretended to no such occult science, but have disclaimed it as false. The pretenders to it have generally been people of indifferent education, and often of worse morals.

If then any possess this kind of knowledge, it must be imparted to them by an invissible being. But who is this being? Not the Deity, or a good spirit instructed and sent by him; for then the communications would be infallible; whereas now, we know, they are often fallacious. Besides; we well know, that miracles, prophecy, inspiration and supernatural knowledge have long since ceased, as the apostle has foretold they would do, being no longer necessary, after the written revelation is completed. And while they existed, they were given to be applied, not to trivial purposes, to little personal concerns, to the gratification of vain curiosity, but to the grand interest of religion, and to objects of public and national consequence.

Hence then it follows, hat these revealers of secrets, if they in any case, possess the knowledge to which they pretend, must derive it from an evil source.

Infernal spirits, who are roaming about in the world, may doubtless have a knowledge of some

things, which are not generally known to mortals. And tho' they have not a foreknowledge of the unrevealed purposes of providence, yet, from their natural subtilty and long experience, it is reasonable to suppose, that, in some cases, they can make more shrewd conjectures concerning future occurrences, than men can ordinarily make. And it is not doubted, but that, in some way or other, they can suggest to the human mind many thoughts, which would not have arisen spontaneously. Now when men addict themselves to divination as a trade and profession, as well as when they pursue any other wicked course, they lay themselves open to the influence of evil spirits, become in a peculiar manner susceptible of suggestions from them, and are, perhaps without any consciousness or suspicion of their own, led captive by them at their will. And tho' these diabolical suggestions frequently prove fallacious, yet, if in a few instances they should be verified in fact, these few would be sufficient to keep up the credit of the diviner and his pretended art ; before among weak and credulous people ; for the failures are seldom mentioned and soon forgotten ; but the verifications are often related and long remembered.

That diviners, in ancient times, were assisted by an evil spirit, is manifest from scripture. The sorcerer in Paphos is called, for mischief and subtilty, "a child of the devil." The damsel at Philippi, who brought to her masters much gain by soothsaying, was actuated by "a spirit of divination ;" and Paul in the name of the Lord Jesus commanded this spirit to come out of her." St John speaks of certain "unclean spirits, the spirits of devils, which go forth and work miracles ;" or enable deceivers to do and tell strange things, which among credulous people pass for miracles. Moses says to the Jews, "If there arise among you a prophet or dreamer, and give thee a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder come to pass, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, thou

shalt not hearken to him." It is here supposed, that a false prophet may shew a sign, and the sign may happen to come to pass. He may by chance, or by the suggestion of the devil, now and then foretell an event, which will follow. The father of lies will tell the truth, as far as he knows it, when truth is necessary to establish the credit of his agent, and increase his influence in deceiving and corrupting men. But such a prophet, tho' his sign should come to pass, is to be rejected as a vile impostor, because he is enticing men away from the service of God. No sign or wonder can justify men in hearkening to such an enticer.

If the professed revealers of secrets, so far as they have a knowledge of the secrets which they pretend to reveal, must derive it from infernal suggestion, then plainly we ought never to consult them in this character, for this is indirectly to consult the devil; and it is directly to encourage a profession, which every friend to religion and society ought to detest and reprobate.

(2.) The use of such pretended arts, and intercourse with those who use them are, as expressly, as any other crime, forbidden in scripture. Moses, enumerating, under various names, the pretenders to occult science, tells the Jews, that God did not allow any such persons to be found among them, nor suffer any to *hearken* to such persons, if they were found. This prohibition respects us under the gospel, as well as the Jews. For Moses immediately adds, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: To *him* shall ye hearken." "This prophet," the writers of the New Testament tell us, is CHRIST. And hearkening unto this prophet is opposed to hearkening unto diviners and observers of times.

In the writings of the prophets and apostles all kinds of sorcery, magic and witchcraft are interdicted and condemned, as contrary to true religion;

and consequently all application to the professors of these arts is utterly disallowed. When Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus, "Many, who had used curious arts," being converted to the faith, "came and confessed their evil deeds, and brought their books together and burned them before all men."

(3.) God only can look into futurity and unfold the secret events of his providence. If we acknowledge any creature, visible or invisible, as having an independent power to open the volume of futurity, and disclose its secret contents, to that creature we ascribe a distinguishing prerogative of Deity.

By giving credit to diviners and conjurers we dishonor and set at nought the revelation of God ; for we introduce other revelations, as teaching things, which this has not taught ; and by receiving and obeying them, we pay the same deference and respect to them, as to this. What if the diviner should tell you, to serve other Gods—to renounce the bible—to reject some of its doctrines and precepts ? Will you hearken to him still ? Where will you stop ? Stop where you are. Reject all commerce with him in his wicked profession. This is what your bible requires.

It was by magical incantations and artificial tricks that some deceivers in the apostles' times, endeavored to obstruct the progress of the gospel. And if such men can obtain credit and countenance, why will they not do the same at any time ? Paul speaking of evil men and seducers, says, "They resist the truth, as the magicians withstood Moses." The conjurer in Paphos, full of all guile and subtilty, "fought by his sorcery to turn away believers from the faith." Such was the danger from this sort of men, that the apostle gives a particular caution to the believers in Ephesus, "that they be not carried about by the *sleight* of men, and *cunning craftiness*, wherewith they lie in wait to deceive." Simon, a forcerer in Samaria, "giving out that he was some great man, and

possessed a mighty power from God, *bewitched* the people with his forceries. Some of the Jewish priests, pretending to skill in magic, made use of their wicked arts to detach believers from the purity of the gospel. Alluding to such impostors, Paul says to the Christians in Galatia, “ O foolish Galatians, who hath *bewitched* you; that ye should not obey the truth.

(4.) Harkening to diviners tends, not only to destroy religion, but to dissolve our mutual confidence and subvert our social security.

Let us suppose that people generally give credit to such persons ; and then see what will be the consequence. A casualty happens, or some mischief is done in our neighborhood ; a barn is burned, or a man is missing, possibly dead, or property is lost. We know not how ; but we suspect, it is done by some designing villain. We dispatch a messenger to the conjurer. What is the moral character of this conjurer, we know not, nor do we much care. It is not the man, but the conjurer with whom we are now concerned. If we cannot trust him in any other capacity , yet we can trust him in this. The messenger goes and opens his business ; an answer is given importing, that the mischief was perpetrated by a certain man of such a description. We think of somebody, to whom the description, with a little help of imagination, will suit tolerably well. Or perhaps the messenger has an enemy whom he suspects, and prejudice will easily modify the picture so as to represent him. A hint is given—it is thrown into circulation—it gains credit ; and an honest man is ruined. Thus divination, when it is held in general repute, puts it in every man’s power to destroy every man, whom he will.

Why do you wish to know the author of a mischief which has been done ? You will say, You wish the villain may be punished, the injury repaired, and evil prevented. Very well : Then take the proper steps to detect and arrest the offender. If a conjurer points out such, or such a person, as the criminal, he may indeed gratify your curiosity, and per-

haps your malice ; but he does no good to society. His suggestion is not evidence, on which the supposed perpetrator can be convicted. If it was, no mortal would be safe. You perhaps believe the insinuation, and you make others believe it. But when the general suspicion falls on an innocent man, investigation stops ; this innocent man suffers the reproach, and the really guilty lies unsuspected, and escapes unpunished. And when a new mischief happens, the same scene may be acted over again.

On social, therefore, as well as on religious principles, these diviners ought to be prosecuted rather than encouraged—to be punished rather than patronized. Judge Blackstone says, that “ pretending to tell fortunes, and to discover stolen goods by skill in the occult sciences, is a misdemeanor, deservedly punished by law.” The reason why it deserves punishment is, because it not only tends to subvert religion but also to disturb the peace of society, and destroy the reputation and security of every virtuous member.

There is one use more, which we will make of this story

4. Some of the reasons against consulting diviners will apply to superstitious interpretations of unusual sights and noises, remarkable dreams and extraordinary impressions. By them nothing is revealed, and from them nothing can be learned. They are neither injunctions of duty, nor prognostics of events. An undue regard to them exposes us to groundless terrors and dangerous delusions, and weakens our faith in God.

The prophet cautions the captive Jews, that they “ learn not the way of the heathen, nor be dismayed at the signs of heaven, as the heathen were,” who from comets, meteors and the aspects of the planets predicted calamitous events, and thus excited consternation in themselves and others.

The strange sounds and appearances, by which people are sometimes affrighted, doubtless proceed from some natural cause, which might, in most instances, be discovered by calm enquiry. But whether the cause be investigated or not, so much is

certain, they point out to us no new duty, and inform us of no particular event. If they suggest to us the thought of death, or bring this thought more closely to our minds, very well. Let us entertain the thought and be excited by it to stand daily prepared for all events, which may await us in this changing world. But let us not yield to a dismay, which would unfit us for the duties, and incapacitate us for the enjoyments of life.

“ Dreams come thro’ the multitude of business.” They are the casual and incoherent associations of thoughts and images, which had occurred in our waking hours. Or if we suppose, that they may sometimes be suggestions from invisible spirits, still what shall we make of them? We have no rule in reason or scripture by which to interpret them, and therefore they teach nothing, and forebode nothing. But if a *good* thought arises in sleep, whether by casualty or suggestion, let us make a good use of it, when we are awake. It is never the worse for coming in a dream. If it be of a moral tendency, we may improve it to a moral purpose. But we are never to turn a dream into a precept or prophecy; for thus we substitute it in the place of scripture, and expose ourselves to dangerous seductions and endless delusions. Among the deceivers who had crept into the Christian church, St. Jude mentions “ *Dreamers*, who defiled the flesh, despised dominion and spake evil of dignities.” By pretending to revelations in dreams, and by persuading others to confide in these pretended communications, they subverted the doctrines of the gospel, broke the bands of society, and opened a door to licentiousness.

An impression on the imagination when we are awake, has no more authority, than a suggestion when we are asleep. The impression, however strong, is not to be obeyed implicitly as a certain dictate of heaven, but to be examined seriously, whether it accords to scripture, and tends to virtue. If a sacred truth, or religious obligation be deeply impressed on the mind, let us take the benefit of such an

impression by obeying the truth, and fulfilling the obligation. But never let us conclude that an action is right, merely because we feel an unusual inclination to do it, or that an event will befall us or our friends, merely because we feel an unaccountable apprehension of it. This would be to expose ourselves to continual terrors and temptations, to give imagination the dominion over reason, and to substitute our own impressions in the place of divine revelation.

Finally : We have great cause to be thankful, that God has favored us with a revelation, which contains all that we need to learn in relation to our most important interests. With this let us converse, and ~~this~~ let us follow, and we shall be safe and happy. "Secret things belong to God ; things which are revealed belong to us that we may do all the words of God's law." Let us be content to know what may be known, and to be ignorant of things, which cannot be known. Why would we foresee the events, which are before us ? Would we diminish our blessings, and augment our calamities by anticipation ? All events God will order well ; and the events which now await us, he will make known to us in the fittest time ; and that is usually the time when they come.

There is one event, concerning which we need no diviner to inform us. That is our own death. The event is certain ; the time of it is uncertain ; it is happy for us, that it is so. Did we know it to be distant, we should probably become more dilatory and negligent in our duty. Did we know it to be on the morrow, we might be as much overwhelmed as was Saul. Terror might render us incapable of repentance. Or if a repentance took place in such a situation, it might seem to be rather a matter of necessity than of choice ; and the sweet comforts of hope would be wanting. Our times are in God's hands : and in his hands let us calmly leave them. "What *our* hands find to do, let us do it with our might, for there is no work, wisdom nor device in the grave, to which we are going."