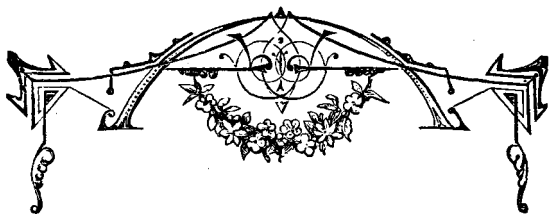


a community called ...

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M A D N E S S .

WHEN pestilence is raging, who would be blamed for bidding the infected seek a speedy cure? There is a worse pestilence than cholera or the plague, and every human being suffers from the contagion. It is the plague of sin. This kills not the body only, but the soul, and with a death whose pangs will last forever. Men blinded by unbelief or self-righteousness, are often not aware that they are dying of this infection till recovery is hopeless. This ignorance is as sinful as it is fatal, for the great God bears testimony to the fearful fact, that by nature all are perishing of this plague: "The imagination of man's

heart is evil from his youth." Gen. viii, 21
"The heart of the sons of men is full of evil,
and madness is in their heart while they
live." Eccles. ix, 3. "The heart is deceitful
above all things, and desperately wicked;
who can know it?" Jer. xvii, 9.

Thus, the heart of every man is by nature *only* evil. Pride leads men to form false views of themselves, and to indulge self-flattery. The love of sinful pleasure is fostered by the deceitfulness of the heart: vices are excused, and holiness despised. The enmity of the heart to God excuses false reasonings against his perfections, his word, his judgments, and the doctrines he reveals; and it is awfully apparent in the indifference that is shown respecting his favor or displeasure.

The *aboundings of sin* confirm this fact. Could all the sins that are committed in twenty-four hours, in any town or city—the oaths, profaneness, lewdness, gluttony, drunkenness, dishonesty, cheating tricks, passion, malice, envy, revenge, hatred, pride, and

self-importance, be made visible in one view what a hideous mass of wickedness would be seen! Yet all this proceeds from the evil of the heart. He who searches the heart declares, "From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."

All run not to the extreme of wickedness. Checks, of various kinds, prevent the full display of the evil of the heart; yet, unless changed by divine grace, every heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; and there are no lengths of wickedness to which, if left to themselves, any might not go. It is related of John Bradford, that when he saw a criminal going to execution, he would say, "There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God." No servant of sin knows to what excess in wickedness he might proceed. When Hazael was told by the prophet what

crimes he would commit, he said, "What ! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ?" 2 Kings viii, 13. Yet soon he committed all those crimes.

This wickedness is most completely displayed in *direct enmity* to God: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." Volney said this; but in a storm on an American lake recanted, and cried out, "O my God, my God, what shall I do ?" "Well, Mr. Volney," said a passenger, "you have a God now." "O yes ! O yes !" replied the trembling atheist; but when he safely reached land he showed again the enmity of his heart to God by denying his existence. And this enmity to God is shown, not merely by atheists, but by pretended philosophers, who "often produce specious and fatal instruction by framing impious and infidel systems. These gratify the curiosity, pride, and presumption of man, suit his carnal mind, and silence his conscience. On this poison numbers feed and perish."

Madness also dwells *in the unchanged heart*. It is related of Colonel Gardiner, that after his conversion it was reported he was gone mad, and that on one occasion, after being exposed to the railery of some of his former associates, he challenged them to bring forward any thing they could urge to prove that a life of irreligion and sensual pleasure was preferable to a life spent in the love and service of God. Some attempted an answer; but the master of the house, a candid, though not a pious man, cut short the debate by saying, "Come, let us call another cause; we thought this man mad, and he is in good earnest proving that we are so." This, in effect, will ere long be the confession of all who make light of the great salvation.

Is it madness to *neglect the best friends*? Yet this is done with respect to one far better than any earthly friends. What would not God be to you and do for you? The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Jehovah—would bless you with love surpassing knowledge, and

with eternal heavenly treasures. What madness to neglect such a friend !

Again : see the madness of the heart in men's willing *subjection to their great enemy*. They would not submit to a thief or a murderer, but be enraged at his attempts to rob or destroy them ; yet they are not enraged at Satan working in their hearts, that he may rob them of heaven and destroy them in hell !

The madness of the heart is shown in man's *neglect of everlasting blessings for momentary things*. Would it be madness if, for the sake of one hour's enjoyment, a man were to give up wealth that he might otherwise keep for a long life, or to incur poverty, want, and misery for the whole of life, at the price of a moment's pleasure ? Alas ! there is more fatal madness in losing heaven for earth. This sinful neglect is seen in the ardor with which multitudes pursue trifles that will soon avail them nothing, while they make light of Christ and his salvation. Suppose the case of many criminals shut up in prison all con

denmed to die. They have, however, a brief respite, in which pardon may be sought and found. But instead of seeking pardon, or even thinking of its value, one employs his whole time in ornamenting his cell, and calls it his estate. Another spends all his time in trying to find out the nature of the soil under his prison. A third occupies his whole season of mercy in gazing on the stars through a casement. Day after day passes, till the day of execution comes, and then, too late, they awake to the madness of their course. What better is the course of all, except the few who truly follow Jesus? Whether the object of human pursuit be wealth, or pleasure, or learning, or honor, too late will those who have made these things the chief aim of their lives find, that while they squandered on them the day of salvation, madness was in their hearts.

The fact that the heart is full of evil, and desperately wicked, shows *how indispensable to happiness is a divine change within*. No outward forms will avail us any thing if

there be not a new heart. Of this all the heirs of salvation are made partakers. God promises this, Ezek. xxxvi, 26 : " A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." The dispositions and principles implanted by God's Holy Spirit subdue the evil and madness of the heart. Partaking of this change, the penitent believer now loves his best friends, and hates the foes whom once he served. Brought to Christ, and believing in him, he lives a life of faith, sees earth to be only a secondary object, and seeks a home in heaven. And when his time on earth shall have passed, he goes to dwell forever with the Lord he loved.

Reader, what are you? If you reject these truths, alas! you suffer from a fatal madness that must be removed, or you must perish.

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