

XCVI.

Self-Deception.

Prov. xiv, 12.

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Proverbs xiv, 12 (also xvi, 25):—

there is a way which seemeth  
right unto a man; but the  
end thereof are the ways of  
death.

The attentive reader of the book of the Proverbs observes with but little surprise, that this impressive saying occurs twice, within a few pages. Fitting is it, to be repeated; worthy of our repeating over & over until it might be learned by heart, and cherished as "an apple of gold in a [basket] of silver!"

God has here counseled us, that we are liable to

Self-Deception.

The complicated & interesting life of man on earth is to be considered thoughtfully in this,

<sup>3</sup> that it is full not merely of  
temptations, but also of delusions.  
I shall endeavor to set before your  
remembrance, my hearers, some  
of these evils, in their true light  
as exhibited by our text, and  
then to suggest some of the reasons  
of their deluding power.  
It may be well for us to have  
the light of Scripture brought  
to bear upon our possible  
path, just at this time. May  
He Who has given us this script.  
use of wisdom, bless it to our  
profit for two worlds, as we  
dwell upon it today!

The wise man speaks of a  
 way, that is a manner of life, which  
 has its natural termination in death;  
 yet, which seems right to a man.  
 The evil of it, lies in its specious-  
 ness; it is a well-contrived counter-  
 feit, apt to deceive until finally con-  
 fronted with Him who cannot err,  
 & only to be detected by ~~the~~ some  
 transfer of His knowledge. The  
 holy Bible is His message to us  
 for this very purpose; but alas!  
 how easily do we neglect it,  
 how ill do we use it!

There is no error in the world  
 which thrives, which does not  
 do so from a close resemblance  
 to the truth, nay, ~~the~~ from an

admixture of truth with error.

Truly in vain the net is spread  
in the sight of any bird." The  
most successful rival of the  
Christian religion, <sup>the religion of Mohammed,</sup> owes its su-  
perior & marvellous success to  
the fact that it is not, like ~~that~~

Buddhism, a mere paganism,  
but a ~~real~~ paganism founded  
on Christianity. The most disturb-

ing political fallacy of our  
time, communism, has the  
secret of its popularity in its

~~concealing of a truth its  
shallow conclusions and meth-  
ods with the genuine doctrine  
of adding absurd & unreason.~~

the truth, of the rights of man, <sup>6</sup>  
which it presents in distorted &  
false phases. The greatest social  
~~evils are justified sometimes by~~  
~~their casual connection with~~  
evils are apologized for on the  
specious ground of original ne-  
cessities.

The world is full of these half-  
true, really false doctrines & notions.  
We are warned, in our text, that  
they <sup>may</sup> vex not only society as a whole,  
but each individual. There is a  
ray which seemeth right to a man;  
notwithstanding the end thereof are  
the rays of death.

We might occupy a long time  
with the consideration of ~~such~~  
rays in mere physical life; but

7 our text manifestly points us  
higher. It would be interesting to  
think of the mistaken theory of  
overwork, which leads to pre-  
mature disease, disappointment, &  
death; or the opposite blunder of  
underwork, which also tends to its  
own end of decay, despondency, &  
death. It seems right to many men  
to overtask their powers in order  
to the ends they have in mind;  
& it seems as right to others to  
rest out in <sup>quiet</sup> elegant uselessness;  
but both are deceived, & both  
suffer, & die.

But you will expect me, in  
this sacred place, to present



rather the <sup>spiritual</sup> ~~religious~~ than the  
hygienic, phase of this truth;  
to show its bearing upon our  
prospective eternal life, not merely  
temporal welfare. Now from that  
point I will speak first  
of deceptive courses of life, that  
are evil because, first, of their  
entire lack of religion, or, second,  
of their misconception of religion.  
There are invidious ways which  
seem to many, right, but whose  
end are the ways of death. And  
there are ways of mistaken reli-  
gious direction, which end are  
the ways of death. Of these two  
classes I will speak first, & after.

9 hard of the cause of their  
delusive power.

I. 1. First, there are rays of  
no religion, which seem to some to  
be right, but which are ruinous.

(1) First, ~~there are~~ one may think  
life will not be a failure, even if he  
have a contempt for all religions;  
nay, may think this a surer way  
to success, & welfare. Start not, X?!  
there have been multitudes misled  
by such a notion. When the French  
people set up a human form in  
their X<sup>n</sup> temples, in derision of  
the Invariable Jehovah, the world  
saw a vast national blunder, that  
yet had to be worked out bit by bit, ab-

sure & miserable ending before  
its votaries could perceive the  
truth! And doubtless there are  
men going about these streets to-  
day, who really believe that it is an  
evil & a hindrance to a man, to  
have any religion at all, to go to  
any church, to offer any worship  
~~to~~ all to God, to entertain any  
thought of Him, or ever to rise above  
the mere, simple, easily-comprehend-  
ed creed of "Each man for himself!"  
It is, indeed, a fallacy too bold  
bold to need any reputation here;  
the lives, the value, the happiness, of  
its advocates, are answer enough.  
Their end is misery; but they are  
one illustration of the text, that  
men do think that to be right,  
which is miserably, numerous wrong!

(2) But again, some men think  
~~it right to jansay religion. Not being~~  
~~able to deny its reality, or its decla-~~  
~~rations, they seek to take off the~~  
~~force of its vital truths, & leave~~  
~~the rest.~~

it right to reflect the religion  
 which they cannot altogether de-  
 ny. They cannot shut their eyes  
 to the existence of a Supreme Ru-  
 ler, nor, it may be, even to that mar-  
 velous exhibition of justice admin-  
 istered by love, which God has made  
 in our blessed Saviour. But their  
 plans & wishes for life are hope-  
 lessly at variance with the cross-  
 bearing doctrine of X<sup>c</sup>, & so they  
 wish to turn away from it; &

the way that seems right to 12  
them is, to neglect religion. They  
believe in the Bible, but never read  
it; they believe ~~there~~ prayer to be  
a gift of God, but never use it; they  
have some regard for the Church,  
but no participancy whatever in it.  
They are without God in the world.  
When they come to die, they prove  
the fallacy of their course, by sud-  
denly ceasing their neglect, too late  
to do anything but witness to  
their error; or, they themselves  
confess that they have been in  
the way of death; or, their mis-  
take goes with them to the hidden  
tribunal of God, where we shall  
see them dismayed at the Great Day!

2. Secondly, there are many of false religion, which seem to some to be right, but which do in fact only lead down to death.

(1) First, there is the one-sided religion. There are men who really believe that God, Whom the Scriptures declare to be Love, is only Love; who are unable to see any justice in divine justice, & who really think that He is too good & kind to condemn any mortal to everlasting punishment. They are not always as tolerant of their opponents, as they expect God to be of His; their religion does not

prompt them to the self-denying<sup>14</sup>  
labors of those who believe that "the  
soul that sinneth it shall die"; their  
religion tends to decay, & fails to ex-  
hibit the fruits of the Spirit, which  
are a perennial promise of eternal  
vitality.

(2) But besides these, some men  
think that a formal acceptance  
of religious truth, is right. Dr. Good-  
ell tells in one of his letters of two  
Moslem pirates whom he saw  
once at Malta, who went thro' the  
forms of prayer & adoration of  
God as devoutly, & all appearance,  
as the humblest & most faith-  
ful disciple. But what rose all  
their numerics in the sight of  
God? It is a miserable delusion,

15  
that, <sup>merely</sup> fasts twice a day & pines  
titles of all possessions; how much  
more pitiful, that has even less ~~form~~  
appearance of devotions, while it  
has no more of the spirit! Well  
has Bishop Hall (Masterpieces, p.  
172) said: "O God, if whippings, &  
haircloths, & watchings, would satisfy  
Thy displeasure, who would not  
sacrifice the blood of this vessel,  
~~this~~ body, to expiate the sin of  
his soul? Who would not scrub  
his skin to ease his conscience?  
Who would not hold his eyes open  
& avoid an eternal unrest &  
torment? But such sacrifices &  
oblations, O God, Thou desirest not."



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So there are who do not neglect to go to church, to read a Bible chapter, to repeat a prayer; & yet who honor the Lord with their lips only, while — as He has said by His prophets (Isa. xxix, 13, Ezek. xxxiii, 21-33) — their heart is far from Him. Ah! He Who has said to sinners: "Give Me thy heart!" will not be pleased with anything less! It is a ray of death, that tends to any less than this!

(3) Once more, there are men ~~whose lives are not cho-~~ who choose the religion of mere morality. They believe it to be right to live without any further thought or regard for God than to the recog- nize His immutable laws, & to

17 shine to obey them. They will expect, when they shall see X<sup>r</sup>, to run to him with the same alacrity which characterized the moral young men who boasted that he had kept all the commandments from his youth. Deluded souls! One now from the real X<sup>r</sup> dashes all their hopes! "Love God above all, & thy neighbor as thyself!" It reveals in an instant the exceeding narrowness, & selfishness, & utter unfitness to follow eternal life with X<sup>r</sup>, of the moralist's error.

~~II. But now, all these men are, really, believing these fallacies~~

You & I both know men who 18  
scout at all religion, or who believe  
in it only to let it altogether alone; or  
who only believe one part of it, or  
only keep up mere religious appearances,  
or whose religion is a mere earthly  
morality, & yet who actually anticipate  
heavenly happiness forever! Strange delu-  
sions, that turn the land of God into  
providing so profound a life, & yet  
deny from him all heart-love!  
Alas, friends! are ne free, each of you, from  
~~Every one of these errors!~~

There are many <sup>subordinate</sup> causes which  
lead men to put their trust in  
unfounded & unworthy imitations  
of the right way. It is possible to  
err, because of such influences; &

19 when we consider their  
power, we may well inquire:  
to what am I giving my be-  
lief, guided by such strong tenden-  
cies?

~~1. It is in the power of~~

1. First, we are liable to be  
led astray by our own imag-  
inings. Religion is not a thing  
of sight, but of thought; & when  
we turn away from the  
guides which the Maker ~~has~~  
for our minds has put before us,  
& seek to evolve out of our own  
consciousness a scheme of duty  
& acquaintance with God, what

20

wander that we wander off  
into mere vagaries, & worship a  
deity that is but the creation of  
our own fancy? Men have  
done this, in all ages; why not  
now?

~~But it is far more import-  
ant to consider the particular  
bias which our sinful hearts,  
predisposed to sin, & constantly sin-  
ning, give~~

There is no subject <sup>in regard to</sup> upon which  
we are so absolutely dependent  
upon revealed truth, as that of  
God's nature, and relations with  
us. We can examine our minds,  
our nature, by turning our  
thoughts in upon ourselves; we

21 can acquaint ourselves with  
the secrets of the creation, by  
delving into the rocks & the  
thousand shapes that cover the  
Earth. But no man can do more  
about God, & heaven & hell. He  
cannot take wing & fly to the abode  
of the Eternal; he cannot search  
out the secrets of future things. He  
must put his hand, humbly, into  
the hand of a mysterious guide,  
a guide assured by the purity both  
of his actions & his accomplish-  
ments. God has given us such  
a guide to the spiritual life, in  
the holy Bible. That records for us,  
what God has miraculously un-

parted to those men whom 22  
he chose; it records the story of  
that life, which as a sunlight, ex-  
hibits both the nature & the purpose  
of him whom we have never seen.  
Without it, men have contrived num-  
bers theories, fit to amuse or  
terrify children, but not to develop  
the spiritual nature of men: - such  
fables as <sup>Olympus & the Titans, by</sup> Aeneas & Pyrrha; as the  
incomprehensible Brahma, or the  
multifold deontology of India.  
What have these tales ever done for  
men? yet they are such as the un-  
aided human mind produces. With  
the Bible, men have evolved the  
numberless advantages of X. civili-  
zation; ~~with~~ for they were freed  
away from mere phantasy, to solid  
& truthful conceptions of life; &

it is the great privilege of each one of us to be guided by the same meriting teachers, into communion with our God.

2. Further, we are liable to be led astray, not only by our independent imaginations, but also by the examples of others. The way, which the Bible would teach us, was many a thousand examples, teach us is right. How easy it is to believe a lie, when all the people about one believe it! Thousands believed in England, in 1710, believed that there was profit ready for every investor, in the trade to South America which proved a South Sea Bubble; & perhaps that whole nation now are believing with equal



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fidelity, an opposite fallacy abt  
the value of their national debt; all  
because certain leaders, & then a  
multitude, trust the scheme. When  
the social influences of a gen-  
eration are lax, in religion, how  
difficult is it to think that strict  
views are not a blunder! & if your  
nearest acquaintance manages to  
carry religion in one hand &  
worldly ~~enjoyment~~ enjoyment in the other, how  
hard it is to let go the world, &  
cast one's burden on the Lord!

The Bible is a silent former of  
opinion, perhaps little read; the  
~~serious~~ influences of the Church  
are less constantly before the eye  
than those of business & society;  
& business, with its <sup>appeals to</sup> selfishness, &

society, with its appeals to the senses, are low, continual considerations. What wonder, if men believe a lie! Yet God has put the truth before them, ~~fixed the Sabbath for its repetition~~, given the Church a voice to proclaim it, fixed the Sabbath for its continual repetition! If false may to death seems right to a man, he has consented to choose the bad rather than the good teacher!

3. Once more, the man seems right because, not only of fancy & of Example, but also because of habit. Habit is a mighty founder of opinion. A man will believe, if

he can, what will quiet his con-  
 sciences w<sup>t</sup> that which he feels has the  
 mastery of habit over him. The man  
 who has so surrendered his life - little  
 by little it may have been - to untruth-  
 ful speech, ~~will, if he can~~ is predis-  
 posed to disbelieve in a universal moral  
 Ruler; or, failing that, to reject the ne-  
 cessity of any close acquaintance  
 with Him; or, if he cannot think  
 that, to believe Him more loving than  
 just. And if men about ~~him~~  
 us give us the example of hold-  
 ing any of these doctrines; & if we  
 use our own imaginations, un-  
 restrained by Scripture-study, to  
 evolve, out of our own necessities,  
 a softened notion of God; there  
 is a ray which soon seems right  
 to us, but its ~~rays~~ are the rays of death.

The text has its value for us, in persuading us of our necessity for the Lord Jesus Christ, in our lives. As a Jewish proverb it had value to ancient Israelites to lead them to constant reverence for <sup>the</sup> ancient landmarks of religion which the fathers set up. But we have the living, revealed Messiah. Nothing do we know better than that He is The Way. He is the Way, not that someone might run into a man, but that is right. When His companions & pupils begged of Him to show them the way to eternal life, His answer was: "The way ye know!" & when they declared those words an enigma He added "I am the Way!"

These words may seem <sup>to us</sup> ~~them~~ as enigma, in their bold  
Oriental imagery; our tongue <sup>and</sup>  
never has so expressed the  
thought. How can I am be the  
Way of life? And yet, consent-  
ing humbly to the strange foreign  
visions, we can catch the thought.  
Our life will be right & well-or-  
dered, if it proceeds according to  
X. Jesus.

1. First by faith. The several  
ways of no-religion, neglect of reli-  
gion, false religion one-sided, or for-  
mal or made up only of professed  
validity, are bad ways to trust to. X.  
tells us, comes suffering in His own  
blood to tell us, that we must have  
religion, i.e., we cannot escape a  
certain close relation to God; that  
what God sees as to be prevented

29 that relation from being one  
of peace until our sins have given  
satisfaction to God; but, that He Him-  
self has given that satisfaction & that  
our consent to His so doing, our  
acceptance of Him as our repre-  
sentative, Friend, Savior before God  
will be accepted & leave us at  
peace with God. Thus it is our  
right way. He becomes our reli-  
gion; we trust in Him, rest in  
Him; this is the right way; when  
this seemeth right unto a man then  
that man is in the way of life.  
In other words, the right way is one  
of faith in God; faith that without  
Him we are condemned sinners;  
faith that He is the propitiation  
for our sins; faith that He will  
never forsake us, will forever save  
us.

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2. Secondly obedience. Those  
nays that we saw seem right to a man  
but are not, are wrong in this: they  
are too self-reliant, self-important,  
self-directive. Upon the myste-  
rious journey of life — how dark  
it often seems to us! when we know  
not what course is best to pur-  
sue! how solemn, when it passes  
suddenly by the unwelcome fire!  
upon this mysterious journey, how  
mad is a man, never passing over  
it before, constantly half-dazed  
with its profound ~~enigma~~ problems,  
to think he can afford to despise  
a guiding voice from Heaven! Let  
no man vainly boast that he does  
have faith in G., who is not all the  
time rendering an earnest, watch-  
ful obedience to His word! See  
the wanderer ~~among~~ fitfully  
in strange waters

31 neglect his compass? would such  
an one be counted wise? does the  
traveler over a strange road neglect the  
guide posts? So X. must be our Way,  
by commanding our instincts & con-  
stant obedience; obedience to His  
every word; acquaintance with it  
in order to obedience, inflexible faith-  
ful heed to its every counsel, every  
admonition, every command.  
This may sometimes seem not right  
unto a man: when it bids him to  
run athwart the popular prac-  
tices of his dear companions, when  
it leads straight into humiliation, &  
money loss, & what many will call sin-  
gularity or eccentricity; but it is right,  
this obedience to the word of X., & the  
faithful one who really believes X.  
will, however painfully, yet, never-  
er even reluctantly, choose this Way.

3. Third of imitation. Please to be



the name of the great God, Who, 32  
along the mysterious journey of  
this world's life, has given us for  
the only sure way, the difficult &  
self-humbling <sup>assurances</sup> <sup>&</sup> <sup>commands</sup> of X<sup>c</sup>; that  
He has not required us to go in it  
alone, or in the dark. Is it hard to  
do sometimes as the Bible bids  
us? Learn X<sup>c</sup> is the way, in that  
He has not only made peace for us  
with God by His own sufferings, not  
only lays down certain terrible com-  
mands for us, but in that He Him-  
self affords us an example of  
so journeying. What hardships can  
we encounter that He did not endure?  
What loss shall we suffer that has  
not cost Him more? What con-  
tumely of the world's people can  
be heaped upon us that has not

33 wounded Him? He does not  
say Go! but Follow Me! If we  
are puzzled sometimes, to know what  
word of His is the direction for our  
steps; if we find it hard in the  
blinding darkness of this sinful  
world, sometimes to see the  
compass, to read aright the guide-  
boards; great is the love of God, in  
that a careful study of His  
life as one goes on this same strange  
life journey may familiarize us  
enough with His mind, with His ex-  
periences, to keep us from serious error.  
O the love of H<sup>e</sup>! That gives us, indeed,  
away which is right! Love to Him  
— the free play of gratitude for all  
that He has done for us — is a suf-  
ficient light by which to read His will,  
His directions, in the darkest night.

This shall steer & guide us ever <sup>34</sup>  
away from no-religion, from ne-  
glect of religion, from one-sidedness,  
from formal religion, & from the man  
who boasts of an adequate morality. This  
shall protect us against vain im-  
aginations, bad example, & bad habits;  
when the love of X<sup>o</sup> constraineth us,  
then, tho' then only, do we stum-  
ble the way that seemeth right unto  
a man but the end of which are  
the rays of death."