

## WANDERING THOUGHTS.

We hope that our readers will give particular attention in reading Rev. John Wesley's article on "Wandering Thoughts" in our two issues of The Highway—February 28 and March 15. Many have been much perplexed on this subject.—Ed.

By Rev. John Wesley.

(Continued from last issue)

III. 1. What kind of wandering thoughts are sinful, and what not, is the Third thing to be inquired into. And, First, all those thoughts which wander from God, which leave him no room in our minds, are undoubtedly sinful. For all these imply practical Atheism; and by these we are without God in the world. And so much more are all those which are contrary to God, which imply opposition or enmity to him. Such are all murmuring, discontented thoughts, which say, in effect, "We will not have thee to rule over us;"—all unbelieving thoughts whether with regard to his being, his attributes, or his providence. I mean, his particular providence over all things, as well as all persons, in the universe; that without which "not a sparrow falls to the ground," by which "the hairs of our head are all numbered;" for as to a general providence, (vulgarly so called), contradistinguished from a particular, it is only a decent, well-sounding word, which means just nothing.

2. Again: All thoughts which spring from sinful tempers are undoubtedly sinful. Such for instance are those that spring from a revengeful temper, from pride, or lust, or vanity. "An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit:" Therefore if the tree be evil, so must the fruit be also.

3. And so must those be which either produce or feed any sinful temper; those which either give rise to pride or vanity, to anger or love of the world, or confirm and increase these or any other unholy temper, passion, or affection. For not only whatever flows from evil is evil; but also whatever leads to it; whatever tends to alienate the soul from God, and to make or keep it earthly, sensual and devilish.

4. Hence, even those thoughts which are occasioned by weakness or disease, by the natural mechanism of the body, or by the laws of vital union, however innocent they may be in themselves, do nevertheless become sinful, when they either produce or cherish and increase in us any sinful temper; suppose the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life. In like manner, the wandering thoughts which are occasioned by the words or actions of other men, if they cause or feed any wrong disposition, then commence sinful. And the same we may observe of those which are suggested or injected by the devil. When they minister to any earthly or devilish temper (which they do, whenever we give place to them, and thereby make them our own), then they are equally sinful with the tempers to which they minister.

5. But, abstracting from these cases, wandering thoughts, in the latter sense of the word, that is, thoughts wherein our understanding wanders from the point it has in view, are no more sinful than the motion of the blood in our veins, or of the

spirits in our brain. If they arise from an infirm constitution, or from some accidental weakness or distemper, they are as innocent as it is to have a weak constitution or a distempered body. And surely no one doubts but a bad state of nerves, a fever of any kind, and either a transient or a lasting delirium, may consist with perfect innocence. And if they should arise in a soul which is united to a healthful body, either from the natural union between the body and soul, (or from any of ten thousand changes which may occur in these organs of the body that minister to thought—in any of these cases they are as perfectly innocent as the causes from which they spring. And so they are when they spring from the casual, involuntary associations of our ideas.

If our thoughts wander from the point we had in view, by means of other men variously affecting our senses, they are equally innocent still: For it is no more a sin to understand what I see and hear, and in many cases cannot help seeing, hearing, and understanding, than it is to have eyes and ears. "But if the devil injects wandering thoughts, are not those thoughts evil?" They are troublesome, and in that sense evil; but they are not sinful. I do not know that he spoke to our Lord with an audible voice; perhaps he spoke to his heart only, when he said, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." But whether he spoke inwardly or outwardly our Lord doubtless understood what he said. He had therefore a thought correspondent to those words. But was it a sinful thought? We know it was not. In him was no sin, either in action, or word, or thought. Nor is there any sin in a thousand thoughts of the same kind, which Satan may inject into any of our Lord's followers.

7. It follows that none of these wandering thoughts (whatever unwary persons have affirmed, thereby grieving whom the Lord had not grieved) are inconsistent with perfect love. Indeed, if they were, then not only sharp pain, but sleep itself, would be inconsistent with it:—Sharp pain; for whatever this supervenes, whatever we were before thinking of, it will interrupt our thinking, and of course draw our thoughts into another channel:—Yea, and sleep itself; as it is a state of insensibility and stupidity; and such as is generally mixed with thoughts wandering over the earth, loose, wild, and incoherent. Yet certainly these are consistent with perfect love: So there are all wandering thoughts of this kind.

IV. 1. From what has been observed, it is easy to give a clear answer to the last question,—What kind of wandering thoughts we may expect and pray to be delivered from.

From the former sort of wandering thoughts—those wherein the heart wanders from God; from all that are contrary to his will, or that leave us without God in the world; every one that is perfected in love is unquestionably delivered. This deliverance, therefore, we may expect; this we may, we ought to pray for. Wandering thoughts of this kind imply unbelief, if not enmity against God; but both of these he will destroy, will bring utterly to an end. And indeed, from all sinful wandering

thoughts we shall be absolutely delivered. All that are perfected in love are delivered from these; else they were not saved from sin. Men and devils will tempt them all manner of ways; but they cannot prevail over them.

2. With regard to the latter sort of wandering thoughts, the case is widely different. Till the cause is removed, we cannot in reason expect the effect should cease. But the causes or occasions of these will remain so long as we remain in the body. So long, therefore, we have all reason to believe the effects will remain also.

3. To be more particular: Suppose a soul, however holy, to dwell in a distempered body; suppose the brain be so thoroughly disordered, as that raging madness follows; will not all the thoughts be wild and unconnected as long as that disorder continues? Suppose a fever occasions that temporary madness which we term delirium; can there be any just connexion of thought till that delirium is removed? Yea, suppose what is called a nervous disorder to rise to so high a degree as to occasion at least a partial madness; will there not be a thousand wandering thoughts? And must not these irregular thoughts continue as long as the disorder which occasions them?

4. Will not the case be the same with regard to those thoughts that necessarily arise from violent pain? They will more or less continue, while that pain continues, by the inviolable order of nature. This order likewise, will obtain, where the thoughts are disturbed, broken, or interrupted, by any defect of the apprehension, judgment, or imagination, flowing from the natural constitution of the body. And how many interruptions may spring from the unaccountable and involuntary associations of our ideas! Now, all these are directly or indirectly caused by the corruptible body pressing down the mind. Nor, therefore, can we expect them to be removed till "this corruptible shall put on incorruption."

5. And then only, when we lie down in the dust, shall we be delivered from those wandering thoughts which are occasioned by what we see and hear, among those by whom we are now surrounded. To avoid these, we must go out of the world: For as long as we remain therein, as long as there are men and women round about us, and we have eyes to see and ears to hear, the things which we daily see and hear will certainly affect our mind, and will more or less break in upon and interrupt our preceding thoughts.

6. And as long as evil spirits roam to and fro in a miserable disordered world, so long they will assault (whether they can prevail or no every inhabitant of flesh and blood. They will trouble even those whom they cannot destroy: They will attack, if they cannot conquer. And from these attacks of our restless, unwearied enemies, we must not look for an entire deliverance, till we are lodged "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest."

7. To sum up the whole: To expect deliverance from those wandering thoughts which are occasioned by evil spirits is to expect that the devil should die or fall asleep, or, at least, should no more go