

Spiritual Improvement

Sunday [aft.] 12

Matthew 25, Chapter 29<sup>th</sup> Verse.

June 1842

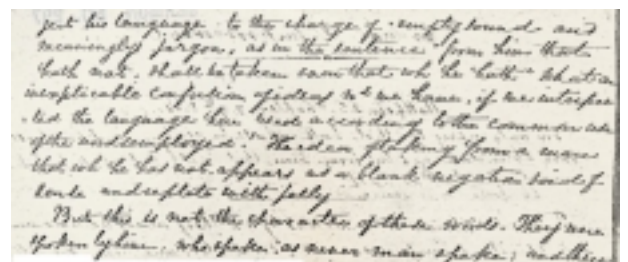
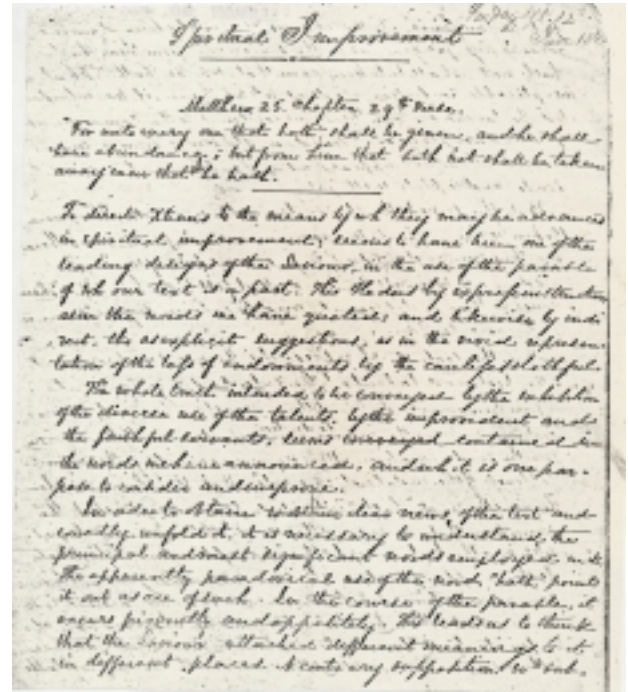
“For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away that wh he hath.

To direct Xtians to the means by wh they may be advanced in spiritual improvement; seems to have been one of the leading designs of the Saviour, in the use of the parable of wh our text is a part. This He does by express instructions as in the words we have quoted; and likewise by indi[-]rect the as explicit suggestions, as in the vivid representation of the loss of endowments by the careless & slothful[.]

The whole truth intended to be conveyed by the exhibition of the diverse use of the talents, by the improvident and the faithful servants; seems conveyed contained in the words we have announced, and wh it is our purpose to consider and improve.

In order to obtain ~~to obtain~~ dear news of the text and corectly unfold it, it is necessary to understand the principal and most significant words employed in it. The apparently paradoxical use of the word, “hath” points it out as one of such. In the course of the parable, it occurs frequently and oppositely. This leads us to think that the Saviour attached different meanings to it in different places. A [couts] supposition w<sup>d</sup> subject his language to the charge of empty sound and meaningless jargon, as in the sentence “from him that hath not, shall be taken even that wh he hath[.]” What an inexplicable confusion of ideas w<sup>d</sup> we have, if we interpreted the language here used according to the common use of the [unds]employed! The idea of taking from a man that wh he has not, appears as a blank negation void of sense and replete with folly[.]

But this is not the character of these words. They were spoken by him, who spoke as never man spoke; and there=



fore, they are words of deep import and full of the highest wisdom, as were all the words that fell from his lips. There must be then a different and peculiar significance pertaining to them.

From the context wh represents the use & improvement of the bestowed talents by the enterprising servants—  
—from the commendation of their master for such [a] procedure—from the ~~deduction~~ [in....] [...] drawn by the Saviour from the condemnation uttered on account of the unprofitableness of the indolent; we infer that the Saviour when he used the word “hath” intended it to carry with it the same force that we regard this word “appropriate” to possess; and the text may be thus paraphrased: He that hath, or appropriates, shall have more given to him; even as unto him who had increased his talents to [...] were added other two talents; and he who does not appropriate his endowments, shall lose those that have been bestowed upon him, as was the case with the unprofitable servant whose two talents were taken from him.

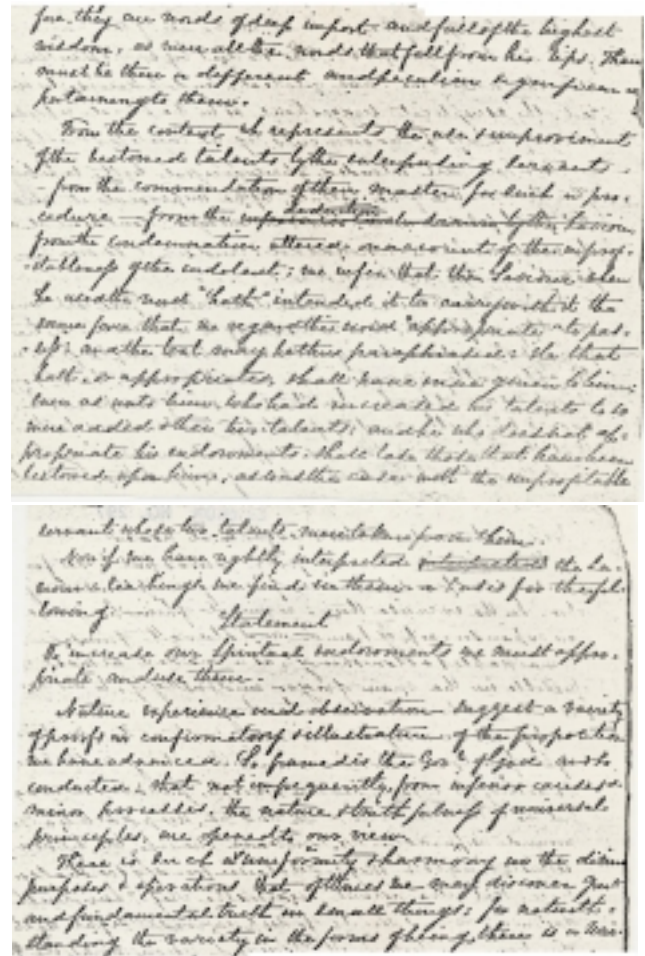
Now if we have rightly interpreted ~~interpreted~~ the Saviour's teachings we find in them a basis for the following—

#### Statement

To increase our spiritual endowments we must appropriate and use them.

Native experience and observation suggest a variety of proofs ~~in~~ confirmatory illustration of the proposition we have advanced. So framed is the Gov<sup>t</sup> of God and so conducted; ~~[shall]~~ not infrequently, from inferior causes & minor processes, the nature & truthfulness of universal principles, are opened to our view.

There is such an uniformity & harmony in the divine purposes & operations that oftentimes we may discover great and fundamental truth in small things; for notwithstanding the variety in the forms of being there is a Uni=



=ty pervading all. This lead us to remark that the state  
=ment deduced from the text is substantiated by a refe=  
rence to the analogy of things[.]

The men distinguished for extraordinary physical energy are examples of the effects produced in the use and exercise of our powers. The Blacksmith who with iron frame & sinewy arm wields his ponderous sledge, & deals out his astonishing blows upon the resistless anvil; was once in his time a weak & helpless infant~~er~~. Perhaps in his youth, he was more remarkable for imbecility, as giving indications [than for] strength of nerve or vigor of frame. In this respects he may have been inferior to many who now look with wonder at his strength and power.

But as he advanced in youth he was put to the forge and accustomed to the use of heavy implements of labor. In the exercise there required of him he gained an [exhaustiveness of] frame and strength of muscle, so remarkable & astonishing, as to make it almost impossible in the man of vigor and energy, to discover the once weak and attenuated boy.

Again, we may see the same truth in the quick keen sight of inexperienced [Seaman]. Standing with him on the deck of yr ocean-heaved vessel, you can see nought but the clear heavens above and the deep dark waters around as far as the eye can ~~reach~~ stretch, till the horizon seems to bring both sky and water in friendly & cordial embrace. But on the instant he raises the cry—"[Land] in the [...]!"—and due its [yr] deep earnest sight in the direction. You look with steamed vision until the eye is pained and the head dizzyed with the intensity of gaze, and nought is observable save the same accustomed blank of clouds & waters wh for days have mocked yr anxious heart, and you begin to doubt his capacity of vision.

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But what is difficult for yr eyes is perfectly easy to his[.]  
A few years ago he c<sup>d</sup> see no further than you. But the blindness  
in wh he is engaged required quickness of sight and was  
adapted to strengthen and lengthen the vision, and so by  
continual [...].

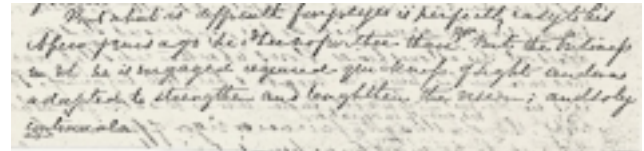
Now passing from the proofs drawn from the exercise  
of our physical endowments to the use of our mental powers  
we ~~may~~ shall discover the like principle in a different form.

Our own country—among the many she can produce  
furnishes one of the most illustrious examples the world ever  
saw, in the life and character of Benjamin Franklin.

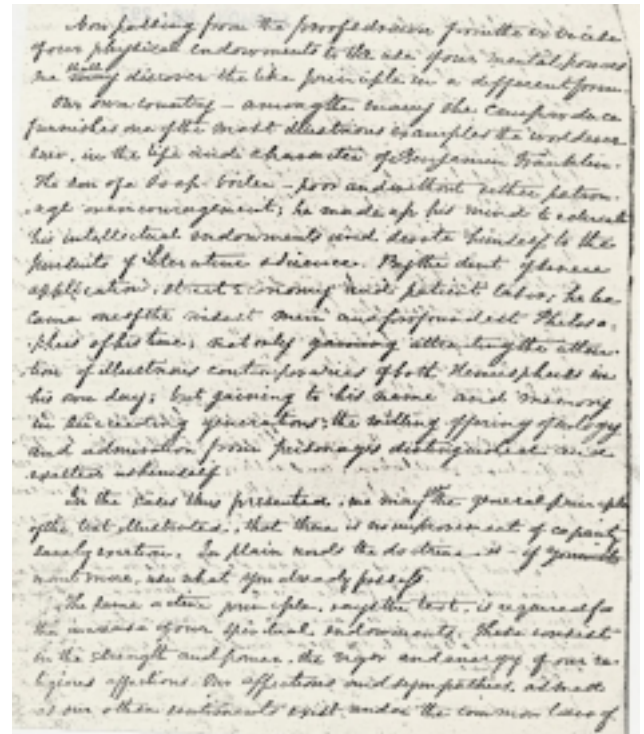
The son of a soap-boiler—poor and without either patron=  
=age or encouragement; he made up his mind to educate  
his intellectual endowments and devote himself to the  
pursuits of Literature & Science. By the dint of severe  
application, strict economy and patient labor; he be[—]  
=came one of the wisest men and profoundest Philoso=  
=phers of his time; not only ~~gaining~~ attracting the atten=  
=tion of illustrious contemporaries of both Hemispheres in  
his own day; but gaining to his name and memory  
in succeeding generations, the willing offering of eulogy  
and admiration from personages distinguished and  
exalted as himself.

In the cases thus presented, we may use the general principle  
of the text illustrated, that there is the improvement of capacity  
[sanely] exertion. In plain words the doctrine is—if you ~~wish~~  
want more, use what you already possess.

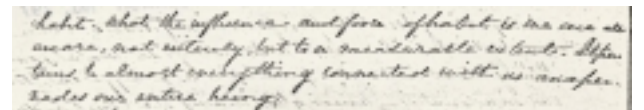
The same active principle, says the text, is required for  
the increase of our spiritual endowments. These consist  
in the strength and power, the vigor and energy of our re=  
ligious affections. Our affections and sympathies, as well  
as our other sentiments exist under the common law of  
habit. What the influence and force of habit is we are all  
aware, not entirely, but to a measurable extent. It per=  
tains to almost everything connected with us and per=  
vades our entire being.



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want more, use what you already possess.

The Saviour tells us that as Xtians can so praise themselves under the control & influence of healthful & soul elevating habits, that by strict conformity to them, they may strengthen the tone of their capacities, and reap to themselves a rich and abundant harvest of spiritual good & blessedness, & thus be brought powers in the Xtian course. And this is the condition upon wh spiritual advancement, and growth in grace are offered by him[.]

Another argument sustaining the general position we have advanced may be found in the conditions on wh all the benefits of the gospel are dispersed.

The chief benefits the Saviour offered men in his [mind] are conversion regeneration, the aids & blessings of the Spirit of grace for spiritual exaltation, and ultimately the crown of eternal life; and the bestowment of them is based upon conditions wh require the earnest and continual exercise of all the powers of the soul.

The soul of man is not regarded by its maker as a passive instrument for the operation of divine influences[.] When He framed it, he framed it with an active principle assigned to every form of being and capacitated it to ~~go~~ great and limitless improvement[.]

#### In this active

The commencement of God's kingdom in the heart is by conversion. Divine influences are so [exhausted] upon the soul as to change thought disposition and tendency from that impure & [whole] current in wh they have ever flowed; till in will we are perfectly coincident with the divine mind. But there can be no conversion without repentance, and repentance is an act of the individual soul. No other individual being in the universe can repent for us but ourselves. The mind turned in upon itself, examining its own states; loathing its own corruption in the sight of God; is to turn from the ways of sin; and upon this ex=

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=ercise of its powers is conditioned that divine power of conversion wh is the first movement in the souls progress to spirituality. In this is expressed to us in distinct terms the means of renovation. If you w<sup>d</sup> [be connected] [...] our maker—repent—Repent and be [connected].—If you w<sup>d</sup> appropriate to yrself this ~~high~~ initiatory step toward regeneration & salvation; exercise yr own pow=  
=ers.

The same terms are declared as necessary in the supply of the soul with those peculiar gifts & influences wh are guaranteed by the Holy Spirit for the [confirmation] of the Saints and the upbuilding of the Faith in the [heart] —“Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek & ye shall find.”—And so the [...] of your faith and holiness the [crown] ~~of life~~ righteousness wh the Lord, the righteous Judge—has laid up for the faithful, will be given us as the [...] of “patient continuance in well doing” and per=  
severance unto the End.

The doctrine of the text is further substantiated by a reference to the effects of some peculiar spiritual exercises.

There are those whose continual practise is to spiritualize [upon] every thing that meets their eyes. There is nought that they see but what speaks of goodness, truth, and love and [...] ty, and God the great source of all. It is their constant habit to be ever educing something of holy import from the things that meet and pass their vision[.] What to others seems blank and vacant is full of spiritual presences to them, the forms that are odious and repulsive to the most, present to their scrutinizing gaze glorious revelations, and even in things evil they discover a soul of goodness.

And there are others: The atmosphere they breathe is odorous with prayer. They feel their home ever to be at the foot of the mercy seat, and their duty the quiet or vocal utterance of the soul's desires. With such men every thought and all their conversation is sanctified by the sacred aspect of prayer[-]

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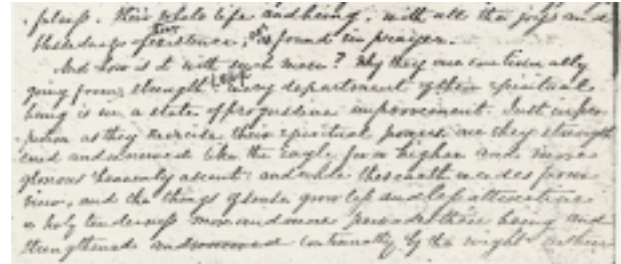
And how is it with such men? Why they are continually going from strength to strength. Every department of the spiritual being is in a state of progressive improvement. Just in proportion as they exercise their spiritual powers, are they strengthened and renewed like the Eagle for a higher and more glorious heavenly ascent: and while this earth recedes from view, and the things of sense grow less and less attractive a holy tenderness more and more pervades their being and strengthened ~~and renewed~~ continually by the might [...] inspired by the Holy Spirit, they take hold as with [...] the things of the spirit, incorporate them in their being and while they dwell on earth they breathe [...] air.

A fourth argument adapted to convince us of the ~~49~~ truth of the general sentiment we are endeavoring to sustain; may be found in the example of goodness wh[o] at various times have been sent to bless the human family, and illustrate divine truth in their lives.

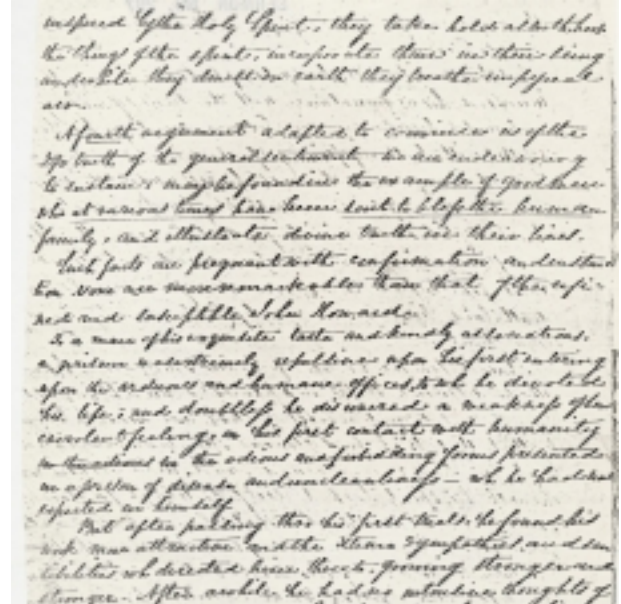
Such facts are pregnant with confirmation and instruction[.] None are more remarkable than that of the refined and susceptible John Howard.

To a man of his exquisite taste and kindly associations, a prison is as extremely repulsive upon his first entering upon the arduous and humane offices, to wh he devoted his life; and doubtless he discovered a weakness of benevolent feeling, in his first contact with humanity ~~in the odious~~ in the odious and forbidding forms presented in a prison of disease and uncleanness—wh he had not expected in himself.

But after passing thro his first trials, he found his work more attractive and the Xtian sympathies and sensibilities wh derided him there to, growing stronger and stronger. After awhile he had no intrusive thoughts of



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a repelling character. So invigorated became his benevolence, and so expansive his love, that there was more delight to his soul in relieving the ~~the~~ wants and lessening the miseries of his fellows, than was ever experienced in the pleasures of a drawing [...] or amid the convivialities of social life.

And thus was it with the objects of his benevolence. As he increased his acquaintance with the scenes of misery and want under his own eye in his own country; his heart swelled with brotherly feeling for the wide world of distress and misery; and he cast his eyes upon the more intolerable scenes of prison=suffering in foreign lands[.] And he left his own country, and became the Apostle of suffering man, amid the fevers and contagious diseases pent up in the narrow cells of criminals, until death laid him low, a martyr to humanity, in a foreign clime.

I have before me the life of John Bunyan's. I see there all the different states and processes thro wh he passed, from the wild and almost brutish aversion to Xtian truth, to that high and glorious spiritual exaltation to wh few have ever attained, and in wh, even while on earth his spirit, took to itself the wings of a dove, and gave revelations to men seraphic and almost divine.

I turn to the life of another exalted saint[.] I have Paul before me. I follow the incidents of his life, from his heartless and bloody assent to the murder of Stephen, to his cruel persecution of the Xtians of Jerusalem—from the miraculous interposition on the road to Damascus, yet dead to righteousness and faith;—to his conversion and first efforts in the Xtian cause at Damascus—from his imprisonment at Philippe, ~~to his bold & fearless self-vindication before Agrippa~~ to his undaunted and majestic condemnation of heathenism on the Forum at Athens—or his

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pears before me. I follow the ~~the~~ eventful course of his  
life from the departure from the home of his fathers, at  
the Lords bidding; until I reach his high attainment in  
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guests & visitants, were wont to sit familiar beneath the  
shade of his tent door, and at his well furnished board;  
and God himself was willing patiently to listen in friendly  
communication, to mortal man.

And what do we learn from the example of these holy  
ones whose life and character we have held up to yr ob=  
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And I have heavenly visions, and divine revela=  
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is opened to my view. There I see angels and arch=angels, myriads on myriads, a countless multitude[.] There I behold the entire host of the redeemed. To them particularly do I direct any attention. They are all gathered around the throne of the Lamb, and [pass] Him unceasing adoration and unnumbered praises[.]

And what is it I learn from them? –I see in their eventful career, written as with the prayer of God the great truth it has been ours to prove. They have all worked out their salvation with fear and trembling and have come up to the heavenly city this great tribula= tions and distresses, and thus have they secured to them[–] selves the ineffible delights of God's kingdom of grace & glory above.

“Therefore” says the inspired seaman;—Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day & night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on their [...] heat. For the Lamb wh is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them into living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

Rev. [...]

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