Fleeing Out of Sodom

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Contents

Introduction

1. Doctrine: We Ought Not to Look Back.

2. Application of This Doctrine

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Introduction

"Even thus shall it be in the day when
the Son of man is revealed."
—Luke 17:30

Christ is here foretelling His coming in His kingdom in answer to the question which the Pharisees asked Him, namely, when the kingdom of God should come. And in what He says of His coming, He evidently has respect to two things, His coming at the destruction of Jerusalem, and His coming to the general judgment at the end of the world. He compares His coming at those times to the coming of God in two remarkable judgments that were past; first to that in the time of the flood: "and as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man" (Luk 17:26). Next, He compares it to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot…even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luk 17:28-30).

Then He immediately proceeds to direct His people how they should behave themselves at the appearance of the signal of the approach of that day, referring especially to the destruction of Jerusalem. "In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back" (Luk 17:31). In which words Christ shows that they should make the utmost haste to flee and get out of the city to the mountains, as He commands, Matthew 24:15-18 says: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes."

Jerusalem was like Sodom, in that it was devoted to destruction, by special divine wrath, as Sodom was; and indeed to a more terrible destruction than Sodom. Therefore, the like direction is given concerning fleeing out of it with the utmost haste, without looking behind, as the angel gave to Lot, when he bid him flee out of Sodom in Genesis 19:17, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain." And in the text Christ enforces His counsel by the instance of Lot's wife. He bids them remember her, and take warning by her, who looked back as she was fleeing out of Sodom, and became a pillar of salt.

If it be inquired why Christ gave this direction to His people to flee out of Jerusalem, in such exceeding haste, at the first notice of the signal of her approaching destruction, I answer: it seems to be, because fleeing out of Jerusalem was a type of fleeing out of a state of sin. Escaping out of that unbelieving city typified an escape out of a state of unbelief. Therefore they were directed to flee without staying to take anything out of their houses, to signify with what haste and greatness of concern we should flee out of a natural condition; that no respect to any worldly enjoyment should prevent or delay us one moment. And that we should flee to Jesus Christ, the refuge of souls, our strong rock, and the mount of our defense, so as in fleeing to Him, to leave and forsake heartily all earthly things.

This seems to be the chief reason also why Lot was directed to make such haste, and not to look behind; because his fleeing out of Sodom was designed on purpose to be a type of our fleeing from that state of sin and misery in which we naturally are.

1. Doctrine: We Ought Not to Look Back.

The following reasons may be sufficient to support this doctrine.

First: That Sodom is a city full of filthiness and abominations. It is a filthy and abominable city; it is full of those impurities that are worthy to be had in the utmost abhorrence and detestation by all. The inhabitants of it are a polluted company. They are all under the power and dominion of hateful lusts. All their faculties and affections are polluted with those vile dispositions that are unworthy of the human nature, that greatly debase it, that are exceeding hateful to God and dreadfully incense His anger. Every kind of spiritual abomination abounds in it: in Sodom there is all filthiness that can be thought of. There is nothing so hateful and abominable but that there it is to be found, and there it abounds.

Sodom is a city full of devils and all unclean spirits; there they have their rendezvous, and there they have their dominion. There they and those that are like unto them sport and wallow themselves in filthiness as it is said of mystical Babylon in Revelation 18:2, "Babylon...is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." Who would be of such a society? Who would not flee from such a city with the utmost haste, and never look back upon it, and never have the least inclination of returning, or having any thing to do there any more?

Some in Sodom may seem to carry a fair face, and make a fair outward show; but if we could look into their hearts, they are every one altogether filthy and abominable. We ought to flee from such a city, with the utmost abhorrence of the place and society, with no desire to dwell longer there, and never to discover the least inclination to return to it; but should be desirous to get to the greatest possible distance from it, that we might in no wise be partakers in her abominations.

Second: We ought not to look back when fleeing out of Sodom, because Sodom is a city appointed to destruction. The cry of the city has reached up to heaven. The earth cannot bear such a burden as her inhabitants are; she will therefore disburden herself of them, and spew them out. God will not suffer such a city to stand. He will consume it. God is a holy God, and His nature is infinitely opposite to all such uncleanness as Sodom is full of. He will therefore be a consuming fire to it. The holiness of God will not suffer it to stand, and the majesty and justice of God require that the inhabitants of that city, who thus offend and provoke Him, be destroyed. And God will surely destroy them; it is the immutable and irreversible decree of God. He has said it, and He will do it. The decree is gone forth, and so sure as there is a God, and He is Almighty, and able to fulfill His decrees and threatenings, so surely will He destroy Sodom. Genesis 19:12-13 says, "Whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it." And verse 14, "Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city."

This city is an accursed city; it is destined to ruin. Therefore, as we would not be partakers of her curse, and would not be destroyed, we should flee out of it, and not look behind us: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev 18:4).

Third: We ought not to look back when fleeing out of Sodom, because the destruction to which it is appointed is exceedingly dreadful. It is appointed to utter destruction, to be wholly and entirely consumed. It is appointed to suffer a dreadful storm of fire and brimstone. This city is to be filled full of the wrath of God. Every one that remains in it shall have the fire of God's

wrath come down on his head and into his soul. He shall be full of fire, and full of the wrath of the Almighty. He shall be encompassed with fire without and full of fire within. His head, his heart, his bowels, and all his limbs shall be full of fire, and not a drop of water to cool him.

Nor shall he have any place to flee to for relief. Go where he will, there is the fire of God's wrath: his destruction and torment will be inevitable. He shall be destroyed without any pity. He shall cry aloud, but there shall be none to help. There shall be none to regard his lamentations, or to afford relief. The decree is gone forth, and the days come when Sodom shall burn as an oven, and all the inhabitants thereof shall be as stubble. As it was in the literal Sodom, the whole city was full of fire. In their houses there was no safety, for they were all on fire; and if they fled out into the streets, they also were full of fire. Fire continually came down out of heaven everywhere. That was a dismal time. What a cry was there then in that city, in every part of it! But there was none to help. They had nowhere to go where they could hide their heads from fire; they had none to pity or relieve them. If they fled to their friends, they could not help them.

Now, with what haste we should flee from a city appointed to such a destruction! And how we should flee without looking behind us! How it should be our whole intent, and that we with all our minds and might are engaged about, to get at the greatest distance from a city in such circumstances. How far we should be from thinking at all of returning to a city which has such wrath hanging over it!

Fourth: The destruction to which Sodom is appointed is a universal destruction. None that stay in it shall escape. None will have the good fortune to be in any by-corner, where the fire will not search them out. All sorts, old and young, great and small, shall be destroyed. There shall be no exception of any age, or any sex, or any condition, but all shall perish together. Genesis 19:24-25 says, "Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground." We therefore must no longer delay or look behind us; for there is no place of safety in Sodom, nor in all the plain on which Sodom is built. The mountain of safety is before us, and not behind us.

Fifth: The destruction to which Sodom is appointed is an everlasting destruction. This is said of the literal Sodom, that it suffered the vengeance of eternal fire, in Jude 7: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." That destruction that Sodom and Gomorrah suffered was an eternal destruction. Those cities were destroyed, and have never been built since, and are not capable of being rebuilt; for the land on which they stood at the time of their destruction sunk, and has been ever since covered with the lake of Sodom or the Dead Sea, or as it is called in Scripture, "the salt sea" (Jos 3:16). This seems to have been thus ordered on purpose to be a type of the eternal destruction of ungodly men. So that fire by which they were destroyed is called eternal fire, because it was so typically. It was a type of the eternal destruction of ungodly men; which may be in part what is intended, when it is said in that text in Jude, that they were set forth for an example, or for a type of representation of the eternal fire in which all the ungodly are to be consumed.

Sodom has in all ages since been covered with a lake which was first brought on it by fire and brimstone, to be a type of the lake of fire and brimstone, to be a type of the lake of fire and brimstone in which ungodly men shall have their part forever and ever, as we read Revelation 20:15, and elsewhere.

Sixth: Sodom is a city appointed to swift and sudden destruction. The destruction is not only certain and inevitable, and infinitely dreadful, but it will come speedily, "Whose judgment...lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not" (2Pe 2:3). And so Deuteronomy 32:35: "The day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste." The storm of wrath, the black clouds of divine vengeance even now every moment hang over them, just ready to break forth and come down in a dreadful manner upon them. God has already whet His sword, and bent His bow, and made ready His arrow on the string (see Psa 7:12). Therefore we should make haste, and not look behind us. For if we linger and stop to look back, and flee not for our lives, there is great danger that we shall be involved in the common ruin.

The destruction of Sodom is not only swift, but will come suddenly and unexpectedly. It seems to have been a fair morning in Sodom on the morning that it was destroyed. There is notice taken of the time when the sun rose that morning (Gen 19:23). It seems that there were no clouds to be seen, no appearance of any storm at all, much less a storm of fire and brimstone. The inhabitants of Sodom expected no such thing; even when Lot told his sons-in-law of it, they would not believe it (Gen 19:14). They were making merry; their hearts were at ease. They thought nothing of such a calamity at hand. But it came at once, as travail upon a woman with child, and there was no escape; as it is observed in the context, Luke 17:28-29, "They did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all."

So it is with wicked men. Psalm 73:19 says "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors." If therefore we linger and look back, we may be suddenly overtaken and seized with destruction.

Seventh: There is nothing in Sodom that is worth looking back upon. All the enjoyments of Sodom will soon perish in the common destruction; all will be burnt up. And surely it is not worth the while to look back on things that are perishing and consuming in the flames, as it is with all the enjoyments of sin. They are all appointed to the fire. Therefore it is foolish for any who are fleeing out of Sodom to hanker any more after them; for when they are burnt up, what good can they do? And is it worth the while for us to return back for the sake of a moment's enjoyment of them, before they are burnt, and so expose ourselves to be burnt up with them?

Lot's wife looked back, because she remembered the pleasant things that she left in Sodom. She hated to leave them. She hankered after them; she could not but look back with a wistful eye upon the city, where she had lived in such ease and pleasure. Sodom was a place of great outward plenty; they ate the fat and drank the sweet. The soil where Sodom was built was exceedingly plentiful; it is said to be as the "garden of the LORD" (Gen 13:10).

Here Lot and his wife lived plentifully; and it was a place where the inhabitants wallowed in carnal pleasures and delights. But however much it abounded in these things, what were they worth now, when the city was burning? Lot's wife was very foolish in lingering in her escape for the sake of things which were all on fire. So the enjoyments, the profits, and pleasures of sin have the wrath and curse of God on them; brimstone is scattered on them; hellfire is ready to kindle on them. It is not therefore worthwhile for any person to look back after such things.

Eighth: We are warned by messengers sent to us from God to make haste in our flight from Sodom, and not to look behind us. God sends to us His ministers, the angels of the churches, on this grand errand, as He sent the angels to warn Lot and his wife to flee for their lives, and to say and do as we have account in Genesis 19:15-16. If we delay or look back, now that we have had such fair warning, we shall be exceedingly inexcusable and monstrously foolish.

2. Application of This Doctrine

The use that I would make of this doctrine is to warn those who are in a natural condition to flee out of it, and by no means to look back. While you are out of Christ, you are in Sodom. The whole history of the destruction of Sodom, with all its circumstances, seems to be inserted in the Scriptures for our warning, and is set forth as an example, as the Apostle Jude says. It, in a lively manner, typifies the case of natural men, the destruction of those that continue in a natural state, and the manner of their escape who flee to Christ. The psalmist, when speaking of the appointed punishment of ungodly men, seems evidently to refer to the destruction of Sodom in Psalm 11:6, "Upon the wicked he [God] shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup."

Consider therefore what the state is that you are to get out of, you that are seeking an interest in Christ. You are to flee out of Sodom. Sodom is the place of your nativity, and the place where you have spent your lives hitherto. You are citizens of that city which is full of filthiness and abomination before God, that polluted and accursed city. You belong to that impure society. You not only live among them, but you are of them. You are some that have committed those abominations, and have so provoked God as you have heard. It is you that I have all this while been speaking of under this doctrine. You are the inhabitants of Sodom. Perhaps you may look on your circumstances as not very dreadful; but you dwell in Sodom. Though you may be reformed, and appear with a clean outside, and a smooth face to the world; yet as long as you are in a natural condition, you are impure inhabitants of Sodom.

The world of mankind is divided into two companies, or, as I may say, into two cities: there is the city of Zion, the church of God, the holy and beloved city; and there is Sodom, that polluted and accursed city, which is appointed to destruction. You belong to the latter of these. How much soever you may look upon yourselves better than some others, yet you are of the same city; the same company with fornicators, and drunkards, and adulterers, and common swearers, and highwaymen, and pirates, and Sodomites. How much soever you may think yourselves distinguished, as long as you are out of Christ you belong to the very same society. You are of the same company, you join with them, and are no better than they, any otherwise than as you have greater restraints. You are considered in the sight of God as fit to be ranked with them. You and they are altogether the objects of the loathing and abhorrence of God, and have the wrath of God abiding on you. You will go with them and be destroyed with them, if you do not escape from your present state. Yea, you are of the same society and the same company with the devils, for Sodom is not only the city of wicked men, but it is the hold of every foul spirit.

You belong to that city that is appointed to an awful, inevitable, universal, swift, and sudden destruction; a city that has a storm of fire and wrath hanging over it.

Many of you are convinced of the awful state you are in while in Sodom, and are making some attempts to escape from the wrath which hangs over it. Let such be warned by what has been said, to escape for their lives, and not to look back. Look not back, unless you choose to have a share in the burning tempest that is coming down on that city. Look not back in remembrance of the enjoyments which you have had in Sodom, as hankering after the pleasant things which you have had there, after the ease, the security, and the pleasure which you have enjoyed.

Remember Lot's wife; for she looked back, as being loth[1] utterly and forever to leave the ease, the pleasure and plenty which she enjoyed in Sodom, and as having a mind to return to them again. Remember what became of her. Remember the children of Israel in the wilderness,

who were desirous of going back again into Egypt, because they remembered the leeks and onions of Egypt. Numbers 11:5 says, "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers…and the onions, and the garlick." Remember what was the issue of their hankering. You must be willing forever to leave all the ease, and pleasure, and profit of sin; to forsake all for salvation, as Lot forsook all, and left all he had, to escape out of Sodom. And further to enforce this warning, let me entreat[2] all you who are in this state to consider these several things which I shall now mention.

First: The destruction of which you are in danger is infinitely more dreadful than that destruction of the literal Sodom from which Lot fled. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in a storm of fire and brimstone was but a shadow of the destruction of ungodly men in hell, and is no more to it than a shadow or a picture is to a reality, or than painted fire is to real fire. The misery of hell is set forth by various shadows and images in Scripture, as blackness of darkness, a never dying worm, a furnace of fire, a lake of fire and brimstone, the torments of the valley of the son of Hinnom,[3] a storm of fire and brimstone. The reason why so many similitudes[4] are made use of, is because none of them are sufficient. Any one does but partly and very imperfectly represent the truth, and therefore God makes use of many.

You have therefore much more need to make haste in your escape, and not to look behind you, than Lot and his wife had when they fled out of Sodom. For you are every day and every moment in danger of a thousand times more dreadful storm coming on your heads than that which came on Sodom, when the Lord rained brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven upon them; so that it will be vastly more sottish[5] if you look back than it was in Lot's wife.

Second: The destruction you are in danger of is not only greater than the temporal destruction of Sodom, but greater than the eternal destruction of the inhabitants of Sodom. For however well you may think you have behaved yourselves, you have continued impenitent under the glorious gospel, have sinned more, and provoked God far more, and have greater guilt upon you, than the inhabitants of Sodom, although you may seem to yourselves, and perhaps to others to be very harmless creatures. Matthew 10:15 says, "Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city."

Third: Multitudes, while they have been looking back, have been suddenly overtaken and seized by the storm of wrath. The wrath of God has not delayed while they delayed. It has not waited at all for them to repent, to turn about and flee; but has presently seized them, and they have been past hope. When Lot's wife looked back, she was immediately destroyed. God had exercised patience towards her before. When she lingered at the setting out, the angels pressed her, her husband and children, to make haste. Not only so, but when they yet delayed, they laid hold on her hands and brought her forth, and set her without the city, the Lord being merciful to her. But now when, notwithstanding this mercy, and the warnings which had been given her, she looked back, God exercised no more patience towards her, but proceeded in wrath immediately to put her to death.

Now God has in like manner been merciful to you. You in time past have been lingering; you have been warned by the angel of your danger, and pressed to make haste and flee; yet you have delayed. And now at length God has, as it were, laid hold on you, by the convictions of His Spirit, to draw you out of Sodom; therefore remember Lot's wife. If now after all, you should look back, when God has been so merciful to you, you will have reason to fear that God will suddenly destroy you, and wait no longer for you. Multitudes, when they have been looking back and putting off to another opportunity, have never had another opportunity; they have been suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy.

Fourth: If you look back, and live long after it, there will be great danger that you will never get any farther. The only way to seek salvation is to press forward, with all your might, and still to look and press forward, never to stand still or slacken your pace. When Lot's wife stopped in her flight, and stood still in order that she might look, her punishment was that there she was to stand forever. She never got any farther; she never got beyond that place; but there she stood as a pillar of salt, a durable pillar and monument of wrath, for her folly and wickedness.

So it very often is with backsliders, though they may live a considerable time after. When they look back after they have been taking pains for their salvation, they lose all; they put themselves under vast disadvantages, by quenching the Spirit of God, and losing their convictions. They dreadfully harden their own hearts and stupify their souls; make way for discouragements; dreadfully strengthen and establish the interest of sin in their hearts; many ways give Satan great advantages to ruin them, and provoke God oftentimes utterly to leave them to hardness of heart. When they come to look back, their souls presently become dead and hard like Lot's wife's body. And if this be the case, though they live long after, they never get any farther; it is worse for them than if they were immediately damned. When persons in fleeing out of Sodom look back, their last case is far worse than the first (see Mat 12:43-45). And experience confirms that none ordinarily are so hard to be brought to repentance as backsliders.

Fifth: It may well stir you up to flee for your lives, and not to look behind you, when you consider how many have fled to the mountain, while you yet remain in Sodom. To what multitudes has God given the wisdom to flee to Christ, the mountain of safety! They have fled to the little city of Zoar, which God will spare and never destroy. They are in a safe condition; they are out of reach of the storm; the fire and brimstone can do them no hurt there.

But you yet remain in that cursed city among that accursed company. You are yet in Sodom, which God is about so terribly to destroy, where you are in danger every minute of having snares, fire, and brimstone, come down on your head. Though so many have attained deliverance, yet you have not. Good has come, but you have seen none of it. Others are happy, but no one knows what will become of you; you have no part nor lot in that glorious salvation of souls. The consideration of this should stir you up effectually to escape, and in your escape to press forward; still to press forward, and to resolve to press forward forever, let what will be in the way; to hearken to no temptation, and never look back, or in any wise slacken or abate your endeavors as long as you live, but if possible to increase them more and more.

Sixth: Backsliding after such a time as this will have a vastly greater tendency to seal a man's damnation than at another time. The greater means men have, the louder calls, and the greater advantages they are under, the more dangerous is backsliding; the more it has a tendency to enhance guilt, to provoke God, and to harden the heart.

We, in this land of light, have long enjoyed greater advantages than the most of the world, and backsliding will be proportionably the greater sin, and the more dangerous to the soul. If therefore you look back, there will be great danger that God will swear in His wrath, that you shall never enter into His rest; as God sware concerning them that were going back into Egypt, after they had seen the wonders which God wrought for Israel. Numbers 14:22-23 says, "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto the fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it."

Seventh: We know not but that a great part of the wicked world is, at this day, in Sodom's

circumstances when Lot fled out of it, having some outward temporal destruction hanging over it. It looks as if some great thing were coming; the state of things in the world seems to be ripe for some great revolution. The world has gotten to such a terrible degree of wickedness that it is probable the cry of it has, by this time, reached up to heaven; and it is hardly probable that God will suffer things to go on, as they now do, much longer. It is likely that God will erelong appear in awful Majesty to vindicate His own cause; and then none will be safe that are out of Christ. Now therefore every one should flee for his life, and escape to the mountain, lest he be consumed. We cannot certainly tell what God is about to do, but this we may know, that those who are out of Christ are in a most unsafe state.

Eighth: To enforce this warning against looking back, let me beseech you to consider the exceeding proneness which there is in the heart to it. The heart of man is a backsliding heart. There is in the heart a great love and hankering desire after the ease, pleasure, and enjoyments of Sodom, as there was in Lot's wife, by which persons are continually liable to temptations to look back. The heart is so much towards Sodom that it is a difficult thing to keep the eye from turning that way, and the feet from tending thither. When men under convictions are put upon fleeing, it is by mere force. It is because God lays hold on their hands, as He did on Lot's and his wife's and drags them so far. But the tendency of the heart is to go back to Sodom again.

Persons are very prone to backsliding also through discouragement. They are apt to be discouraged. The heart is unsteady, soon tired, soon gives out, is apt to listen to discouraging temptations. And discouragement tends to backsliding: it weakens persons' hands, lies as a dead weight on their hearts, and makes them drag heavily; and if it continue long, it very often issues in security and senselessness. Convictions are often shaken off that way; they begin first to go off with discouragement.

Backsliding is a disease that is exceeding secret in its way of working. It is a flattering distemper. It works like a consumption,[6] wherein persons often flatter themselves that they are not worse, but something better, and in a hopeful way to recover, until a few days before they die. So backsliding commonly comes on gradually, and steals on men insensibly, and they still flatter themselves that they are not backslidden. They plead that they are seeking yet, and they hope they have not lost their convictions. And by the time they find it out, and cannot pretend so any longer, they are commonly so far gone that they care not much if they have lost their convictions. And when it comes to that, it is commonly a gone case with persons as to those convictions. Thus they blind themselves, and keep themselves insensible of their own disease, and so are not terrified with it, nor awakened to use means for relief, until it is past cure.

Thus it is that backsliding commonly comes upon persons that have for some time been under any considerable convictions, and afterwards lose them. Let the consideration of this, your danger, excite you to the greatest care and diligence to keep your hearts, and to watchfulness and constant prayer against backsliding. And let it put you upon endeavors to strengthen your resolutions of guarding against everything that tends to the contrary, that you may indeed hold out to the end, for "then shall you know,if you follow on to know the Lord."—Amen.

Notes

[← 1]
loth – a variant of loath; unwilling; reluctant.

[←2]

entreat – beg; implore; strongly plead.

[←3]

valley of the son of Hinnom – the place where pagan sacrifices of children were practiced by Judah: 2Ch 28:3; Jer 7:31.

[←4]

similitudes – things resembling another; comparisons.

[←5]

sottish – senseless; foolish; stupid.

[←6]

consumption – progressive wasting away, as from tuberculosis.