

GENUINE RELIGION THE BEST FRIEND OF THE PEOPLE

by Archibald Bonar

Bonar's argument that authentic Christian faith, far from being the enemy of human flourishing, is in fact the greatest friend of individuals and society. He demonstrates the practical benefits of genuine religion for personal character and public welfare.

8 Chapters

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000 - Memoir of the Rev. Archibald Bonar, Minister of Cramond

MEMOIR OF THE REV. ARCHIBALD BONAR, MINISTER OF CRAMOND. IN attempting a short sketch of the life and character of this excellent man, and eminent minister of Christ, we feel ourselves as about to recall the living image of a friend and father, endeared to us by many delightful associations; and we only regret our utter inability to convey to those who knew him not, an adequate idea of that sterling worth, and that attractive loveliness, which threw an overpowering charm around his character and ministrations. The Rev. ARCHIBALD BONAR was descended from ancestors who, for several generations, had been distinguished ministers of the Church of Scotland. His great grandfather, JOHN BONAR, was, for upwards of half a century, minister of the parish of Torphichen, in the presbytery of Linlithgow, having been ordained there in 1693, and having finished his course on earth in 1747. He was characterized by earnestness and energy, combined with much Christian simplicity, in his public appearances as a preacher; by unremitting fidelity and zeal, in his private labours; by steady attachment to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of Scotland; and by singular piety and child-like humility, in his private walk as a man and as a Christian. The writer of this memoir conversed several years ago with an old man, in the parish of Torphichen, who remembered him well; rehearsed several anecdotes characteristic of him, and of the times in which he lived; and spoke with warm interest of the profit and the pleasure which never failed to attend his catechetical labours and his pastoral visits. The later period of his ministry was a time of much difficulty and trouble to the church. He felt as every true lover of Zion will feel, in the divisions of Judah; and often, as my old friend informed me, did he give utterance to his feelings in public, by reading, or causing to be sung, "the four score Psalm," as he usually termed it;-a portion of Scripture beautifully descriptive of a state of depression and division in the church, and admirably expressive of the feelings and the prayers of those who "mourn for the afflictions of Joseph." When in 1742, the remarkable revival of religion in the west of Scotland took place, Mr. Bonar, though then much enfeebled both by age and bodily debility, exerted himself far beyond his usual strength to make a journey to the spot, that he might personally witness what he had heard of by report, and contribute, by his latest efforts in the pulpit, to promote the important and interesting work. Mr. Whitefield, on his visit to Cambuslang, takes particular notice of those ministers with whom he had intercourse; and among others he mentions, with peculiar affection, "good old Bonar," whose heart was warmed by the revival, and the evening of whose days was cheered by the prospect of better times. * *Gillies' Life of Whitefield. The elder son of Mr. Bonar of Torphichen, and the grandfather of Mr. Archibald Bonar, was JOHN BONAR, minister of the united parishes of Fetlar and North Yell, in Zetland, where he was settled in 1729, and died in 1752. He was a man of eminent classical attainments; a complete master of Greek and Hebrew; and well acquainted with Chaldee and Syriac; and all his acquirements he steadily and successfully applied to the understanding and elucidation of the Scriptures. He was also respected and esteemed by all who knew him, as a warm and impressive preacher, and a minister who adorned the doctrine of our God and Saviour, by a suitable life and conversation. His son JOHN was minister, first of Cockpen and afterwards of Perth, where he died in the midst of his days and usefulness, in 1761. Mr. Bonar, of Perth, was highly esteemed and respected, as a man of

superior talents; and the several publications which he gave to the world afford ample ground to hope, that if his life had been prolonged, the church would have derived most essential benefit from his future labours. His "Observations on the conduct and character of Judas Iscariot," first published in 1750, has been lately republished, with a short account of his life. This work went through two editions at the time of its first appearance; and is deservedly esteemed, as containing an ingenious, and at the same time, satisfactory argument in favour of the divine mission of our Lord, drawn from the conduct of the apostate disciple.

ARCHIBALD BONAR was the fifth son of Mr. Bonar of Perth. He was born at Cockpen, on the 23d of February, 1753. His constitution was naturally so feeble, that he was scarcely expected to survive the period of infancy. But by degrees, he acquired strength, and though he never was robust, yet he enjoyed such a measure of health, as enabled him to undergo the studies of youth, and the toils of maturer age. He was too young, at the time of his father's death, (1761,) to be sensible of the loss which he sustained by that event; and it was wonderfully supplied by the affectionate assiduity, and prudent management of his mother, who was spared, for ten years, to be a blessing to her family, and who, with her children, have given an interesting proof of the faithfulness of God, when he says to the departing saint, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widow trust in me." The rudiments of his education, he received at the High School of Edinburgh. From that seminary he went to the University; and in both, he made a respectable figure among young men who have since risen to distinction and eminence in the world. His mind was very early under the influence of religion. He experienced the power, as well as acquired the knowledge of saving truth: and made such rapid progress, both in the science and the practice of the gospel, as to attract the notice and admiration of all who knew him. His serious views were confirmed and quickened by the intercourse which he had with Mr. George Whitefield, and Mr. Joseph Townsend, of Pewsey, who, at that time, were occasionally in Edinburgh, and visited in his mother's house. Mr. Whitefield marked his piety with much satisfaction, and held with him many instructive and encouraging conversations. Mr. Townsend, also, who was nearer his own age, and full of zeal for the gospel, formed with him a close and affectionate intimacy, which could not fail to be both agreeable and useful to him. He always spoke with gratitude and delight of the benefits he had derived from both; but while he gave strong testimony to those superior apostolic qualities, with which the former was so conspicuously endowed, yet he acknowledged still greater obligations to the latter, who, in his public addresses, and in his private converse, had a warmth of devotional feeling, as well as a power and an energy in declaring the counsel of God, which was admirably calculated to awaken, to interest, and to impress the mind of the youthful Christian. Mr. Townsend has, since that period, risen to deserved celebrity in the literary and religious world, as a traveller, a geologist, and a divine. The profession for which Mr. Bonar's friends had at first intended him, was that of the law. And with this view, he was placed in the office of one of the clerks of session. He was diligent and attentive in discharging the duties of his new situation. But his inclination led him decidedly to the work of the ministry. He declared his anxious wish to devote himself to it. And at last, with the entire approbation of those to whom he looked for direction, he renounced all views of a secular line of life, and entered upon those studies which were requisite to fit him for being a minister of the Church of Scotland. Having gone through a full course of philosophy and theology, at the University of Edinburgh, he was, with high approbation, licensed by the presbytery of Edinburgh, to preach the gospel, on the 29th October, 1777, and preached his first sermon, on the 16th November following, in the New Gray Friars' Church. The

feelings and views which actuated him on these occasions, are recorded in his diary, and show what importance he attached to the work in which he was engaging, and what anxiety he had to perform it diligently and efficiently. The hopes of his friends were not disappointed. His talents and piety soon raised him to deserved elevation in public opinion. Highly acceptable as a preacher, and greatly esteemed as a Christian, he speedily acquired popularity of no ordinary kind; and nearly about the same time he got the offer of two parishes. He rejected the one which had the largest emoluments, because it was also the heaviest charge; and preferred the other, which though a considerably poorer living, held out to him the prospect of more comfort and usefulness. This was the parish of Newburn, in Fife. Its situation was pleasant; its extent limited; its inhabitants not numerous, but of plain manners, well-informed in religious truth, regular in their attendance upon ordinances, and disposed to cherish every degree of respect and attachment to their minister. Among this affectionate people, he was ordained, 31st March, 1779. The solemn rites of ordination were, in his case, accompanied with many interesting and profitable exercises of self-examination; devout meditation; and earnest prayer. For days and nights previous to the event, he "wrestled with God;" and while, with fear and trembling, he undertook the charge of the souls of men, he went forth to his beloved people in the strength of the Lord, and conveyed to them with boldness, yet with affectionate earnestness, the message of eternal salvation. At Newburn, Mr. Bonar continued four years; and he often spoke of these years as the happiest portion of his life. Newburn, he used to say, had indeed been a Bethel to him; and much as he felt the goodness of God in his subsequent changes, he never could forget what he had enjoyed, both as a Christian and a minister, in that peaceful solitude.

He was most laborious in discharging all the duties of the pastoral office; and there is reason to think, that the ardour of his studies, and the unremitting eagerness with which he engaged in other departments of duty, rather injured his health, and materially impaired a constitution not naturally robust. In 1781, on the death of the Rev. James Morison, the successor of the celebrated Dr. Witherspoon, in the Low Church parish of Paisley, Mr. Bonar was nominated to the vacant charge. It so happened, that just at the same time, his valued friend, Dr. Snodgrass, then one of the ministers of Dundee, had received the offer of the Middle Church of Paisley, which had been newly erected. The Commissioners appointed for the purpose made application to both at the same time; and although the consideration of having such a man as Dr. Snodgrass for a colleague, had no little weight, still Mr. Bonar felt a great repugnance to dissolve the endeared connexion with his people at Newburn, and declined the call which had been thus addressed to him.

It so happened, that very soon after his settlement at Newburn, he had been called to preach in the Outer High Church of Glasgow, at the introduction of his much-esteemed friend, Dr. Balfour, as successor to Mr. Randall, now the venerable Dr. Davidson of Edinburgh. Having been thus brought under the notice of the Christian public of Glasgow, in circumstances peculiarly interesting, he was soon after urged to accept an offer of the North West Church, then vacant, by the removal of Dr. Findlay to the Divinity Chair. Reluctant as he felt to quit his country retirement, he looked upon it as a duty to comply with the call which had thus been repeatedly addressed to him; and accordingly, after taking a solemn and affectionate leave of his parishioners; he was settled minister at Glasgow, on the 17th July, 1783. His labours in that city were uncommonly acceptable and useful; and he found, in the attention and attachment of his congregation, proof that his labours had not been altogether unavailing. But, in a short time, he found also, that the

unremitted and extensive ministerial labours connected with his situation, as well as the constant and unavoidable bustle of a town life, were likely to prove injurious to him. His health was impaired, and his constitution likely to suffer. The Church of Cramond, near Edinburgh, having become vacant, in 1784, an offer was made to Mr. Bonar of the charge, by the late excellent and distinguished Lady Glenorchy, who had known him from his youth, befriended him in his studies, and during her life, retained for him the sincerest esteem and respect. Mr. Bonar cheerfully embraced the opportunity thus providentially presented of leaving the harassing and incessant hurry of a town life, and again exercising his labours in a country station. On the 19th April, 1785, he was accordingly, with the unanimous consent, and much to the satisfaction of the parish, settled minister of Cramond.

He often expressed the satisfaction he felt in this change; a change which gave him the quiet of the country, yet in a situation sufficiently near for enjoying the society of his valuable friends in Edinburgh. Above all, he was happy in the field of usefulness now before him, in a place entirely suited to his disposition. The people loved him as a preacher and as a man, and anticipated from him all the benefits which may be expected to flow from an able and faithful minister of the gospel—an anticipation which was largely realized, and in the fulfilment of which, many are now rejoicing around the throne. Here, therefore, he resolved, and he adhered to his resolution, that he would spend his remaining days. Nor did he spend them either idly or in vain. He took great delight in preaching the gospel, and conducted his pulpit duties with great earnestness and fidelity. He was diligent in visiting and catechising his parish, and in bestowing those various attentions which a Christian people are entitled to look for from their pastors, and which no conscientious pastor will ever think of withholding. The fruits of his labours were soon perceptible, in the growing concern which was felt for religion, and in the evidence which many gave, by their life and conversation, of their having received the truth in faith and love. In the beginning of 1787, Mr. Bonar was visited with a severe domestic trial, in the death of his wife, after an illness of several months. She was the sister of the Rev. David Black, late of Lady Yester's Church, Edinburgh, and a lady, in all respects qualified to be the helpmate of such a man as Mr. Bonar. Their union was cemented by a congeniality of sentiment and feeling; and the stroke of separation was peculiarly trying. Mr. Bonar fully manifested the resignation, the faith and hope of a Christian; but it was long before his serenity was fully revived. An illness followed, which unfitted him for duty for several months. Having gradually recovered strength, he gladly resumed his labours, with a sermon somewhat in the manner and spirit of one of Dr. Watts', entitled, "the Privileges of the Living above the Dead," pointing out the strong and peculiar calls to active exertion in the work of God, arising from deliverance out of trouble, and restoration to health, after the near prospect of death.

After remaining more than five years a widower, Mr. Bonar married again, in 1792. His second wife was a cousin-german of his own, by whom he had a pretty numerous family, and who still survives to feel and to bewail the loss of one of the best of husbands. Their eldest son was cut off at the age of seven, towards the end of the year 1800. The anguish which Mr. Bonar felt on this occasion; the anxieties which agitated his mind; the consolation which he derived from the exercise of faith, of prayer, and hope; and the entire resignation with which he was enabled to give up his dear child to the disposal of his heavenly Father, are all expressed with beautiful pathos in the pages of his diary, and present him to our view in the most interesting light in which a Christian can be contemplated. The rest of his family were spared to him; and they are still spared, to follow

the steps of their venerable parent; to be a comfort to their excellent mother; and to enjoy, we trust, the favour and the blessings of "a father's God." In 1796, he published the small treatise entitled, "Genuine Religion the best Friend of the People." The title was adopted from a name at that time much assumed, and much misapplied by certain political associations. But in the treatise itself, the subject of politics is no way touched upon. The sole aim of the work is to exhibit in a brief, but impressive manner, the nature of religion in regard to doctrine, practice and experience; its importance in all the relations of life, and the means of promoting it in individuals and in communities. The work was most favourably received; and has passed through several editions in Scotland, besides being printed in America, at the advice, and under the charge of Dr. Morse, of Boston, the celebrated geographer of America. In 1802 and 1806, Mr. Bonar was called to lament the loss of two much-esteemed friends, the Rev. Mr. Paul, of St. Cuthbert's, and the Rev. David Black, of Lady Yester's, Edinburgh. To both of these eminent servants of Christ, he had been long and fervently attached; and he was called to pay the last affecting tribute of regard to them by preaching their funeral sermons: both of which are published, in the two volumes of Mr. Bonar's sermons afterwards noticed. The death of these two intimate friends, one of them his cotemporary, the other several years younger, impressed Mr. Bonar with strong presentiments that his own labours might ere long draw to a close. In 1809, his health began to decline, in consequence of a bad cold, which left the seeds of an asthmatic complaint, which in time proved too powerful for his frame. For a good while, however, his ministerial labours suffered little interruption; and during two or three succeeding seasons, a change of air and of scene for a few weeks in summer recruited his strength. In a letter, which I received from him, dated November 26th, 1811, there is the following passage which, as it shows the state of his mind at the time, will be read with interest by all who knew the estimable writer.

-- "I preached the day after yours came to hand, in our newly repaired church, and there got a fresh cold, which I struggled with to the following Sabbath, and was enabled to preach again, and to hold a long session after, in the Manse. But next day my last year's complaints returned with greater violence than ever, and for some days, neither I nor any of this family expected I would revive, especially as I had been so feeble during the summer, and my complaints had, for two months past, been assuming a more alarming aspect than formerly. But, oh my dear brother, I rejoice to inform you that my mind was most comfortable amidst all the gloomy prospect of leaving my flock, and dear family, and, friends. The everlasting gospel; the faithful saying; the all-fulness of Jesus; and the hope of glory, were brought delightfully to view, and yielded both peace and joy in believing."

After this illness he was mercifully restored to some measure of strength, and with occasional help from his friends, was enabled to go through the public duties of the parish. In the summer of 1813, he was not only able for these, but also for taking some new measures for the spiritual benefit of his people. This will appear from a short extract of a letter which I had from him, dated 27th July of that year.

"It will give you much satisfaction to learn that I have founded a Cramond Bible Society; and it is meeting with far more encouragement than I expected." "Our Session are cordially uniting with me in some bold measures for repressing the profanation of the Sabbath, and I have great hopes of prevailing upon all the Innkeepers through the parish, (by privately and mildly dealing with them) to shut up their houses from Saturday night, at ten o'clock, to Monday morning at six. This would be

a great reformation here." The subject of the spread of religion both at home and abroad was always uppermost in Mr. Bonar's mind; and when, in 1796, the religious public in Scotland were loudly awakened to the duty of attempting something for the salvation of heathen and unenlightened nations, he cordially co-operated in the establishment of the Edinburgh (now the Scottish) Missionary Society, although from local circumstances he was prevented from taking any active part in the conduct of its affairs. It was on the establishment of this Society that he took occasion to write in the Missionary Magazine, a very excellent "Letter to a Lady," in defence of Missions in general, and the plans of the Edinburgh Missionary Society in particular. The establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society, several years afterwards, was beheld by him with singular pleasure; and, although prevented, by local circumstances, from establishing an auxiliary in its support, till 1813, its progress and triumphs were never absent from his heart, or from his prayers. In the beginning of 1815, he resolved to publish a volume of those discourses which had so long delighted and profited his hearers. On this occasion, he wrote me in terms expressive at once, of the elevated devotion of his heart, and of the amiable pleasantry of his temper and manners.

"Did it not greatly surprise you," says he, "when you heard that the parson of Cramond, who has so long and so loudly testified against glutting the market with printed sermons, intends being an author.

"I trust, however, that my motives for this measure, which, I confess, appears odd to myself, are such as I need not disavow. For more than three years past, my health has been extremely feeble and fluctuating; so that I have not been able to carry on my former course of visiting or examining in this extensive parish. I therefore earnestly wished to leave some memorial of the truths which I have uniformly taught; on which I have founded my own future hopes; and from which I have long derived strong consolation." The volume was published in 1815; it was received with distinguished approbation by the public, and has already gone through three editions. A second volume was published from his MSS. after his death, and the discourses which it contains are distinguished by the same excellences which characterize the first. We do not know two volumes of sermons better adapted for the private and domestic perusal of Christians, and of Christian families; and we envy not the man who can rise from their perusal with any other feelings than those of profound veneration for the author, and affectionate interest in his truly Christian instructions. The second volume is accompanied with a well-written memoir of the author, with several extracts from which we have taken the liberty of enriching the present narrative. It was drawn up by the author's younger brother, the late James Bonar, Esq. F. R. S. a gentleman of distinguished classical and literary attainments; and who united in a manner rarely exemplified, the character of a profound philosopher with that of a humble Christian.

During the winter of 1815, and the beginning of 1816, Mr. Bonar's weakness increased; and it was very evident, both to his family and friends, that his continuance in the world could not be long. During the whole of his last illness, the strength and ardour of his faith were conspicuous; and every thing that he uttered breathed the spirit of one longing for immortality. It was his last attempt to repeat the following lines of one of Dr. Doddridge's Hymns:- "I'll speak the honours of thy name
With my last labouring breath, Then speechless clasp thee in my arms, The antidote of death."

Nature was at length exhausted; and on the 8th of April, 1816, without any violent pain or struggle, he entered into his eternal rest. The regrets and the tears of an affectionate people, and a large circle of friends, attended his remains to the tomb; and a small monumental stone, in the church-yard of Cramond, marks the spot where his hallowed dust has been deposited, till the morning of the resurrection dawn. In person Mr. Bonar was of a slender make, and rather under the middle size. His features were pleasing and animated, and his countenance indicated great mildness and benevolence of heart. When in the pulpit, or engaged in the devotional exercises at a communion service, his eyes were uncommonly keen and penetrating. His natural abilities were excellent, and might have fitted him to excel in any branch of pursuit. But his talents and acquirements were all consecrated to the cross. In company he was lively and cheerful; entering freely into the ordinary topics of conversation; noticing with warm benevolence every individual, even the youngest or meanest in the company; and ever anxious to turn the familiar intercourse of life into a profitable channel. The natural sweetness and amiability of his temper were heightened and purified by the charities of the gospel. To the poor he was a constant and substantial friend; and with every scheme that promised to contribute to the temporal or spiritual good of his fellow-creatures, his heart did ever beat in unison. Of him it may with peculiar propriety be said, "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith." He literally "walked with God:" and no one could long reside under the same roof with him, without feeling himself in the presence of one who breathed, as it were, an atmosphere of piety; and who, by the equanimity of his temper, and the heavenliness of his soul, enjoyed a felicity with which a stranger cannot intermeddle.

We may here advert to a particular circumstance, which occurred between twenty and thirty years ago, as illustrative of the estimation in which the character of this eminent servant of Christ was held, even by those who were not immediately connected with him. The Rev. David Williamson, a respectable dissenting minister at Whitehaven in Cumberland, when publishing a volume of "Lectures on Civil and Religious Liberty," was pleased to dedicate them "to the Rev. John Newton, of the Church of England, and the Rev. Archibald Bonar, of the Church of Scotland," as examples eminently illustrative of the principles and character which ought ever to distinguish Christians and Christian ministers. His discourses, from the time that he was licensed as a preacher, were remarked for a complete acquaintance with the word of God, enlarged and consistent views of evangelical doctrine, and a deep experimental knowledge of the Christian life. No person can peruse his valuable volumes without being charmed with the good sense, the scriptural arguments and illustrations, the practical and devotional strain, the beautiful simplicity, and the spiritual unction, which pervade their contents, and give to them a power and an eloquence which at once improve the understanding and win the heart. To the delivery of his sermons he paid particular attention; and all who heard him can testify how much it pleased, affected, and interested the audience. It was, indeed, hardly possible to listen to him with indifference, when roused to warmth by the truths he was uttering. Upon communion occasions especially, the deep and solemn attention with which his exhortations and prayers were received could hardly be exceeded.

One circumstance, at all times, gave peculiar force to his ministrations—the perfect knowledge which his congregation had of the sincerity and unaffected feeling from which he spoke. He preached the doctrines of the gospel because he believed them and loved them, had felt their infinite value to his own soul, and ardently wished for nothing so much as to see them equally impressed upon others. His life was a practical commentary on the doctrines he preached. While

he "allured to brighter worlds" by his doctrine and instructions, he "led the way" thither by a conversation and a conduct "becoming the gospel." His doctrine was decidedly Calvinistic; but he afforded a very striking illustration of what has been not unfrequently questioned by its enemies, that the strictest Calvinism may be associated in close connexion with all that is attractive in the graces of the Christian character, and with all that is pure and elevated in the morality of the Christian life.

During the closing scene of life, Mr. Bonar felt a good deal of that pious anxiety, which every faithful pastor must feel, regarding the spiritual interests of his flock, after his removal from them. His latter days were soothed by the well-founded impression that, on this vitally interesting point, his ardent wishes and prayers would, in all human probability be gratified. They have been gratified to their full extent, in the appointment to the charge of such an able, laborious, and every-way apostolic minister as Dr. GEORGE MUIRHEAD.

R. B.

PAISLEY, June, 1822.

0000 - Preface

PREFACE. To alleviate the anxieties of the laborious poor, and to increase the happiness of the common people, is the sincere aim of the writer of this Treatise. As the most effectual method of accomplishing this desirable object, he wishes to recommend to them, and to their families, the knowledge and the love of real religion: fully persuaded, that this alone can sufficiently support their minds under the various evils to which they are daily exposed.

Many are the snares of poverty, and severe the hardships experienced by such as are placed in the inferior stations of life. When suffering under agonizing solicitude, or cruel neglect, or all the humiliating circumstances of galling dependence; when the barrel of meal is consumed, and children weep for the supplies which their needy parents are unable to impart: when sickness unites with want to render their habitations dismal; when he on whose industry their hopes were centred, is pierced by the arrows of death-how pitiable then is the state of such families! But far more pitiable still, if, under these calamities, they remain strangers to the satisfying joys, and animating hopes of Christianity; if they have lived in the mournful habits of impiety, or are growing up in all the miseries of ignorance; if, amidst their complicated trials, felt and bewailed, they are destitute of the soothing consolations which enable believers to triumph in the midst of adversity.

Such ignorance of religion can scarcely fail to be productive of profligacy and wretchedness. Those who have never been taught to seek happiness in the ways of God, yet are eager for comfort, and are naturally led to place all their expectation of enjoying it in the intoxications of vice; their poverty, united with their ignorance, involves them in many snares, hurries them on to all the awful excesses of iniquity, and drowns them at last in guilt and perdition. Whereas, had they been trained up in the paths of piety and righteousness, they might have maintained an honourable character amidst all the snares of want, and enjoyed inward serenity amidst all the adversities of life. To attempt, therefore, the release of many from this mental misery, and to aim at conducting them forward in the paths of wisdom and peace, cannot be an object unbecoming a benevolent mind. With this design, and from an ardent desire of promoting so important an object, a friend presents to the commonalty in our land, a plain directory and monitor, written for their instruction, and sent into the world with earnest supplications to the Father of all, for its success in promoting the best interests of mankind.

01 - The Principles of Religion

CHAP. I. The Principles of Religion.

RELIGION consists of three parts: proper principles, proper dispositions, and proper conduct. The union of these three, forms the character of a religious person; and if anyone of them be wanting, the other two must be greatly deficient; for the principles you imbibe will give a direction to the affections of your heart; and both of these, when uniting their influence, will determine the general tenor of your conduct.

It will therefore be necessary to lay before you a plain account of those sacred principles, or doctrines, which real Christians regard as essential to their hopes and happiness; which are clearly revealed in the word of God; and which therefore, it greatly concerns you rightly to understand, firmly to believe, and constantly to remember. The essential doctrines of Scripture relate chiefly to the following particulars: The character and providence of God;-the original and present circumstances of mankind;-the love of Christ, as exhibited in his incarnation, sufferings, death, and resurrection; and still displayed in his unremitting care of his church and people:-the application of this love through the influences of the Holy Spirit;-and the state of existence beyond the grave.

Let us attend a little to what the sacred Scriptures have revealed concerning each of these articles.

1. The foundation of all religious knowledge is laid in just conceptions of the Divine Being. That there is a God, all nature loudly proclaims, and almost all nations have readily admitted. Assuming, therefore, the Being of God as an allowed principle, the interesting inquiry naturally follows, What is God? what are his attributes? what notice doth he take of his rational creatures here below? and what is the extent of his dominion and providence. If they who arrogantly boast that unenlightened reason can guide men to happiness, are unable to solve these inquiries with satisfaction to themselves or others; if they can only conjecture: and if their conjectures are liable to be controverted: then let them not think more highly than they ought of the light of nature, but let them listen to the dictates of revelation, and learn from thence what human reason never could have discovered. From the Scriptures we learn, that the God with whom we have to do, is over all, and before all; infinitely, and independently, blessed in himself; from everlasting to everlasting, without any variableness, or even shadow of change. As none can resist his power, so all things are possible with him, for he is the Lord God omnipotent, which was, and is, and is to come. He is glorious in holiness; and cannot look upon iniquity without abhorrence. Before him all things are open and manifest; for the darkness hideth not from him, but is as the light: nay, he searcheth the heart of the children of men, and knoweth all their secret doings.

Great and marvellous are his works. He made the heavens, and all their hosts, the world and all its inhabitants. He upholdeth them by the word of his power, and doth all his pleasure amongst the children of men. His kingdom ruleth over all, and his eyes behold the nations. He wounds and he heals; pulleth down, and raiseth up; and none can deliver out of his hands. What he hath

purposed, he will accomplish; for the counsel of the Lord shall stand for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Therefore it shall be well with the righteous; for verily there is a God that ruleth in the earth; but he will punish the wicked with everlasting destruction. The language of the sacred volume, when describing the character of God, is inimitably sublime; and to direct your attention to some of these descriptions, is surely the properest method of imparting just views of his greatness and glory. Psalm cxlv. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are overall his other works. All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth to all generations. The eyes of all wait on thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. Let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever." To the same purpose you read in Psalm civ. "O Lord my God, thou art very great, thou art clothed with honour and with majesty: who coverest thyself with light as with a garment; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain; who maketh the clouds his chariot, and walketh on the wings of the wind; who causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man. O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches. All thy creatures wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. What thou givest them they gather: thou openest thy hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever; the Lord shall rejoice in his works." No less plain, and no less sublime, is the description of the most high God in the prophecies of Isaiah, the fortieth chapter: "He measureth the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations are as nothing before him; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? and what likeness will ye compare to him? Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers: it is he that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in; that bringeth the princes to nothing, that maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power, not one faileth. Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding."

Every thing relating to the divine nature, character, and dominion, revealed in Scripture, far exceeds what natural reason ever did discover. Reason tells us, that God is the Maker of all things; but it never discovered, that he created all things from nothing, and arranged and established them merely by his sovereign word. Reason can tell us that God is wise and powerful; but it knew not, till taught by revelation, that he inherits these, and every property of Deity, independent of every being, in an infinite degree, through everlasting ages. Reason supposes,

that there is a general providence governing the nations; but it never suggested, that this providence of our God extends to the concerns of every man, to his most secret purposes, and seemingly most accidental mercies. But the insufficient information which unassisted reason imparts concerning God, is peculiarly manifested by the discoveries given us in Scripture of the adorable Trinity.* There we learn, that the Lord our God is one Lord; that in this unity of Godhead there are three persons; that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, possess the same nature, and attributes, and essence; that therefore, in perfect consistency with reason, as well as Scripture, we can affirm, that the glorious object of our worship, is the one living and true JEHOVAH. These are truths, which, while they baffle human wisdom to fathom, are essentially connected with every part of the great scheme of our redemption; and are well calculated to silence all human arrogance, to exalt our ideas of the divine nature, and to make us say, with adoring hosts above, "Who can find out the Almighty to perfection!"

* 1 John 5:7. Matthew 28:19. 2 Corinthians 13:14.

2. As the Scriptures have favoured us with satisfying information on the most sublime and important of all subjects, the nature and character of God; they, in like manner, equally satisfy our inquiries concerning a subject intimately connected with the former, and highly interesting to all:-
-What is man? for what purpose did he receive existence? and what prospects as to futurity, is he permitted to entertain? That man, in many respects, resembles the beasts which perish, is undeniable; like them he eats, and sleeps, and sickens, and dies; is of few days, and these uncertain and full of trouble. But that man is also more excellent than the animal creation, is abundantly evident, from the far nobler capacities which he possesses; a capacity of adoring and worshipping the supreme Being, of contemplating things unseen and spiritual, of holding rational conversation with fellow-creatures, and of acting such a part in life as his understanding and reflection unite to dictate.

These various powers, which mark man's superior dignity above the beasts of the field, are derived from the Father of our spirits; and are entirely dependent for their preservation, on his sovereign pleasure. It remained therefore with him to reveal, whether or not he hath made man immortal. No philosophic reasonings could have fully determined this question; but the sacred page hath put this matter beyond all doubt, and clearly testifies, that as man possesses a living spirit wholly distinct from his material body, so God hath been pleased to stamp immortality on the rational soul, and hath said concerning man, he shall exist for ever.

Nay, Scripture further informs us, that God created man in his own image; adorned him with all the beauties of perfect knowledge, righteousness and holiness; invested him with the dignity of being lord of this lower creation, and rendered him completely blessed, by the knowledge and enjoyment, the contemplation and imitation of his God. But alas! this original state of innocence, dignity, and happiness, was of short duration: mankind soon violated their almighty Maker's most righteous laws, and departed from the living God. Most justly, therefore, were they punished as rebels against his government; banished paradise, driven from the fellowship of once kindred angels, and doomed to pain, to death, and everlasting wretchedness.

Such is the present state of man; a state of apostacy from holiness, and from God; a state of ignorance and dissatisfaction, of degeneracy and guilt, of uncertainty and fears. Such we feel it to be, and such the Scriptures describe it. They also reveal the melancholy cause: that in Adam all

have fallen; that by this man's disobedience mankind were made sinners; and that condemnation hath passed upon all men, because all have come short of the glory of God. No longer doth the heart of man remain upright or uncorrupted; nor is supreme regard to the will of God now natural to men: for their carnal mind is enmity against him, and refuses subjection to his law; their heart is deceitful and wicked; they have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and followed vain imaginations, and turned everyone to his own ways. The temper, pursuits, and conduct of every man, from the days of Adam to the present hour; the experience of every nation, whether barbarous or civilized; daily evidences of headstrong depravity, in opposition to all the influences of education, threatenings and rewards; and the universal prevalence of ingratitude, distrust, and disobedience towards God, unite their evidence with the testimony of Scripture, that all are by nature children of wrath, and that it is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed.

3. As the word of God makes manifest the origin, the nature, and evidences of human depravity, so it graciously reveals the Remedy which God himself hath provided: it is, therefore, proper, in the next place, to remind you, that another distinguishing doctrine of revelation, is the Redemption of Mankind through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture informs us, that from the beginning, the omniscient JEHOVAH foresaw the apostacy of mankind; and, with tenderest pity, beheld them involved in circumstances of misery, from which no human power could redeem: that, in richest mercy, he laid their help on one able to deliver; and gave up his only begotten Son to sufferings and death; that the Son of God readily engaged to save men from ruin, by dying as their surety; and that what he freely undertook, he fully accomplished; for when the fulness of time arrived, he was manifested in the flesh, was numbered with transgressors, and died for the unjust; to redeem the lost, to atone for guilt, and bring many sons and daughters to glory. To aid our conceptions of this Redeemer's love, Scripture assures us, that the guilt of sin could not be expiated, nor men redeemed, without a sacrifice of infinite value; and that he who humbled himself to the death of the cross for us, was none other than the Lord of glory, Immanuel, God with us, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead, and who thought it no robbery to be declared the equal of the Father! This is he who bowed his head on Calvary, and said it was finished: the Messiah cut off, though not for himself; but to make an end of sin-offerings, to make reconciliation for transgressors, and to bring in everlasting righteousness. Need we then wonder that the inspired writers speak in the language of rapture on this glorious theme; and that they seem to labour for expressions when attempting to extol the love of the eternal Father, in giving his only begotten Son to the death for sinners; and the love of the adored Redeemer, in shedding his precious blood for the remission of the sins of many?

They further inform us, that the same unparalleled love, which led the Son of God to suffer and to die, remains to this day as ardent as ever, and shall remain unaltered and undiminished through everlasting ages. Having, by his own blood, atoned for the sins of his people, he rose in triumph from the grave for their justification, ascended to the mansions on high as their representative, and sat down at the right hand of the Father; there he sustains the endearing character of his people's compassionate High-Priest, and righteous Advocate; intercedes with success in their behalf; renders their services acceptable through the merit of his own mediation; gives them grace to help in every time of need; chooses out the lot of their inheritance; makes goodness and mercy to follow them through life; and brings them at last to his heavenly kingdom, to be for ever with the Lord. These are parts of the exceeding great love wherewith he loves his redeemed: but the height

and depth, and breadth and length of redeeming love far exceed all the powers of description, and all the conceptions of men or angels.

Under this article, the love of Christ, are included all the amazing discoveries made to us in Scripture, of what the Redeemer hath done, and is now transacting, and will yet do for his people's felicity; his early and compassionate undertaking for their redemption; his constant condescending care of his church in Old Testament periods, the number, and unutterable variety of his sufferings, when he deigned to dwell with man on earth; the inestimable value of the blessings which his meritorious death procured; the manifestations of his grace to all his chosen, in their conversion, establishment and comfort; the events he is accomplishing through the nations, for conveying his great salvation to men of all languages; his uniting into one family, the glorified saints above, the regenerated on earth, and the innumerable company of angels; his communicating to that family all spiritual blessings, as their glorious Lord and head; and his preparing for all his redeemed, a state of unutterable, uninterrupted, and endless glory. But no language or conception is adequate to this noblest of themes, the love of Christ to fallen men.

4. Another distinguishing doctrine of our holy religion is the agency of the Divine Spirit, in preparing men for the kingdom of heaven. The glorious subject of this branch of divine revelation, is styled in Scripture the Spirit of God, the Eternal Spirit, the Third in the sacred Trinity who bear record in heaven, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, the Spirit of glory-in his name we are baptized; and to him, with the Father and the Son, supreme worship is paid in heaven and on earth. The operations of the Holy Spirit, on the mind of those men who are chosen to salvation, are these: He convinces of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; he quickens those who are dead in sins, and makes them alive unto God; he cleanses them from all their idols, and purifies their hearts through faith in Christ; he sheds abroad the love of Christ, working to will and do what is well pleasing in the sight of God; he teaches them what to pray for, and makes intercession for them; he seals to the day of redemption, and keeps them through his own power; he witnesses with their spirits that they are the children of God, and abides with them as a Comforter; he fills them with hope and patience, strengthens them with all might, and leads them to the land of uprightness. So necessary are the influences of the Spirit to constitute us real Christians, that Scripture frequently assures us, that if any have not the Spirit of Christ, they are none of his; and that they only who are led by the Spirit are the children of God. The evidence of being so led, is progress in grace; for the fruits of the Spirit, saith the apostle, are faith, peace, love, joy, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and temperance.

I have expressed these sentiments concerning the Spirit's influence on the minds of believers, in the precise words of Scripture, that it may be seen what an important place this doctrine holds in the Christian scheme; and how far mistaken those men are, who confine the Spirit's operations to the first Christians, and to the inspired penmen of the sacred writings. By considering these united testimonies of Scripture as they relate to the agency of the Spirit, you will be able to trace the gradual progress of the divine life, from the first saving convictions of the Holy Ghost, through his future enlightening, renewing, sanctifying and comforting operations. But this subject you will find more largely illustrated in the following chapter, under the head of Experience in Religion.

5. The last distinguishing doctrine of our holy religion which I proposed to mention, is the State of Retribution beyond the Grave. This may justly be termed, a doctrine peculiar to the gospel: for

though wise men, in different ages and nations, have longed for future joys; and have conjectured, that surely a future state of bliss or of woe is prepared for men, according to their character and conduct on earth; yet it is only by the revelation which God hath made in his word, that immortality hath been brought clearly to light. As the Old Testament and the New are parts of one gradual revelation made to mankind; as they both testify of one God, and one Saviour, and one gospel; so they unite in discovering the future and the eternal state of things, though with very different degrees of clearness. They show us what shall be hereafter; and solemn and sublime are the scenes which they represent -the opening of the clouds of heaven; the descending of the great God, our Saviour, to judge the quick and dead; the grandeur of his manifestation, in his own and his Father's glory, with ten thousands of his angels; the resurrection of the dead, at the sounding of the trump of God ; the appearing of assembled worlds before the judgment-seat of Christ; the separation of the wicked from the righteous; the irreversible sentence on the ungodly, denouncing everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord; the changing of the bodies of the saints in a moment, and rendering them spiritual and immortal; the raptures of the redeemed, when acknowledged, acquitted, and honoured, before the whole intelligent creation; the general conflagration, at the command of the sovereign Judge, and the dissolution of these stupendous works which he now upholds; the opening of the everlasting gates of glory, to admit the ransomed of the Lord; their bowing before the throne; their being presented to the Father with exceeding great joy; their celestial songs to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain; their seeing God as he is; their remembering all the way by which he led them; their being with Jesus, to behold his glory; their being made kings and priests unto our God for ever and ever! These are the future realities which revelation hath unfolded; these are thy glorious hopes, O believer in Jesus! and these glorious hopes we owe to thine atoning sacrifice, O blessed, blessed Immanuel!

02 - The Experience of Religion

CHAP. II. The Experience of Religion.

HAVING spoken of religious knowledge as it respects the doctrines of Scripture, I come now to consider it as it respects the Scripture account of the experience of Christians; the actings of their minds towards divine objects; and the influence of what they believe on their tempers and affections.

All real piety is seated in the heart; and thence, as good seed sown in good ground, it produces those fruits of righteousness which are to the glory of God. No outward forms of devotion; no external profession of piety, however fervent, regular, and conspicuous; no exertions for the good of mankind, however successful and applauded; no sudden emotions of sorrow or joy, under the preaching of the word; nay, no sufferings for the sake of Christ, or zeal for his cause, can entitle us to the character of real Christians, while we are destitute of that repentance, that faith, and that conversion unto God, which have their seat in the heart, which are the breathings of the spiritual life, and which the Scriptures describe as essential parts of real godliness. That God with whom we have to do, searches the heart, and requires truth in the inward parts; that law by which we shall be judged demands the subjection of the whole inward man, and enjoins the love of God with all our heart and mind: that Jesus, on whom dependeth all our hopes of happiness, distinguishes his real disciples by their being born again, renewed in their minds, and setting their affections on things above; and that gospel which publishes the glad tidings of peace to man, testifies the indispensable necessity of being converted and born again. A new creature in Christ; old things done away; the kingdom of God within you; Christ formed in you; strengthened with all might in the inward man; believing with the heart unto salvation:-these are expressions familiar to the inspired writers; and they remind us, that men are no farther religious in the eye of God, than as their religion is seated in the heart, and is influenced by those divine principles of unfeigned faith in Christ, and supreme love to him, which Christianity enjoins, and which the Spirit of God inspires.

These remarks are intended to evince this important sentiment, That in order to our deserving the character of real Christians, we must experience the energy of vital religion on our own souls. In what manner that influence exerts itself, comes next to be considered. Here, however, we must tread with cautious steps, lest we substitute the delusions of enthusiasm for the communications of divine grace; or lest, in our zeal against enthusiasm, we condemn the noblest operations of the sacred Spirit.

Concerning the nature of the powers and operations of the mind, learned men have always differed, and probably will continue to differ as long as the world lasts. They are not agreed in what manner the understanding operates on the will, the will on the affections, and one affection on another; far less can they comprehend or explain the operations of divine grace on the understanding, the will, and the affections, as united and co-operating. But though philosophical researches can afford us little aid in tracing the progress of the divine life in the soul, yet we enjoy a more sure word of prophecy, and a more obvious method of illustration, to which we will now

attend. That the mind of man is capable of receiving impressions from God is a principle allowed by Heathen sages, as well as by Christian divines. That no man can purify his own mind from all iniquity, is the doctrine of universal experience. But Scripture further inculcates, that, without the Spirit of Christ, we can do nothing truly good; and that it is God alone who works in man to will and to do what is right. Every just view, therefore, of spiritual objects; every pious sentiment imprinted on the mind; all divine emotions of soul arising from these sentiments; all heavenly desires; all holy dispositions; all godlike tempers, and all progressive attainments in inward purity, are the fruits of the Spirit, and the evidences of his divine operations.

Connected with this principle, follows another, equally necessary to be mentioned on this subject;-that the Spirit's operations on the mind are generally through the medium of Scripture, and always in perfect consistency with it. The Scripture revelation is complete, and contains all the information necessary to guide our feet in the ways of peace. The Spirit, therefore, in his agency on the minds of believers makes no new revelation from heaven, nor discovers objects unnoticed in the word of truth: his gracious office is, to make us perceive the meaning, the importance, and the glory of what Scripture testifies; and to bring home, by a particular application, these sacred truths to our understanding and heart. Here then we are naturally led to examine, how the sublime and all-important truths of Scripture, formerly enumerated, affect the mind, when savingly applied by the Spirit. The first evidence of such an application, is self-abasement, and solicitude about peace with God. When the Spirit is come, said the Saviour, he will convince the world of sin. With these convictions his saving operations generally commence; he rouses men from their former insensibility to divine things: he calls their attention to those future, solemn, eternal scenes revealed in Scripture: he sets before them the majesty, the justice, the sovereign authority, and infinite holiness of the Lord God Omnipotent: he unfolds the perfection of the divine law, its demands of constant obedience, its spirit, its wide extent, and its awful sanctions; he convinces them that God will be honoured and obeyed, or will punish the disobedient with destruction; that in demanding unlimited subjection, he is just to himself, and good to his rational offspring; and that they in withholding it, stand chargeable with ingratitude and rebellion, in all their aggravating circumstances. These sacred truths are imprinted on the heart in lasting characters, through the power of the Spirit; they are contemplated, believed, and acknowledged: and their tendency to humble, and awe, and alarm, may easily be conjectured. Is this the God who hath every moment sustained us; but whom we have neither feared, nor loved, nor honoured? Are these the invariable demands of the almighty Lawgiver? Doth his immutable law take an impartial cognizance of our thoughts, our tempers, our motives, our words, and our ways? And doth it threaten indignation and woe against all unrighteousness of men? What then shall we do to be saved? How can we escape the wrath to come? Our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all our secret sins. How then shall we stand before him? or how can we answer for one of our many, many transgressions? Lord, be merciful to us sinners! Lord, we abhor ourselves in thy sight; to us belongs sorrow, for we have sinned, and come short of thy glory.

There is a wide difference between these self-abasing convictions of the Spirit, which are connected with salvation, and the remonstrances of a natural conscience in unrenewed men. The latter are chiefly excited by the commission of gross, or of outward sins, which subject the transgressor to present inconvenience, disgrace, or distress. The former are promoted by a discovery of the opposition which the heart feels to the authority of God, its insensibility to his in-

finite amiableness, and its ingratitude for his unmerited goodness: they lead to review our past life with grief and contrition; they excite unfeigned solicitude for reconciliation with an offended God; and, while they constrain us to confess, that we deserve to perish, they make us willing to be saved in whatever manner a holy and gracious God shall be pleased to appoint. The blessed Spirit of illumination and grace, having humbled these awakened men under the mighty hand of God, next leads them to a believing, joyful acceptance of the mercy offered in the Gospel: he gives them to know that God is in Christ, reconciling a guilty world to himself; that he hath set forth Jesus as a propitiation for the remission of sins; that there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ; and that whosoever will, may take of the waters of life freely. Now God appears not only glorious in holiness but rich in mercy, a just God and Saviour, a God in Christ, justifying the ungodly who believe, and saying in their behalf, "Deliver from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom." Now the cheering dawns of hope arise in the mind of the awakened sinner. Illuminated by the Spirit, I see a fountain opened for my many iniquities; and I am assured that Jesus died, the just for the unjust, to bring sinners unto God; his blood cleanseth from all guilt; his power saves to the uttermost; his invitations are free and unlimited; and his promise tells me, that he will in nowise cast out. Now arrives the solemn and memorable hour, of infinite importance to these awakened men, when, through the great Mediator, they approach the throne of the God of peace, when they deliver up the weapons of their rebellion, when they unfeignedly surrender themselves to the grace and the government of the Almighty King of Zion, and intrust the everlasting interests of their immortal souls' to this all-sufficient Saviour. And now it is, they are made the happy partakers of that faith which is by the operation of the Spirit: they receive the record which God hath given of his own Son; they rely on the great atonement for the pardon of their guilt; they depend on the perfect righteousness of Christ for their justification, in the sight of an offended and infinitely holy God; they plead the experience of his quickening, sanctifying grace; and they lay hold on the covenant of promise, as their security for the enjoyment of all spiritual blessings. So soon as men are thus led to rely on the Saviour for righteousness and redemption, they become new creatures in Christ: old things are done away, and the time past seems far more than sufficient to have wrought the will of the flesh: the high imaginations are laid low, and the affections captivated to the love of Christ; his love constrains them; the influence of sin is opposed; God is supremely delighted in; and the things of time, however joyous, are counted as the small dust of the balance, when compared with the pleasures which are at God's right hand. This astonishing change, which, in the hour of reconciliation, passes upon their minds, is styled, the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and the blessed effects of it are growing comfort and holiness; and both of these in all their gradual progress to perfection; are invariably attributed to the residence of the Spirit in the souls of the regenerated. He fills them with peace and with joy, by bearing witness that God hath accepted them through his beloved Son; that his anger is turned away; that he hath adopted them into his family, and given them not only the honourable title, but all the inestimable privileges of children. That the hope of glory may accompany the joy of believing, the Spirit farther testifies, that if children, then we are heirs, heirs of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading, which God, who cannot lie, hath promised, and which is reserved in heaven for all who love the Saviour. Thus, through views of God as a reconciled Father, through the prospect of immortal joys, and through a noble elevation above this miserable world, they go on their way rejoicing. But these comfortable influences of the Spirit, are diminished or withdrawn, when the people of God indulge in sinful conformity to the world, when they act an undutiful part to their heavenly Father, or fail to

adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour. Hence it is evident, that the sanctifying influences of grace are as necessary to our peace and comfort, as the most satisfying assurances of our interest in the divine favour.

Sanctification means the continuance and progress of that spiritual life which was begun in believers, when renewed in the spirit of their mind. An infant of a day; hath all the parts and faculties which he shall enjoy when he arrives at manhood; but these, while in infancy, are imperfect and feeble: they grow with his growth, and strengthen with his years. Thus is it with the man of God: sanctification confers no new principles, capacities, and pursuits; but it invigorates those which the new creature already possesses, and cherishes them gradually, until he arrives at the fulness of the stature of a man .in Christ. Being renewed in his mind, he sets his affections on things above; he presses forward for the prize of his high calling; he lives under the power of the world to come; he loves the Saviour with all the ardour of supreme delight, and consecrates his talents to the honour of God. In filial submission, he resigns his interests to the divine disposal, saying, " Father, not my will, but thine be done." He studies through grace, to walk humbly with God; and it is his daily endeavour to enjoy nearer and more constant fellowship with the Father, and the Son, through the Spirit. This delightful intercourse, while it elevates his views to heaven, neither leads to presumption, nor fills with arrogance: on the contrary, it promotes the sincerest humility, under lively impressions of his own unworthiness; and excites to watchful circumspection, lest he provoke the holy One of Israel to withdraw his gracious communications.

Such is the gradual progress of the work of grace on the hearts of believers, and such are the feelings of the soul when led by the Spirit: they do unite the ardour of triumphant joy in God, with deepest humiliation for past offences; the confidence of children, with the reverence of godly fear; the comfort of pleasing God, with the conflicts of self-denial; the hope of glory to be revealed, with the fear of seeming to stop short in the heavenly journey. O happy, though hidden life! May I live the life of the righteous! may I daily experience their abhorrence of sin; their gratitude for redeeming love; their joy in the Saviour; their fearfulness of offending; their jealousy over themselves; their mortification of earthly affections; their eagerness to glorify God; their esteem of the saints; their elevation above the world, and their ardent longings for heaven! Your hearts reply, Amen; let us also delight ourselves in God.

03 - The Practical Influence of Religion

CHAP. III. The Practical Influence of Religion.

UNITED with right principles, and experience, religion consists in the conformity of our temper and life to the will of God.

Hitherto we have viewed the saints as seated at their Saviour's feet, listening to his gracious words, and feeling the life-giving energy of his promises: there they could always remain, in blissful intercourse with their Lord. It is good for us to be here, is their language: here would we stay, and pass our peaceful days in the admiring contemplation, and satisfying experience, of what thou hast taught us. But that adored Redeemer, to whose direction and disposal they willingly submit, sends them back to their friends and families, to tell what great things he hath done for them; and honours them with this important commission, "Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father in heaven." With this sentiment and aim, they go forth into the world, to act their part in life, and to exhibit that character and conversation which becometh the gospel of Christ. To honour God before men, is the leading object which they propose to aim at, in all their pursuits and actions. They know that their obligations are infinite; and gratitude constrains them to live to him, who hath redeemed them from everlasting destruction. Animated with this heavenly desire of glorifying God, their first inquiry is after some permanent standard of obedience, and a perfect rule of conduct, to which they can have recourse, amidst all the variety of situations in which they may be placed. The language of their hearts is, "Lord, what wilt thou have us to do? What shall we render to thee for all thy benefits? Speak, Lord, for thy servants hear: not our will, but thine be done: show us thy way and we will walk therein." In answer to these sincere requests, the moral law, explained and exemplified by Christ Jesus, is put into their hands, as the law of his spiritual kingdom, binding on all his subjects, perpetual in its obligations, just in all its demands, perfective of the human character, productive of the highest happiness, and addressed to believers with this endearing inscription, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

Piety and benevolence are the leading features in the character formed upon this pure and perfect law; for therein we are reminded, that the Lord God omnipotent is our God, that we are his children, and that mankind are our brethren. When, therefore, our conduct is regulated by these unerring and unalterable principles, every duty enjoined upon Christians is welcomed by us, as wisely calculated for our personal welfare, and founded on the endearing relations in which we stand to God and mankind: we then most readily subscribe both to the justice and goodness of each precept in this holy law: and it well becomes us to do so; for all these precepts arise naturally from that love to God and man, which is the foundation and fulfilling of the law. If we love him supremely as our God, we will worship him alone; and will reverence his name, and sanctify his Sabbaths. If we regard all mankind as our neighbours, near to us by partaking of one common nature-if this law is written on our heart, and if we act invariably under its influence, we will not injure their character by false witness, nor their circumstances by fraud, nor their domestic comfort

by envying what they possess: we will not covet, nor kill, nor steal. But though the real Christian desires to be guided and governed by this perfect rule of righteousness, he still experiences the painful and powerful influence of that carnal mind which led him captive in his unregenerate state, and which is enmity against the law of God. It may, therefore, tend to explain both the parts and the progress of practical religion, if, in connection with the several duties enjoined, we notice the difficulties which Christians encounter, when endeavouring, through grace, to do the will of their heavenly Father. The first proof of obedience they are called to give, is the opposing their own corrupt dispositions, in order to attain that self-government, without which no obedience can be willing, or uniform. Evil passions and appetites are deeply rooted in all men by nature; and repeated indulgence strengthens their hold in many; but they must be resolutely resisted by the Christian, because their gratification is inconsistent with his progress in grace, and injurious to the interests of religion. The command therefore is, if thy right eye offend thee, or cause thee to offend, pluck it out; if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off; rather suffer loss, and endure pain, than sin against thy God. "Mortify your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness and long-suffering: and put off anger, and wrath and malice." The laying aside of formerly besetting sins, is but a poor attainment, unless we are also clothed upon with the beauties of holiness, and the ornaments of a Christian temper. The principal branches of this temper are humility, temperance, patience, meekness, and self-denial. To have these in them and abounding, is the prayer, and aim, and, in some measure, the attainment of believers.

Conscious of their unworthiness, and weakness, and daily imperfections, they esteem others more highly than themselves; they admire that forbearance of God, which spares such cumberers of the ground; they adore that grace which extends salvation to such unworthy creatures; they confess themselves less than the least of all saints; and under the impressions of unfeigned humility, they ascribe unto God the unrivalled glory of all their happiness and hopes.

Pressing forward to the land of promise, remembering that this is not their rest, and declaring themselves only pilgrims on earth, they endeavour, through grace, to be temperate in all things, to be contented and resigned in every situation, to have their conversation without covetousness, and to use this world as not abusing it, knowing that the fashion thereof passeth away.

Encompassed with many cares and tribulations, they stay themselves on God, and seek in patience to possess their spirits; to guard against all murmuring and distrust; to bear the indignation of the Lord, until he pleads their cause; and to humble themselves under his mighty hand, until he exalt them in his due season.

Meekness under affronts is of the highest importance in such a world as this, in which turbulent and unreasonable men every where abound; whose daily injuries and reproaches are so ready to ruffle the temper, and provoke revenge. But learn of thy Redeemer, O Christian! to be meek as well as lowly: when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to Him who judgeth righteously. Wherefore, dearly beloved, give not way to wrath, and avenge not yourselves; nay, love them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you. The self-denial so strongly urged in Scripture on all the disciples of Christ, implies a guarding with habitual care, against those high imaginations which arrogantly oppose the

humiliating scheme of the gospel; and mortifying that vain ambition for human applause, which leads many to mind their own things rather than the things of Christ: but it chiefly means, the opposing those intemperate and impure desires, which lead captive the men of the world, which are destructive of all inward serenity, and are justly styled the "ways of bitterness and death." To guard the regenerate against these fatal paths, the injunctions to self-denial are many, and plain, and strong. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. Take heed, lest ye be overcome with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life. Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise. Love not the world, nor the things of the world; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world; and the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever."

Thus, in describing the conversation which becometh the gospel, we have been necessarily led to consider the temper of the Christian's mind, and the operation of his inward dispositions: for though these inward tempers are only manifest to God, yet their fruits are visible to all around; so that the careful cultivation of the heavenly tempers, now mentioned, forms an essential branch of practical religion. To promote the growth of these tempers, and their progress towards perfection, is perhaps one of the most difficult labours of the Christian in this untoward soil. Numerous and powerful are the evil propensities of his deceitful heart. Those natural corruptions which he thought had been wholly cast out by the power of regenerating grace, have still their root of bitterness remaining; often regain unexpected vigour, spread their noxious influence, and threaten the destruction of all the graces of the Spirit.

Hence arises another important Christian duty, that, namely, of invigorating and cherishing these heavenly plants by means of religious ordinances. Thus believers are described in Scripture, as trees of righteousness, planted by the rivers of water, which bring forth fruit in their season; and are flourishing even in old age, when others fade. The word of God; the sanctuary and its impressive solemnities; the secret devotions of the closet and family; these are the peaceful streams which water the vineyard of the Lord; and these are the sacred channels through which the almighty Spirit conveys to believers renewed supplies of life, and strength, and fruitfulness. The word of God is their counsellor in straits, and companion in the pilgrimage of life; and many in every age, can say with the Psalmist, "when our sorrows abounded, we would have perished, unless we had found comfort in thy most perfect word." By the prayer of faith, they are strengthened with all might in the inner man; and kept in peace, being staid on God. In his tabernacles, they behold his power and glory, and are brought near to God as their exceeding joy. At his table, they remember his love more than wine; and the fruits of their Redeemer's death are sweet unto their taste. With gratitude they welcome every return of that day which God himself hath consecrated; and which brings them the renewed evidence, that their Lord is risen, and hath triumphed over death and the grave. With Simeon, they go up to the temple to worship: with Lydia, they attend to the things which are spoken of the Lord: with Asaph they meditate on the works of God, and remember the years of the right hand of the Most High: with devout Cornelius, they worship God in their house: with the disciples going to Emmaus, they take sweet counsel together, and talk of him who redeems Israel: and with the first Christians, they continue steadfast in the Apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. The wilful neglect of these institutions of religion, is not only injurious to the progress of grace in the soul, but indicates

impiety towards God; and proves of pernicious consequence to individuals, and families, and societies, by setting before them an example of disregard to divine institutions. Whereas a regular and reverential attention to religious worship, in the closet, and family, and sanctuary, is one of the various methods by which the faithful in Christ adorn his doctrine, and make their light shine before men.

Having stated the more personal branches of practical religion, let us now direct your attention to the duties which we owe to others, and which are therefore styled relative. They are comprehended under these two leading commands, of loving our neighbour as ourselves, and doing unto others as we would wish them, in similar situations, to do unto us.

These general propositions are explained by particular precepts of Scripture. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requireth of thee: do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God. Let none of you imagine evil against his neighbour: speak every man the truth, and execute the judgment of truth. Comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient towards all men. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth: hereby we shall assure our hearts before him. But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion, how dwelleth the love of God in him!" In these exhortations to relative duties, sincerity, justice, and kindness, are particularly recommended, as important articles in the conversation becoming the gospel.

Truth and sincerity of speech is of so much importance in society, that without it, mankind could have no comfort in each other, and no confidence in social intercourse; therefore religion requires, that a Christian's words shall indicate the undissembled sentiments of his heart, and shall be followed out by the conformity of his actions to what he hath spoken or promised: a contrary conduct is treating with disregard the omniscience of God, and substituting dissimulation for the godly sincerity which becometh Christians.

Justice and integrity of conduct should ever accompany sincerity in speech; and will lead the Christian to render to all ranks and relations what they are entitled to expect; tribute to whom tribute is due, honour to superiors, gratitude to benefactors, obedience to rulers, subjection to parents, affectionate attention to neighbours, and constancy of friendship to kindred and companions. It is not therefore sufficient to abstain from contention, debate, oppression, cruelty, or fraud; Christians are also required to be the salt of the earth, and the lights of the world; to do good as they have opportunity; to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to succour the distressed, and to honour the Lord with their substance: for they whom he hath prospered in the world, are stewards of the bounties of providence; and are as really bound by Scripture to supply, as not to rob; to communicate, as not to injure; to comfort, as not to smite. But this extensive law of justice hath a particular respect to the relative situation of mankind, regulating the extent of authority in superiors, and the measure of subjection in inferiors. Such, therefore, is its language, as testified in Scripture.-He that ruleth over men, must be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord. Let every soul be subject to the higher powers: for the powers that be, are ordained of God, for the punishment of evil-doers, and the praise of them that do well.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it: so ought men to love their own wives as their own bodies; for he that loveth his wife loveth himself.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as unto the Lord. Be sober, be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, obedient to your own husbands. Whose adorning, let it be the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is, in the sight of God, of great price.

Ye fathers provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Lay up these my words in your heart, and teach them to your children, speaking of them when sitting in the house, when walking by the way, when lying down, and rising up.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is good and acceptable to God. Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise.

Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honour, and please them well in all things: not answering again, not purloining; but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Ye masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, forbearing threatening; knowing that you have a Master in heaven: neither is there respect of persons with him.*

*These illustrations of relative duties are given in the language of Scripture, but the references are too numerous to be particularized on the margin. We beg to refer the reader for information on these and other topics, to Dr. Chalmers' very valuable and useful work, entitled "Scripture References." ED. To these most reasonable rules of righteousness, which flow from the relative situations of Christians, their Redeemer hath added the new commandment of Love to the brethren. As their head of influence and privilege, he unites them into one spiritual family; and requires them to love each other with a purity, constancy, and endearment becoming fellow-debtors to sovereign grace, and fellow-travellers to the heavenly glory. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another. This love is pure and peaceable, long-suffering and kind; it forgives unto seventy times seven; it rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; it warns the unruly, and restores the fallen, in the spirit of meekness; it comforts the feeble-minded, and confirms the weak. We are brethren, is its language, let us not fall out by the way: We have one faith, one Lord, one hope of our calling, one Father, and one heaven; let us then build up one another in our most holy faith, and edify one another, and rejoice in the hope of the glory to be revealed. On the other hand, if, among the Christian's kindred or companions, any seem strangers or enemies to that grace which brings salvation, his duty is, not to irritate them by railing accusation, by haughty neglect, or indignant scorn; but in meekness to instruct; in the gentleness of advice to recommend religion; in the circumspection of exemplary conduct, to show its powerful influence; and, in all the importunity of prayer, to plead with the God of all grace, that by his unmerited, almighty, and sovereign grace, he would pluck them as brands from the burning, and call them from darkness to his marvellous light, and make them joyful with his inheritance.

Such is the nature of practical religion, as delineated in the sacred Scriptures:-walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless: living unspotted from the world; leading quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty: doing good to all as we have opportunity, especially to such as are of the household of faith: growing in grace: following after those things which are pure and lovely, and of good report; adding to our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance,

patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. The motives to this Christian conduct are numerous, powerful, and endearing. Thus, we glorify our Father in heaven, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour; and walk before him unto all well pleasing. Thus we live unto the Lord, and, as he hath given commandment, and according to the example he hath left us. Thus the life of Christ is made manifest in us, and our light shineth before the world, and the way of truth is not evil spoken of on our account. Thus our peace floweth as a river, and we grow in meetness for inheriting with the saints in light.

Let us then examine our own character: and inquire, What influence religion hath had upon our hearts and tempers, our words and conduct?

Let us nobly aspire after the highest possible attainments, in that life of exemplary and uniform holiness recommended by the gospel. And for this purpose, while we daily rely on the righteousness of the Redeemer for acceptance, and daily dedicate ourselves to his service, let us also be strong in his might, and in the exercise of prayer wait on the promised influences of the Holy Spirit, to hold up our goings, that our footsteps may never slide: to keep us in the hour of temptation: to lead us in the everlasting way: to sanctify us wholly: to preserve soul, body, and spirit blameless unto the coming of the Lord; and to make our path shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

04 - The Importance of Religion to the Usefulness and Happiness of the Common People

CHAP. IV. The Importance of Religion to the Usefulness and Happiness of the Common People.

LET it be understood, that this expression, the common people, far from implying the smallest degree of disrespect, is all along used merely to distinguish the persons here addressed, from those who, by their superior station, fortune, or influence, are, in common language, styled the great. But though neither the middle ranks of life, nor the lowest orders of society, are excluded by this general term of common people, yet the writer of this treatise hath chiefly in view that numerous and valuable class of persons who are employed as tradesmen, labourers, servants, domestics, or apprentices. For their benefit he hath attempted some description of the nature and influence of real religion; and now he wishes to rouse their attention to this deeply interesting subject, and to recommend this religion to their choice, by such arguments as may be suitable to their situations, and may come home to their hearts.

Know thyself, O man! and respect thyself, are maxims applauded by the wise, and worthy the continual recollection of all. They are particularly applicable to you who are placed in dependent circumstances; and whose inferiority may often expose you to disesteem, and may sometimes endanger your undervaluing your own character. To promote this knowledge and respect, be entreated to think seriously on the exalted powers you possess, and to look around with attention upon the station which you hold. In other words, view yourselves both in your personal and in your relative capacity. To these two points the reasoning on this branch of the subject shall be confined.

1. Then, think of yourselves in your personal capacity, as rational and immortal beings. However obscure your lot in life, you possess the same spiritual powers, are formed for the same noble purposes, and are called to the same exalted prospects with the most honourable or wealthy in the land. The lowest circumstances of service, or dependence, or poverty, with all their humiliating and mournful attendants, can in no degree diminish the poor man's intrinsic excellence. He is the child of providence, the expectant of immortality. These honours his gracious Creator confers upon him, in common with the wealthiest potentate on earth. A wretched Lazarus, fed with crumbs from the rich man's table; a blind Bartimeus, who sat by the way-side begging, were as really the objects of divine attention, as Solomon, when arrayed in all his glory. Ye unknown, unenvied men, ye sons and daughters of poverty; ye are equally with others the creatures of God; formed by his power, sustained by his merciful visitation, and placed in those very circumstances which his unerring wisdom hath judged most expedient. Therefore, as his rational and dependent creatures, you owe to him the daily tribute of supreme love, of grateful worship, of unreserved submission, and dutiful obedience. Ask, then, where is God our Maker, who gives us songs in the night? And what hath the Lord required of us? Learn his character and his will: follow on to know him; and walk before him, unto all well-pleasing. As man is born to trouble, so they who move in inferior stations, are peculiarly exposed to numberless distresses; under each of these they require support and solace to their minds: but that consolation they cannot expect from the world. Small is the relief, and few

the joys, it can impart to any. The little that it hath, is reserved for those in affluence and power; but it cruelly leaves the afflicted poor to weep unpitied and despised. Not thus unrelenting and cruel is that amiable religion which descends from above. She visits the house of neglected cottagers. She revives the soul of the sorrowful, and imparts a gladness of heart which can only be understood by those who feel her animating presence. Nevertheless, she disdains to dwell with those who, however needy, remain unprincipled and impenitent; she enters not the habitation of those who are ignorant of God, who disobey the Gospel and love the darkness; she passes their dreary abode with just indignation; and leaves them a spectacle, to men and angels, of the complicated horrors of poverty and pain, when united with ignorance and impiety. Lay up, therefore, a good foundation for the days of darkness, by union and fellowship with that Redeemer, who giveth grace to help in every time of need. To you, equally with others, his infinite merits can extend; for your acceptance the blessings of his great salvation are held out; and for your consolation he proclaims, "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come, and take of the waters of life freely. If united to this compassionate Redeemer, and abiding in him, all the ways of providence towards you will be mercy and peace, and the severest trials in life will work together for your good. Blessed Gospel of peace, which turns darkness into light, and makes the valley of Achor, or trouble, a door of hope! Happy the believer in Christ, cheered with the presence of a friend, who is born for adversity, and who sticketh closer than a brother.

It is appointed for all to die, and after death cometh the judgment; and after judgment followeth the eternal state of existence. Whatever, then, may be the outward condition, or the inward perplexities of any of the common people, they are daily hastening to immortal glory, or endless woe. That poor wretched profligate, who is clothed with rags, yet staggering with drunkenness; who hath brutified his senses by intemperance; who so daringly blasphemes his Maker, and so loudly implores damnation on himself; even he possesses an immortal soul, and soon shall he stand before the impartial tribunal of a sovereign Judge. O that he would consider his latter end; and would lay to heart, in the days of his merciful visitation, the things which belong to his everlasting peace! Yes, the servant, the labourer, the tradesman; nay, that needy, naked, hungry pensioner of the benevolent; each hath a treasure of unspeakable value to secure, or to lose: his soul is immortal, all his temporal difficulties shall soon be forgotten in the uninterrupted pleasures of heavenly glory, or the unutterable agonies of future wrath. This life is the only period allotted him to prepare for eternity: his season of grace is uncertain; his day declines, and his departure is at hand! What scene on earth is more affecting than the death of an ignorant, unprincipled, poor man, who hath toiled hard through life to gain a scanty subsistence, but never thought of an hereafter, who enjoyed but little comfort in this world, and is dying without any well-grounded hope of happiness in the next?

Ye children of industry and indigence, direct your attention to the representation now given: consider yourselves in your personal capacity, inheriting like powers, and exposed to like trials with your superiors: the subjects of God's moral government; journeying through a world of sin and misery; possessing immortal natures, and daily ripening for an unalterable and endless state. If then there is a reality, a power, and a comfort in religion; if it is productive of present peace, and can be advantageous to any of mankind, it must be of peculiar avail to you. You need its divine influence to regulate your affections, to elevate your desires, to dispel your fears, to purify your hearts, and to render you happy in God, independent of all earthly joys. You are capable of en-

joying these influences, and of feeling their glorious power to keep from fainting in the day of adversity; and you are encouraged from Scripture to ask, and to expect more abundant consolations in Christ, than they who experience not the tribulations of life. Let religion then be the guide of your steps, and the solace of your minds. Choose this better part which cannot be taken away; prefer it as the one thing needful; delight yourselves in the Lord; abide in his words, and walk as he hath given commandment: then shall ye know, that Wisdom's ways are pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

"If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. Take fast hold of instruction, let her not go; keep her, for she is thy life. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee; exalt her, and she shall bring thee to honour. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; and shall deliver to thee a crown of glory." Prov. ii. and iv.

2. Let us next consider, that numerous class of men whom providence hath placed in inferior stations, as forming an important branch of the community, and connected with society by various relations.

Here a succession of interesting circumstances present themselves to view; and the value of religion appears with peculiar lustre as happily calculated to render men upright in service-constant in conjugal life-dutiful children-affectionate parents-and useful citizens. To servants of every description, Christianity addresses its exhortations with energy, and affection: it cautions against murmuring at the allotments of an unerring Father; it requires them to abide in their calling with the Lord: it gives them directions for the regulation of their temper, words, and conduct; and it assures them, that by acting a proper part in their several departments, they shall shine as lights before men, and shall adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour.

Many are their dangers, and great their need of intimate acquaintance both with the principles and the power of Christianity. Separated from the eye and care of their parents, they are entered upon an ensnaring world, are scattered through many families, and have many duties to discharge, many difficulties to encounter, and many temptations to resist: nothing less than cleaving to the Lord with full purpose of heart, can prevent their wandering into those paths in which destroyers walk.

However unfashionable the opinion, yet it accords with Scripture and observation, that unfeigned piety is an essential requisite in the character of a faithful servant. Masters can have little dependence on the truth and honesty, the temperance and sobriety, of any under them, who have not the fear of God before their eyes; who disregard his ordinances, or profane his awful name: such will feel but little restraint from the terrors of an earthly master, when tempted to falsehood, or fraud, or self-indulgence. Nothing less than the grace which bringeth salvation, can effectually teach them to deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts; and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world: and nothing but the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart, can constrain them to the performance of commanded duty; especially of those necessary and self-denying duties which contradict depraved dispositions, and natural propensities to evil.

Most wise in its nature, and most beneficial for society, is the language of Scripture to those under authority: "Obey them who have the rule over you; be clothed with humility; lay aside all wrath and malice; put on the ornaments of meek and quiet spirits; be faithful in that which is least, and, in due time, God will make you ruler over many things; be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Religion requires them to resist the solicitations of the wicked; to curb the sallies of passion; to beware lest they be overtaken by intemperance or impurity; and to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. It forbids their doing evil that good may come; and it charges them to speak the truth in love, and not lie one to another; to be sober minded, and not deal in matters too high for them; to do their own work quietly, and not stir up strife; to follow peace with all men, and that holiness without which none can see the Lord.

Such are the amiable counsels of our holy religion, such the character of upright servants, and such the men worthy of being encouraged and employed. But where are such domestics, labourers, apprentices, and servants to be found? Alas! the conduct of the far greater part is in direct opposition to all these heavenly precepts. Unfaithful to their trust, deceitful in their words, dishonest in their transactions, violent in their tempers, and sensual in their gratifications: they too often prove the ruin of companions, the disgrace of society, the dishonour of their friends, and disturbers of the families where they reside. Instead of rising into notice and esteem, or treasuring up for future support, they render themselves objects of public indignation, and involve themselves and their families in infamy and want.

Never will any effectual reformation, in sentiments or manners, be witnessed amongst any class of servants, until, through grace, they submit to the laws of God, and become Christians, not in name, but in heart and life. Other expedients for reforming them have been tried, but always have failed: and the experience of ages hath proved, that it is religion alone, when exerting its practical influence: it is Christianity, when experienced in its power: it is the Gospel of Christ, when known, loved, and obeyed, which inclines and enables dependent men, who earn their bread with the sweat of their brow; to labour without murmuring, and to lead quiet and peaceable lives in all honesty and godliness.

These remarks may be extended to another station of life, even more important than that of service. When persons have entered into the nearest and tenderest of all human connections, what can so firmly secure their conjugal fidelity, as the immutable bond of religion? or what can so effectually perpetuate their conjugal happiness, as that undissembled affection which the Gospel of peace enjoins and inspires? On the other hand, whence ariseth that domestic wretchedness, so often heard of in the habitations of the common people? Whence is it, that the closest of human ties, which heaven appointed as the perfection of human felicity, so often proves the fatal source of constant and increasing torment? The reason is, the married pair entered into that sacred relation untutored, unprincipled, and irreligious: and therefore continue strangers to that regard, constancy and happiness, which result from the united influence of piety and love. Adverse to piety, and uninfluenced by love: oppressed with poverty, and soured by fatigue: the unhappy pair seek not to sooth each other's sorrows, nor to promote each other's comfort: but serve up every meal with unavailing complaints, and imbitter every solitary hour by mutual reproaches.

Behold we show you a more excellent way.-Say with Joshua, Whatever others do, as for us, and our house, we will serve the Lord. Learn of Jesus to be meek and lowly: delight yourselves in the

Lord, and acknowledge him in all your ways; this will lighten the pressure of your poverty, will sweeten your converse, after the fatigues of the day, and will teach you to enjoy the bounty of your God, in the homely fare which your honest industry hath gained.

Many are the advantages of uniform godliness in the marriage-relation: it restrains wrath and bitterness: it suppresses strife and contention; and its happy tendency is to deliver from evil and self-tormenting passions. Nor is this its only aim: it is also productive of another effect, singularly beneficial to society; securing a faithful adherence to the matrimonial vow, and guarding, by the most solemn sanctions, against all criminal conduct. The violation of the marriage-bed is one of the most heinous and most cruel of all transgressions: against none are the warnings of Scripture more frequent, or its threatenings more alarming. Nor doth it only forbid impure actions, but all lascivious language, all irregular desires, and all pollution of the mind. In the spirit of true benevolence, the sacred volume invites Christians to the calm tranquillities, and soothing joys, of domestic life; and, with equal ardour for their happiness, it deters from all those approaches to vice, and all those criminal appetites and indulgences, which end in bitterness and death. Let husband and wife receive these sayings, and though poor, be virtuous; though perplexed, comfort each other; and though toiling through life, live in love; and thus lessen, by bearing each other's burdens.

Religion next addresses you as parents; and commands you to bring up your children in the admonition of the Lord. If you neglect this duty, you are murderers of their souls; nor will any inferiority of station, any multiplicity of cares, or any diligence in business, excuse that neglect. Solemn and binding were your engagements at the baptism of your children, to instruct them in the truths of Scripture: to restrain them from evil; to pray for them, and with them; to educate them according to their station; and to employ your influence, affection, and authority as parents, in promoting their temporal and spiritual welfare. Perform your vows unto the Lord: devolve not all the spiritual charge of your families upon pastors or teachers; nor think that their labours can warrant your omission of instruction, example, and prayer.

Such are the injunctions of religion upon parents; and hence its importance to society is manifest. Were the children of the commonalty trained up in the fear of the Lord, they would not, through life, remain cumberers of the community, troublers of God's Israel, ignorant as the untutored Indian, and obstinate as the fierce barbarian. But can it be expected, that parents will bring up their children for God, if they themselves are enemies to him in their minds; if, in this land of light, they are perishing for lack of knowledge; if, amidst the most plentiful means of instruction, they willingly sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death? Infatuated parents! pity the offspring which God hath given you; they grow up around your table as olive-plants; they cling to you with fond affection; they listen to your talk with admiring silence; they receive from your hands the crumb, and the cup, with eager gratitude; and their wishful looks, and unfolding powers, entreat your attention to their mind, and to their future usefulness. If no other argument could be produced for your walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, this one might rouse you, - the fate of your children; the danger of their perishing through your neglect; and the obligations you are under, to teach them the knowledge, and fear, and love, of their Creator and Redeemer.

While religion, as a heavenly visitant, administers these wholesome counsels to the heads of families, she looks around upon their offspring with mildest countenance; and affectionately

enjoins them to dwell together in unity, to obey their parents in the Lord, and to honour their father and mother, that their days may be long in the land of the living.

Another relative character which the common people hold in society, arises from their connection with the community; and the most effectual method of rendering themselves good citizens, and virtuous subjects, is by their becoming sincere Christians. The gospel teaches them, that they are accountable to God for all their actions; that his word must regulate their measures in society; that, in the station he allots them, they must act with integrity and honour; and that with their conduct in life, is connected the prosperity or the ruin of their country. Let men, however needy or obscure, be habitually impressed with these laws of revelation: this will induce them to lead quiet and peaceable lives, to render tribute and honour where due, and to obey their superiors in the Lord. But if ever they set aside these divine laws, or consider their conduct in society as unconnected with their duty to God, separate morality from religion, or substitute the one for the other: then farewell all public virtue, tranquillity, and order: all regard to distinguishing privileges, all reverence for laws, all countenance from heaven. These guardian angels will then hasten their departure from our once happy land: and leave an ungrateful nation to all the calamities of idleness, injustice, and oppression, to all the direful effects of divine indignation.

Know then your own importance, ye whom Providence hath placed in the inferior ranks of life. You are happily free from the vexatious toil of managing the national concerns, you need not perplex yourselves, or others, with visionary schemes of public government, and you would be but ill-employed in attempting to alter laws, which the experience of ages hath proved to be wholesome, but you have far more important and honourable work to pursue: a never-dying soul to be saved, a family to rear, an example to set before many, and a Saviour to honour upon earth. Were the common people sincerely religious: did they act upon the principles, and conformably to the precepts of Scripture: did they encourage, by their example, a spirit of sobriety, industry, and honesty: did they bring up their children in a reverence for the ordinances of God, and send them forth into the world fortified with the sentiments of revelation: who can tell what blessings they might prove to the places where they reside, and to the nation at large? nay, who can calculate how wide their usefulness might extend, and how long it might be perpetuated? Succeeding generations might reap the blissful fruits of their piety, while their children's children continued to instruct their families in the heavenly truths, and examples, transmitted from their forefathers. But if the generality of the common people degenerate into infidelity, licentiousness, and all immoral conduct, the evil produced will be equally wide, and equally lasting.

05 - The Means which seem best Calculated for Promoting the Knowledge and Spirit of Religion

CHAP. V. The Means which seem best calculated for promoting the Knowledge and Spirit of Religion amongst the Common People.

1. THE foundation of all religious knowledge and attainments, must be laid in a proper acquaintance with the sacred Scriptures, and a constant attention to them as the unerring rule of faith and conduct. Without this heavenly guide, the children of men would wander in perpetual uncertainty and danger; but by following this light of truth, which shineth in a dark world, they are led into the paths of peace, are filled with consolation, and go forward from strength to strength, until they appear before God in Zion. To the poor the gospel is published; by this they are made wise to salvation, and taught how to purify their way. Though the glimmerings of reason, when united with the improvements of philosophy, may be supposed to be of some advantage to men of refinement; yet what benefit can these yield to men unaccustomed to argue, unfit to detect the subtleties of the arrogant, and so much occupied by daily labours, as to enjoy little leisure for perusing the multiplied volumes of the learned? The God of wisdom and compassion hath pitied their circumstances, and hath not withheld from them, a plain and perfect revelation of his will; it shines before them as the bright morning-star, leading their attention to the glorious Sun of Righteousness, and conducting many sons and daughters to glory. Follow ye, therefore, this true light, which descendeth from heaven; search the sacred volume with diligence, humility, and prayer; and hold converse with it daily, as with a beloved companion. Examine its doctrines, rejoice in its promises, observe the path of duty it prescribes, and contemplate with delight the glorious objects it exhibits. Thus seek for wisdom as for hid treasures, and thus apply your hearts to understanding. The Scriptures are intended for the benefit of all ranks, and are adapted to the circumstances of every character; therefore all are required to know the truth, to have the word of Christ dwelling richly in them, and to regard the things which belong to their everlasting peace. But they who hate instruction, who love the darkness, who reject the counsel of God, and obey not his gospel, are threatened with destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

If God commandeth all to search the Scriptures, must not the neglect of this express command, be both sinful and dangerous? Yet some pretended Christians have extolled ignorance as the mother of devotion. Such a daring sentiment insults the kindness of that God, who deigned to reveal his will to men; and betrays so much malevolence against the truth, as may well excite our indignation and sorrow. The arrogant pride of popery, in substituting human inventions for the ordinances of God, is not more fatal and delusive, than the cruel conduct of her priests, in withholding from the common people the free perusal of the Scriptures. But we have not so learned Christ: we know that with him is no distinction of persons; that his voice is to the children of men; that all kindreds and people are commanded to walk in his light, and to make his statutes their songs in their pilgrimage.

Men and brethren, prize your privileges, and rejoice that the word of truth is in your habitations, and in your hands. Your fathers sat in darkness, under popish delusion: but this land where your fathers dwelt, is become a valley of vision. Ye are rescued from the dominion of tyrannic priests: the ministers of the sanctuary are not permitted, by our holy religion, to lord it over your faith: ye are required to try their doctrines by the law and the testimony, before you receive them with all readiness: the word is nigh you, it is translated into your own language, it is given you almost without price; and no man is left untried, to encourage your daily perusal of the sacred volume.

O how highly favoured is this island above many other nations! The Sun of Righteousness has not yet dispelled from their boundaries, the clouds of ignorance, error, and idolatry-the prophets and apostles are scarcely known among them, except by the pencil of the painter-the inspired writings of these holy men are detained in the repositories of priests-the waters of salvation are stopped in their courses, by the mighty bulwarks of superstition-the fountain opened by the Son of God, for purifying many nations, is shut up by the daring Vicar of Christ-the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the people, is guarded from the approaches of the needy by mercenary hirelings-and the glorious light of the gospel is involved in the mysterious darkness of gloomy subtleties. But the God of Zion will ere long arise, and plead his own cause; he will shake the kingdoms of the earth, he will gird his sword on his thigh, and he will go forth in the chariot of his gospel, from conquering to conquer. May his word run, and have free course, and be glorified! May the tumults of the people terminate in the triumphs of the Redeemer's kingdom! and may his blessed religion be preserved amongst us in all its purity, experienced in all its power, and perpetuated to latest ages!

Since to you is given the gospel of salvation, prize this privilege, and improve it with care: count all as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ: read his word with delight and attention, with humility and reverence, with faith and firm assent, with application of what it reveals to your own circumstances, and with fervent supplication for the teaching of the Spirit, that you may understand the Scriptures, may embrace the promises, and may walk in the truth.

2. A spirit of religion will never prevail in any community, where there is not a general and regular attendance on the preaching of the word. This, therefore, is earnestly recommended to families, both as a duty and a privilege.

Thanks unto the God of our fathers, the sublime and sanctifying doctrines of grace are, even in this age of error, taught by many, with sincerity, plainness, and power. Many faithful ministers, of various denominations, harmoniously unite in the declaration and defence of the record which God hath given: they testify the great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh: they preach Christ crucified, as the foundation of hope for guilty creatures, and as the Author of eternal redemption to all who obey him. This comfortable consideration, united with the many important ends of public worship, warrants the exhortation now given, to frequent the house of God, if you desire progress in religion.

Though it is a common complaint, that little space is reserved in churches for the accommodation of the poor, and though the complaint may not be wholly groundless; yet in almost every city and parish, there are churches reared by various sects, where the same gospel is preached, where the poor may find easy access, and where they will be instructed in the truth as it is in Jesus. Since, then, there are places provided in this land of liberty, where you may worship God according to

your consciences, and since ministers are willing to instruct all who come to them, why should you perish for lack of knowledge? Why neglect the means of improvement? And why refuse a willing attendance on the public ordinances of divine institution? That attendance may not perhaps be always followed with the desired effects: some may long enjoy the means of the grace, and remain unenlightened and unrenewed; still they are engaged, as becometh creatures, in waiting on God, and worshipping him; they are in the sanctuary, where he manifests his glory, and exerts his saving power; they are in the place where he promises to meet with his people, and to bless them.

Under these impressions, it is earnestly recommended to all in the community, that they conduct their children to some proper place of worship on the Lord's day, and teach them to listen with reverent attention to the truths delivered. Pernicious and alarming are the consequences, when the common people forsake the worshipping of God in the sanctuary: every religious and moral principle soon becomes effaced from their remembrance; all the restraints of character and decency are burst asunder: those sacred hours in which others are engaged, with heavenly devotion, in public worship, are spent by these neglecters of God's house, in the haunts of intemperance, in depredations on their neighbour's property, or in forming associations dangerous to families, and destructive to domestic order. Considering it therefore as a duty enjoined by religion, as a matter of policy for the welfare of society, as a matter of prudence for the comfort of families, and as a mark of compassion for the souls of the perishing, let parents, masters, and superiors endeavour, by all the influence they can employ, by rewarding the complying and reproving the froward, by exhortation and authority, to prevent their domestics or servants, their tenants or children, from neglecting the assemblies of the saints; let them also endeavour to promote among the poorest of the people, a regular attendance upon the public worship of God every returning Sabbath.

3. A third means of improvement in religion, is a careful application to the several exercises of closet devotion. Under this particular may be included, profitable reading, pious meditation, and secret prayer. Though each of these merits a separate consideration, yet their influence upon each other is so natural and intimate, that there seems no impropriety in classing them together. A daily searching of the Scriptures hath already been urged: and therefore the profitable reading now to be recommended, refers to the serious perusal of books of piety. All have not equal opportunities for this profitable employment: yet the most laborious and hard wrought in our land, have their hours of recess from the fatigues of business, and their seasons of rest and leisure. Without proper caution, these may prove dangerous periods, by leading the unemployed into follies and crimes, which will entail upon them lasting distress and wretchedness. To prevent such miseries, improve your leisure hours in the perusal of the writings of the pious. Thanks unto God, we are favoured with a variety of valuable publications, which are well calculated both to please and to edify; which contain no dangerous tenets; which attempt not to promote devotion without principle, or piety without morality; but which are at once evangelical, practical, and plain. A Flavel, a Watts, an Owen, a Hervey, and a Doddridge, though dead, yet speak to us in all the eloquence of animated address, of unadulterated doctrine, and of genuine piety. In our own day, a Newton, a Venn, a Walker, and a Witherspoon, have given to the world amiable and just representations of evangelical truth. To all these I might add, as worthy of perusal, and happily adapted to the capacities of the meanest, the labours of a Boston, a Bunyan, and an Erskine. All these authors now named were men eminent for their piety, and useful in their day: their spirit breathes in their

works; and their praise will be long perpetuated in the church. Modern refiners of a religion which is perfect in itself, and can admit of no improvement by modern discoveries, may affect to despise the writings now mentioned, and may load them with the reproachful names of enthusiasm and vulgarity. Nevertheless, if you peruse them with care, you will find them rich in sentiment, and profitable for your instruction in righteousness; and if you are so fortunate as to bring your own household, and the families around, to read and relish what these books contain, you will be doing all essential service to the interests of religion.

Serious meditation on divine things, is another important branch of closet-devotion. It is not reasonable, that the objects of time should occupy the chief attention of immortal men; that they should mind only earthly things, and be only careful about worldly concerns. It becomes them to allot proper intervals for spiritual contemplation; to retire often from the business and the bustle of the world: to call themselves to frequent and strict account; to examine if they are in the faith; to try their tempers and conduct by the law of God; to inquire what progress they are making in their preparations for an everlasting state of existence: and to live under realizing impressions of the future world. The want of religious knowledge, and habitual neglect of serious consideration, prove the ruin of thousands. What real or persevering religion can be expected from an uninformed, undisciplined, unthinking mind? and how unavailing must be all the means of grace, if men will not allow themselves leisure to examine their real state before God, to ponder the things which belong to their salvation, and to meditate on the all-important doctrines, promises, and precepts of Scripture? Small attention is necessary to give the objects of sense their full force; these are ever present, and their influence is powerful: but of what is unseen and everlasting, a more fixed recollection is indispensably necessary. This, in some measure, removes the distance between heaven and earth; brings spiritual objects near to the believing reflecting mind; increases that faith which is the substance of things hoped for; and derives from these unseen realities, far nobler joys than can be obtained from the most inviting pleasures of sin.

Retire, therefore, by yourselves, into the fields or the closet, to meditate on heavenly themes: contemplate what hath been, what is, and what shall be hereafter. Mark the ways of Providence; and trace, with admiring acknowledgment, the doing of the Lord to yourselves, your families and your kindred. Look forward to future, but certain and approaching scenes: an expiring world, a general judgment, an unalterable state. How must these solemn prospects moderate your eagerness for the passing fashions of the world, and quicken your progress towards Zion. Meditate on heaven, as the land of rest, and the sure inheritance of all the redeemed; contemplate their joys and their employments, and long to be united with the just made perfect, and with the innumerable company of angels. Above all, let the meditations of God and the Redeemer be sweet unto your thoughts. Contemplate your heavenly Father's mercy and faithfulness, his infinite glory, and his condescending care. Look unto Jesus the author of eternal redemption: admire his transcendent excellence, his sufferings and triumphs, the blessings he hath purchased, the mediation he now accomplishes, and the happiness prepared for all his followers. Inquire if you have good hope through grace, that you are among the number of his followers? if you love him more than all? if you abide in him as your Saviour and Sanctifier? and if you have been made willing to deny yourselves, to take up your cross and to follow Christ? Thus, by uniting serious self-inquiry with heavenly contemplation, you will experience the accomplishment of the apostle's declaration, that to be spiritually-minded is life and peace.

Professing Christians, placed by Providence in laborious or dependent stations of life, excuse their neglect of this duty, by pleading their want of time, and continual employment. But surely this reasoning cannot apply to the Sabbath: or if it does, they themselves are highly culpable, for engaging in any service which admits not of their sanctifying the day of God. That sacred and blessed day is not theirs, to give to worldly business: nor their masters to dispose of: it is consecrated to the God of their lives, and the rock of their salvation: it hath work assigned it peculiar to that one day in seven; and in this work the public and private exercises of religious worship are mercifully interwoven: amongst these, the duty now recommended claims its admission: and some portion of the morning and evening of every Lord's day ought to be set apart for spiritual meditation. - Squander not then these precious hours in unprofitable visits or idle converse; but retiring from every eye, delight yourselves in God, and let your souls follow hard after him: review the general tenor of your tempers through the past week, and your conduct both towards God and man: compare your dispositions, pursuits, words and actions, with the law and the gospel: confess the plagues of your heart, and the transgressions of your life: renew your acceptance of the Saviour, and dedication to his service: and contemplate, with growing joy, the height, and depth, and breadth, and length of the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let the reading and hearing of the word, and all the solemn services of that hallowed day, instead of preventing, promote and encourage this heavenly employment: so shall the reviving worship of the Christian Sabbath on earth prove a pleasing earnest of nearer intercourse with God in the Zion above. But heavenly contemplation need not be confined to one day in seven; it may be enjoyed amidst the ordinary transactions of daily business: nay, every occurrence in life, every mercy and affliction, every temptation or escape, every danger or deliverance - should aid you in rising from the creature to God, and in setting your affections on - the things which are above. Every returning evening it becomes you to inquire, What hath been your state and temper of mind, amidst the varying events of the day? what duties have been cheerfully performed, or sinfully omitted? what temptations have been boldly resisted, or shamefully complied with? what trials have been patiently endured, or fretfully spurned at? what graces of the divine life have been exercised, and what have been neglected? what time hath been happily gained from indolence, or carnal indulgence? and what endeavours have been used for promoting the good of others, or the honour of religion? Such self-examination should be strictly attended to, and considerably enlarged every Lord's day evening, every return of your birth-day, every first day of the year, and always before partaking of the sacrament of the supper.

Another happy mean of promoting in the mind the true spirit of religion, is daily, earnest secret prayer. This may well be esteemed by Christians an important duty, and an inestimable privilege. So necessary is it for the progress of real goodness, that without prayer, all the other means already recommended, would be of little avail; and so advantageous is it to the Christian, that the follies of the world will be lightly esteemed, when intercourse with the God of all grace is enjoyed. No duty can be more reasonable, than that frail creatures should daily acknowledge, with gratitude and reverence, their dependence upon God, and their obligations to the Giver of all good: no service can be more acceptable to heaven than the morning and evening sacrifice of humble adoration and fervent intercession, through the one Mediator; and no attainment marks more strongly the Christian's progress in religion, than a praying spirit; by which is meant, a delight in approaching to God as the hearer of prayer; and unfolding, with undisguised freedom, our sins and sorrows; a turning every day's events into arguments and matters for supplication; and a

persevering continuance, in humbly pleading for promised blessings. That praying spirit which all should cultivate, meets with violent opposition from the pride and levity of the human mind; the former inclining to live as if independent of God; the other leading to an indolent superficial performance of a mere external form, vainly dignified with the name of prayer. But every lover of real religion must resist these temptations; must seek, through grace, to continue instant in prayer: and even when unable to order his cause through reason of his ignorance, or through the prevalence of unbelief, must, with sighs, which cannot be expressed, heave the wishful desire to that righteous Advocate, who maketh continual intercession: and hope for the Spirit to help his infirmities.

You who are considered as placed in the obscurer ranks of life, and for whose benefit this publication is chiefly intended, ought particularly to rejoice in the privilege of prayer. It is the provision which your heavenly Father hath made for your consolation in this weary wilderness; allowing you, at all times, freedom of access to the throne of his mercy; and assuring you that his ear is ever open to the cry of the humble. Through that compassionate Redeemer, who is your prevalent Advocate, you have access by one Spirit, to the Father. Go, therefore, to him with all your difficulties; unfold to him the secret griefs which you cannot safely intrust with any companion; rely on his wisdom for guidance, and on his almighty power for protection; enlarge your desires after heavenly enjoyments; and plead the accomplishment of his gracious promises. Thus by the prayer of faith, you will be strengthened, established, and comforted; and by making all your wants known, with supplication and thanksgiving, the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and mind, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

06 - A Short Address to Parents and Masters

CHAP. VI. A Short Address to Parents and Masters.

EVERY head of a family hath an authority and influence, which, if rightly improved, may considerably promote the progress of religion among the inferior orders of the community.

All parents, however obscure and needy, are bound, by the command of Scripture, to bring up their children in the knowledge of the Lord: and every master of a family hath in charge, not his own soul only, but the careful inspection of all his servants. He is to them a head and guardian: and he ought, like Abraham, to teach his household to keep the way of the Lord. To him, and to every parent, belongs the charge given to Israel, recorded in Deut. vi. 6. " These words which I command thee, saith the Lord, shall be in thy heart; thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way: and thou shalt diligently teach them to thy household."

Education and instruction are two important duties incumbent on the heads of every family; giving all diligence that their children and servants be taught to read the Scriptures, and be instructed in the principles of religion. Both of these duties are mutually connected, are of much importance to the welfare of society, and are essential to the spiritual interests of individuals.

Unless your children are taught to read the word of God in their own language, every other mean of communicating religious knowledge will be of little avail; and that little, of short duration. When they grow up in life, their minds will remain unfurnished; their leisure evening hours will hang heavy on their hands; and their usual relaxation from the tediousness which ignorance begets, will be sought in the fatal joys of intemperance and the wretched abodes of vice.

Every observer of mankind may perceive, that these are the dismal effects of neglected education in youth; and that this neglect is becoming too general among the families of the common people. Too many parents, in the inferior stations of life, foolishly suppose, that if they can procure food and raiment for their children, they have sufficiently discharged their duty; that teaching these children to read, is unnecessary labour, or unprofitable expense; and that their early days are far more usefully employed in earning a little pittance, than in learning to read the Scriptures.

Cruel parents! is it thus you care for the souls of your offspring? is it thus you prepare them for acting an honourable part in life? and is it thus you fortify them against the dangerous temptations of an ensnaring world? Have you forgot your engagements at the baptism of your children; and your vowing before heaven and earth, that you would educate them in the fear of the Lord, and make them acquainted with what his word reveals and requires? How false have you proved to these vows! and how regardless of your solemn obligations! Your children are uneducated; and are likely to remain unprincipled through life: they will soon be beyond the reach of your instruction, under the dominion of others, and engaged in the service of their masters; may it not be feared, that there they will act a wretched part, until their intemperance; dishonesty, and fraud, are detected, and they themselves loaded with infamy and disgrace? To you, their parents, will be greatly owing their vices, and their miseries. You taught them not, in early days, to dread the paths

of the destroyer: you implanted not in their forming minds the seeds of religious knowledge; nay, you cruelly unfitted them for acquiring that knowledge, by withholding from them the blessing of education. Excuse not this conduct, by pleading your own ignorance; for that ignorance is both wilful and criminal. Say not, that your little income could not defray the charges of their education. In every city, nay, in almost every village, a wise government, or a generous public, have provided means for the free education of indigent children; in such schools, though the higher branches of education are most reasonably excluded, yet so much is introduced, as may enable even the poorest, to peruse the word of God with distinctness; to carry on the common commerce of life; and to correspond with their parents, though far separated from their habitation.

How inexcusable are those parents, who keep back their sons and daughters from being educated, when the means are provided, and the education generously offered without reward! Nor less criminal are those parents, who, though able to defray the charges of procuring necessary learning for their children, do withhold such education, that they may squander the profits of their labours in drunkenness and profligacy: the enormity of this guilt is great beyond the power of description; and the infatuated parents, upon whom it is chargeable, are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath.

Ye benevolent masters, into whose service such ignorant youth have entered, consider yourselves as bound, by every tie of humanity and religion, to remedy this awful evil, and to obtain necessary education for these neglected children. Driven by poverty from the dwelling of their careless parents, they have been led for shelter to your abode, and seem to supplicate your bounty for provision to their starving minds. Act the part of a parent; alleviate their miseries; pity their ignorance; provide the means of their education; allow them leisure hours for their improvement; excite their emulation; encourage them to excel, and reward their progress in knowledge. Thus be a father to the fatherless; and, in due time, they may repay your parental attention with the esteem, fidelity, and obedience of children. The other duty earnestly recommended to heads of families, is the religious instruction of their children and servants. Your enabling them to read, is laying a foundation for their comfort and usefulness through the whole of life. But it will also be of essential service, if you can aid them in forming just sentiments of the religion they profess; in understanding its doctrines and duties; in tracing their mutual connection; and in perceiving the purifying influence which every part of religious truth should have on the temper and conduct. For fulfilling this duty, by a method easy to yourselves, and advantageous to your family, let me recommend to your attention the catechisms of our church. They contain a valuable and comprehensive summary of the Protestant religion. In them the sublime doctrines of Christianity, its glorious privileges, and its pure precepts, are stated with accuracy, are arranged in order, and expressed in language as plain as the subject will admit. Cause your children and servants to learn these catechisms: explain their meaning; and allot proper seasons for examining their progress in the knowledge of Christian principles. No season can be more suitable for this profitable employment, and none can surely be more convenient for persons in your circumstances, than the evening of the Lord's day: you are not then fatigued with labour, nor encumbered by the interruptions of worldly business. That sacred day is appropriated for the purposes of obtaining and imparting heavenly knowledge; its precious hours must not be squandered in the circle of friends, nor in the walks of public resort, nor in business, nor in recreations; these are allowed in six succeeding days of each revolving week; one day of seven, is

the day of God; he claims it for his own; he separates it for himself; and wills not that its hallowed joys should be molested or abridged. He commands his people to keep it holy, as a day of peculiar intercourse with heaven; and to seek their delight in those spiritual duties which become the followers of a risen Saviour. Every man, therefore, who bears the Christian name, ought to venerate the Sabbath. But heads of families, in busy or inferior stations, may particularly prize this day of sacred rest; and ought carefully to guard against the misimprovement of its valuable hours. The duties of the closet must neither be omitted, nor superficially performed: the duties of the sanctuary, if attended with reverence, will yield sublimest satisfaction: yet let not these exclude the delightful exercises of family instruction and devotion. If these are omitted: if the members of your families, are not attended to, they will increase, by their bad example, that general profanation of the Sabbath which you so justly lament. Suffer, therefore, the word of exhortation. On every returning evening of that hallowed day, convene your children, domestics and servants; recommend religion to their attention and esteem; inquire into their conduct, and devotions, during the former part of the day; remind them of what they heard in the house of God; examine if they have committed to memory what you formerly appointed; commend the diligent; encourage to farther improvement; and close this profitable duty with suitable counsels, and with the delightful solemnities of family-worship. Perhaps you murmur at this directory for the devotions of a Sabbath evening; and deem it too rigid for this refined age, and so heavy a burden, that neither you nor your children are able to bear it: but all the duties now enjoined, are agreeable to Scripture; have been the practice of the saints in every age; are conducive to the comfort of domestic life; and, through the power of promised grace, may be performed by all, with ease, and pleasure, and advantage.

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