

other hand, this change must be perfectly in harmony with the physical and intellectual constitution of human nature, or the figure would be devoid of propriety and significance.

But a doctrine of divine influence like this, which is so full of promise and comfort to the aspirant after true virtue, and which offers nothing to those who are eager for transitory excitements and who look for visible displays of supernatural power, does not satisfy the religious enthusiast. Not content to be the recipient of an invigorating and purifying emanation, which, unseen and unperceived, elevates the debased affections, and fixes them on the supreme excellence; nor satisfied to know that, under this healing influence, the inveteracy of evil dispositions is broken up and a real advance made in virtue, he asks some sensible evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and would fain so dissect his own consciousness as to bring the presence of the divine agent under palpable examination. Or he seeks for some such extraordinary turbulence of emotion as may seem unquestionably to surpass the powers and course of nature. Fraught with these wishes, he continually gazes upon the variable surface of his own feelings, in unquiet expectation of a supernatural troubling of the waters. The silent rise of the well spring of purity and peace he neither heeds nor values: for nothing less than the eddies and sallies of religious passion can assure him that he is "born from above."

A delusive notion of this kind at once diverts attention from the cultivation and practice of the virtues, and becomes a fermenting principle of frothy agitations, that either work themselves off in the sourness of an uncharitable temper, or are followed by physical melancholies, or perhaps by a relaxation of the moral sentiments, which leaves the heart exposed to the seductions of vicious pleasure. Thus the religious life, instead of being a sunshine of augmenting peace and hope, is made up of an alternation of ecstasies and despondencies; or worse—of devotional fervors and of sensual indulgencies. The same error naturally brings with it a habit of referring to other, and to much less satisfactory tests of Christian character than the influence of religion upon the temper and conduct. So it happens that practical morality, from being slighted as the only valid credential of profession, comes too often to be thought of as something which, though it may be well in its way, is a separable adjunct of true piety.

The rate of general feeling at any time in a community measures the height to which the exorbitances of enthusiasm may attain; thus in times of peculiar excitement a perverted notion of Divine influence is seen to ripen into the most fearful excesses. In such seasons it is not enough that the presence of the Holy Spirit should be indicated by unusual commotions of the mind; but convulsions of the body also are demanded in proof of the heavenly agency. Extravagance becomes gluttonous of marvels; religion is transmuted into pantomime; delirium and hypocrisy—often found to be good friends, take their turns of triumph: while humility, meekness, and sincerity, are trodden down in the rout of impious confusion. Deplorable excesses of this kind happily are infrequent, and never of long continuance; but it has happened more than once in the history of Christianity that the habit of grimace in religion, having established itself in an hour of fanatical agitation, and become associated, perhaps with momentous truths, as well as with the distinguishing tenets of a sect, has long survived the warmth of feeling in which it originated, and whence it might derive some apology, and has passed down from father to son—a hideous mask of formality—worshipped by the weak, and loathed, though not discarded, by the sincere. Meanwhile an hereditary or a studied agitation of the voice and muscles, most ludicrous, if it were not most horrible to be seen, is made to represent before the world the sacred and solemn truth—a truth essential to Christianity, that the spirit of God dwells in the hearts of Christians. Whatever special interpretations may be given to our Lord's awful announcement concerning the sin against the Holy Ghost—an announcement which stands out as an anomaly in the midst of his declarations of mercy, every devout mind must regard it as shedding a fearful penumbra of warning around the doctrine of divine influence, and will admit an apprehension lest he should, by any perversion of that doctrine, approach the precincts of so tremendous a guilt, or become liable

to the charge of giving occasion in others to unpardonable blasphemies.—*Episcopal Watchman.*

FOR THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

THE BESETTING SIN.

There are few persons, however amiable in disposition, or worthy of heart, who are not subject to some sin which doth so easily beset them—some sin the recurring temptation to which, is not frequently calling off the mind from higher and nobler meditations. Were unprofitable speculations the only evil resulting from such influence, it would be the Christian's duty, and his interest to endeavour, by divine assistance, to subdue it. When indeed we reflect that we are called upon to "redeem the time," to improve the moments as they fly, what excuse shall we render to God for allowing our minds to wander continually to subjects which not only do not minister to edification, but which tend rather to debase the thinking powers, inflame the passions, and lead to acts of malevolence and crime? "Stand in awe," says the holy Psalmist, "and sin not; commune with your own heart on your bed and be still." Commune with your own heart, not with a view of calling up scenes to amuse and soothe the vicious appetites of corrupt humanity, but from motives of seriousness and devout meditation, remembering that "by mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord men desist from evil."

But if it be criminal to allow improper ideas to rule, as it were, in the mind, and to bias and continually employ the imagination, how much more criminal is it to reduce these unhallowed meditations to practice! to allow them such an ascendancy as to govern our conduct, and, not unfrequently, to undermine our constitutions! How many evil habits of action, followed in secret, but seen of God, have been brought on and confirmed by habits of evil thinking. "When hath conceived" says the Apostle "it bringeth forth sin," and that too sometimes, when the full indulgence of it was never intended in the mind.—There is but one way then, one course of conduct which will enable us successfully to oppose besetting sins;—we must make no compromises whatever with sin, but set our faces strongly and uniformly against it. If we allow ourselves to be seduced into the commission of what we may consider trifling offences, we should soon be hurried on to the commission of crimes. "*Facilis discensus averni.*" We are commanded therefore, and we shall find it our interest, to abstain from even the appearance of evil. "Whosoever nameth the name of Christ, let him depart from iniquity."

If such be the guilt of those who allow the powers of the mind, naturally noble, to be prostituted to improper purposes,—if so great be the guilt of those who, in consequence of such prostitution of intellect, indulge in secret in excesses which they would blush to acknowledge before the face of day, of how much more aggravated a character must the guilt of those be who, in spite of family, and friends, and health, and reputation, indulge in open and scandalous vices—vices which have a tendency at once to plunge them in the vortex of ignominy and dissipation! In both the former cases the harm resulted principally to the individual; but the last instance the influence of bad example involves the whole community in danger and makes the evil general. Surely then if those who "turn many to righteousness" shall have a "more abundant entrance into the kingdom of God," we may fairly infer, by parity of reasoning, that those, on the other hand, who seduce the unwary from the path of rectitude, whether by evil precept or example, and make them associates in their crimes, shall receive a punishment proportionably greater, in that place were the "worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

G. S.

In the matter of composition, especially of letters, thou shouldst write as thou speakest, with ease and freedom, for it is more friendly, as well as natural. And it is so much my inclination, (saith Seneca) that if I could make my mind visible to my friend, I would neither speak nor write.